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NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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Health care anxiety

It was a typically dark and damp North Vancouver winter afternoon ...

Which just added to my admiration for the 50 or so people who chose to spend time last Monday at North Vancouver's Presentation House Theatre with their North Shore Members of Parliament to discuss priorities for the upcoming federal budget.

Admittedly, our annual pre-budget consultation is not the most glamorous of night's out, but if we're to protect and foster democracy in our country, we require an engaged citizenry.

To enjoy the rights of democracy, we must each individually exercise the responsibilities attached to those rights. That includes not only voting every couple of years, but doing so in a manner that is thoughtful and informed.

That's why I consider public meetings like last Monday's to be important and valuable. They provide an opportunity to express opinions, to engage in discussion with fellow citizens, to get informed, and to inform our elected representatives.

Community meetings are an invaluable information touchstone and reality check that enable me to credibly represent your concerns in Ottawa.

Health care top of mind

We covered a lot of ground last Monday: housing, the rising cost of living, Canada's response to climate change, Ukraine, Iran... but the most emotional discussion centred around health care. It carried an undercurrent of anxiety and urgency that was very real.

For generations, our public health care system has been part of what it means to be Canadian. We felt reassured by a kind of birthright promise that our health care system would be there when we needed it. But it was evident from what was said at the meeting - and how it was said - that there is a deep uneasiness that this promise has been compromised.

People spoke of wait times for diagnosis and treatment, of shortages of family practitioners and specialists and of over-stretched front-line providers. Much was said about the lack of mental health services and the suffering of those for whom help is just not there.

There was frustration over insufficient coordination and collaboration between levels of government in our system where Ottawa provides a good portion of the funding while provinces and territories provide health care delivery. There were calls for greater efficiency and innovation and more accountability and transparency for outcomes.

I was left with the feeling that many at last Monday's meeting feared the system has become too complex to fix. While that may be understandable, we cannot allow ourselves to succumb to that belief.

New health care proposal

The following day, after months of discussion, the Prime Minister met with all thirteen premiers to propose a new health care agreement with the provinces and territories, in an effort to work together to improve health care for Canadians.

The federal government is prepared to provide \$198.6 billion in additional federal funding over the next ten years. This includes planned increases to the Canada Health Transfer, as well as new funding of \$48 billion over the next decade.

That's a major new investment, but money alone is not the answer. There are some conditions in the agreements we hope to sign with provinces and territories that will help ensure:

- Canadians have access to family doctors and nurse practitioners;
- there is support for those who drive our health care system and reduce backlogs;
- there is access to quality mental health care and substance use supports; and
- that your health information is available to you and your health providers - so you get the best quality care.

I have no illusions that on a dark and damp evening a year from now - at our next pre-budget community consultation - anxiety over the state of health care will have vanished. But I am hopeful there will be a feeling that the system is beginning to heal.

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