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NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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Note to reader:

A group of North Vancouver friends have made it their good-natured mission to ensure I do not become too “Ottawized” while serving as your representative in our nation’s capital.

Recently, I was heard to say to a member of this group, “I did an SO31 before QP on Don Mavinic.”

My friend’s baffled gaze conveyed that I had inadvertently lapsed into a foreign tongue known as Ottawa Babel. It’s a mysterious language of countless acronyms, abbreviations and made-up words.

My initial immersion was disorienting - like your first visit to Starbucks where people are speaking in tongues yet somehow manage to get their coffee.

But you get the hang of it. Trouble is it’s not particularly helpful outside of the Ottawa bubble.

So please permit me to translate “I did an SO31 before QP on Don Mavinic” because it relates to what this column is about.

“SO31” is parliamentary shorthand for Standing Order 31 of the House of Commons procedural rules that allows MP’s to rise before Question Period (QP) to make a one minute statement on just about anything they want.

Dr. Don Mavinic is a North Vancouver resident and a world-renowned water treatment expert who just won a prestigious Gold Medal Award from Engineers Canada. As I stood in the House recently to recognize Don’s achievement and have it recorded in Hansard, I thought his story of achievement would make a great focus for a column about innovation. So here it is.

North Vancouver’s Innovation Inspiration

It’s often said that innovation is the key to Canada’s future competitiveness and economic growth. If that’s true, then the future holds some challenges.

The World Economic Forum ranks Canada at just 26th for business innovation. Canada remains near the bottom of its peer group on innovation, ranking 13th among the 16 countries tracked by the Conference Board of Canada.

The Conference Board defines innovation as a process through which economic or social value is extracted from knowledge—through the creating, diffusing, and transforming of ideas—to produce new or improved products, services, processes, strategies, or capabilities.

Countries and provinces with robust and successful innovation activity see improvements in productivity, economic growth, and job creation and have more resources available to support spending in education, health, infrastructure, and other areas.

Incredibly complex

Enhancing innovation from a policy perspective is complex. I’ve been spending a considerable amount of time with my colleagues in Ottawa helping to develop this government’s innovation agenda. An effective innovation agenda is critical if Canada is to sustain and grow its prosperity as a nation.

The good news is innovation is part of our national DNA. It was innovation that carved this country out of the wilderness into the social, cultural and economic envy of the world that it is today.

Which brings me to Don Mavinic and all the Don Mavinics out there. Because their stories provide the inspiration and

the example that Canada, with focus and determination, can be a world-leader in an ever more innovation-based global economy.

Don’s a civil engineering professor at UBC who decided to take on a significant environmental challenge: marine dead zones caused by phosphorus pollution from run-off and sewage treatment.

An inventive invention

Don’s team invented a system that extracts phosphorus from sewage and transforms it back into valuable fertilizer.

The road from invention to commercialization was not easy but they eventually succeeded. Vancouver-headquartered Ostara Nutrient Recovery now sells the technology around the world.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is on the Ostara board of directors: “This technology provides an elegant solution that benefits the environment at all stages, and truly exhibits the new shift that we are seeing towards closed looped and sustainable technologies.”

So I asked Don Mavinic for his best advice on this subject: “Have faith in what you are doing and believe in. Do NOT be discouraged by temporary setbacks. And all stakeholders MUST be patient and be prepared to invest for the long term success.”

In recognition of his award, what say we give Don Mavinic the last word:

“Canada is way too risk-adverse compared to other countries. To be an innovation leader we need to be bold.”

Sponsored by the Electoral District Association of North Vancouver, Liberal Party of Canada.

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