

Speech by Mike Schreiner | October 24, 2019

I want to acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional lands of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca and most recently the treaty lands of the Mississauga of the Credit First Nation.

I'm looking forward to being back in the House next week.

MPPs were elected to serve our constituents, and it's unfortunate that our work was put on the backburner as part of a federal election tactic.

I've been busy the last five months touring the province twice and meeting with my constituents in Guelph.

As MPP for Guelph, I want to take a moment to congratulate Lloyd Longfield on his re-election on Monday.

I value our strong working relationship across party and jurisdictional lines -- the kind of respectful relationship that is needed here at Queen's Park.

I want to take a moment to reflect on the federal election.

Almost universally, people are saying how ugly this election was - the hyperbolic tone, the half-truths and baseless accusations, the character assassinations and the negative campaigning.

The split results are an indicator that Canadians were unimpressed with the bad behaviour of the traditional parties.

Let's not forget that the tone at Queen's Park has been just as toxic, with many days here descending into cheerleading and excessive heckling.

It only serves to divide us.

We must all do better - the government and the opposition parties - to find common ground.

Because people elect us to build Ontario up, not tear each other down.

So I will continue to do my best to put collaboration over confrontation and solutions over slander.

And in that spirit, I want to acknowledge that the government has changed course on some of his cuts and that it did reach a deal with CUPE workers.

But we need more.

More listening; more dialogue; more consultation; more collaboration; and more respect.

Good outcomes don't come from cutting first and thinking later.

And if the Premier is interested in setting a more positive and constructive tone, then I would encourage his government to look at my Private Member's Bill to protect the drinking water of 200,000 people in the Guelph region.

Bill 71 received all-party support at second reading, something I am very proud of.

What better sign of a renewed, less toxic legislature if we could all work together to pass the first ever Green legislation in Ontario history -- legislation based on bills previously put forward by NDP, Liberal and PC MPPs.

From where I sit, there was another thing missing this election: Vision. And ideas for inspiring people and giving them hope for a better future.

We need a response to the millions who marched during the global climate strikes about how we can lead the economic transformation that is urgently needed and is beginning to sweep across the globe.

I firmly believe that Ontarians are problem solvers, not problem deniers.

They want to translate their concerns about climate change into action we can be proud of.

So my number one priority as we head back into the legislature will be to continue promoting the clean and caring economy - now valued at over \$26 trillion globally.

We know that over \$355 billion will be invested annually in clean energy alone over the next five years.

Green jobs are there for the taking, on the rise just as jobs in fossil fuels are in decline.

We've got to skate to where the puck is going and not where it's been.

So I want to have conversations about retrofitting our homes and buildings - helping people and businesses save money by saving energy.

About expanding and electrifying mass transit.

About helping people to get into electric vehicles.

About jobs in science and technology, in responsible forestry and mining, in sustainable agriculture and bio-based manufacturing.

And about jobs in the caring professions - health care providers, teachers, personal support workers, mental health providers and all the other low-carbon jobs of today and tomorrow.

We should see this transformation not as the reluctant chore of fighting climate change but as a golden opportunity to build a bridge to the future that we can walk across together.

But until now the government isn't delivering on either climate action or the jobs of the future.

An NGO progress card this month revealed that the 'Made-in-Ontario' environment plan has completely failed to launch, with the Ford government taking us in reverse on climate targets, EVs, energy efficiency and so much more.

A good first step would be to stop wasting tax dollars suing the federal government and putting stickers on gas pumps.

Next, I urge the Premier to put an end to the politically motivated rhetoric.

Don't tell us that carbon pricing will be a big job killer one day and then take credit for good provincial job numbers the next day.

Don't use inflated deficit numbers to threaten our children's education by taking 10,000 teachers out of our classrooms.

And don't balance the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable.

Last month, we also learned that poverty costs the province \$33 billion every year.

While the government reversed some of its cuts to social services, it still scrapped the Basic Income pilot, froze the minimum wage, cut off assistance to adults with severe autism, and mused about restricting the definition of disability to qualify for ODSP.

I will continue to fight against these cuts that harm our most vulnerable and raise the costs of poverty for all of us.

Finally, I want to talk about an issue that came up over and over again as I travelled across the province: the housing affordability crisis.

It's affecting young and old in nearly every part of this province.

We need smart, modern solutions to unlock affordable housing for all, to build the missing middle that is in high demand, and to put the needs of families, seniors and young people ahead of speculators and deep-pocketed developers.

And to do it in a way that protects the Greenbelt and other places that we love.

I heard from people and municipal leaders that the government's housing bill is at best, not working and at worst, adding to the problem.

Housing is a complex problem that simple slogans won't fix.

But we must start addressing it now because it is already tearing at the fabric of our communities and overwhelming people's ability to afford a decent life.

So I'll be visiting communities, meeting with people on the front lines, and consulting with experts to get housing right.

I urge the Premier to do the same.

To wrap up, I remain willing and eager to speak with the Premier about how we can demonstrate the climate leadership and economic vision needed, how we can balance our finances in ways that don't hurt the most vulnerable, and how we can make sure everyone has an affordable place to call home.

Above all, my message to the Premier is that we need evidence before we act. We need to find the best solutions regardless of which party offers them up.

Too much depends on us getting it right.

And as we begin the second legislative year of your government, I urge you to stop campaigning, and start governing.

To set a new, less partisan tone at Queen's Park

And to start working with other parties to put people first.