MPP ARIS BABIKIAN'S INAUGURAL SPEECH AT QUEEN'S PARK

Posted on August 2, 2018 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

Mr. Aris Babikian: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Speaker. I am confident that your experience and skills make you the ideal individual for the position, and you will do us proud by guiding the Legislature over the next four years.

I would like also to congratulate my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for the great privilege that the people have entrusted in them and for being part of the class of 2018.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Speaker. I am confident that your experience and skills make you the ideal individual for the position, and you will do us proud by guiding the Legislature over the next four years.

I would like also to congratulate my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for the great privilege that the people have entrusted in them and for being part of the class of 2018.

Mr. Speaker, I am humbled to stand here today to address this august chamber as the first Canadian Armenian to serve not only in the Ontario Legislature but also in any other provincial Legislature in this wonderful country of ours. Who would have thought that on the 40th anniversary of my arrival to Canada as a refugee, I would be bestowed the distinct honour of serving the crown and the people of Ontario?

I owe this privilege to the people of Scarborough–Agincourt, my volunteers, my community, my friends and, finally, my family.

Scarborough–Agincourt has been my home since 1991. My two nieces, Gacia, which means "cinnamon" in Armenian, and Meghri, which means "honey" in Armenian, were both born there. I'm a founding member of the Wishing Well community association and served on its board for two terms. I was also one of the founding members of the Willowdale legal aid clinic and served on its board for one term.

Scarborough–Agincourt is one of the most diverse ridings in Ontario. Many ethnic communities call the riding home. Amongst them are the Chinese, Greek, Tamil, Filipino, Armenian, Italian, South Asian, Hispanic, Lebanese, Coptic, Middle Eastern, East European, Afro-Canadian and many more. They all help enrich the riding's social fabric and its multicultural nature, making it an ideal place to live and work.

We are proud to be the home of Vimy Oaks Farm. Leslie Miller, who fought in the Battle of Vimy

Ridge, gathered a handful of acorns from the battlefield and planted them in his farmland in Scarborough. It is now home to the Scarborough Chinese Baptist Church on Kennedy Road. He called his farm Vimy Oaks Farm. Today, several of the original oaks still survive. However, the oaks at Vimy Ridge in France have not survived. The Vimy Foundation, in partnership with the Vimy Oaks Legacy Corp., is working to repatriate those Vimy oaks of Scarborough–Agincourt back to Vimy, to help preserve Canada's First World War legacy through the creation of a living memorial.

Additionally, the Scarborough Hospital, Birchmount site, formerly Grace Hospital, is located in our riding. I am sure that under the leadership of Premier Doug Ford, the riding will become home of the Bridletowne community health hub, where it will host the biggest dialysis centre in Ontario.

After 31 years of Liberal reign in Scarborough–Agincourt, our riding's residents decided that it is time for change. They resolutely believe in Ford Nation's message of revising the sex education curriculum, extending the Sheppard subway line to Scarborough Town Centre, ending the hallway health care debacle, reducing skyrocketing hydro rates, restoring the public's trust in government, and bringing accountability and fiscal responsibility to Queen's Park. I'm overwhelmed by their confidence and trust in Premier Ford, the PC Party and me. Over 50% of our residents voted for me.

I would like to thank the hundreds of volunteers who also believed in our mission. Our 21-month journey culminated with the June 7 victory. I would like to make special mention of the youths who were the core of my volunteers. I would also like to pay special mention to two 12-year-olds who were the heart and soul of the campaign. I would like to mention Aris Movsessian, who is here with us today in the gallery with his mother, and Garen Demerjian. Both of them were amazing. They were at the campaign office every day. They have a bright future ahead of them.

My gratitude also goes to my sister, Sevan Hajinian, who was my campaign manager, to my mother and to the rest of my family.

Without the hard work, commitment and sacrifices of the volunteers and my family, I would not be standing here among my esteemed colleagues of this House.

The biggest influence on my life and my lifelong dedication to helping others was my grandfather. My grandfather was a survivor of the 1915 Armenian genocide. He was six years old when he witnessed the brutal killing of his six brothers and sisters, in addition to his father and 40 members of his extended family. When I was a kid, I used to listen to the horrific trauma that he lived through. I would see the sadness in his eyes.

He always encouraged me to help others, to defend the vulnerable and the persecuted members of not only my society but also anywhere they lived. He was so proud of me. I was his first grandchild. Unfortunately, he did not live to witness this day.

0910

By the way, close to 100 years ago Ontario became a pioneer in welcoming refugees when the

province brought over 120 orphaned children between the ages of eight and 10 to Ontario. They purchased a farm in Georgetown and gave a new lease on life to these survivors of the Armenian genocide. We should be proud of our history of welcoming refugees.

Since my arrival to Canada in 1978, I have been actively involved in the Canadian civil society and the multicultural communities. My contribution included political, social, neighbourhood, multi-faith, human rights, social services, education, immigration, culture and other spheres. I have served as a citizenship judge, World Vision Canada Multicultural Council ambassador, chair of Levant Settlement Centre, secretary of the Canadian Ethnocultural Council and member of the National Ethnic Press and Media Council of Canada.

As a citizenship judge, I have lectured on human rights, civic participation, tolerance, Canadian values and traditions. I am grateful to my friend the Honourable Jason Kenney, the former Minister of Immigration and Citizenship, for providing me the unique opportunity to serve the people of Canada as a citizenship judge for six years.

I have a strong regard to our youth; they are our future. I have been a Wolf Cub and Boy Scouts leader, soccer coach and youth adviser. Many of the young people that I have mentored have become leaders in their communities and organizations, and successful members of our civil society.

As a secretary of the Canadian Ethnocultural Council, I established excellent relationships with the leaders of our diverse social mosaic, participating in the national umbrella organization's round table on the United Nations Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, consulting with high-level federal officials and ministers regarding changes in the Canadian immigration and citizenship act, testifying at the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration hearings regarding the Syrian refugee program.

I also testified at the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage and the CRTC. I was also the founding member of the Darfur Solidarity Coalition.

These are some of the highlights of my recent public service activities.

I also acted as a monitor on behalf of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe council during the 2003 parliamentary elections in Armenia. **Serving as the president of the Armenian National Federation of Canada and the first executive director of the government relations office of the Armenian National Committee of Canada were additional milestones in my public calling.**

Together with friends, we participated in the private sponsorship and settling of over 250 Syrian refugee families. The refugees have become productive members of our community. Many are self-employed and have bought houses. Some even contributed to the recent Progressive Conservative

Party victory in Scarborough–Agincourt.

Volunteerism, especially encouraging our youth to volunteer and get involved, has always been a priority of mine. So is the conviction that the sky is the limit for any Canadian who is willing to put in the time and make the effort. Regardless of one's colour, religion, race, name or ethnicity, Canada offers equal opportunity for all of us.

In recognition of my contributions to our country, the Canadian government awarded me the Queen Elizabeth II Golden and Diamond Jubilee medals and Canada's 125th Confederation Commemorative Medal, while Ontario honoured me with its 20-year Volunteer Service Award.

I will be forever grateful to Canada, to Ontario and to Canadians for providing a safe haven to me and to my family and for offering me the opportunity to fulfill my potential. My contribution over the last 40 years is a small token of appreciation to the country which gave me and my family so much.

Mr. Stephen Lecce : I want to just note, Madam Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with the member from Thornhill.

……..

If I may, Madam Speaker, I do want to recognize the former speaker from Scarborough–Agincourt and just note the history in this Parliament. He's the first Armenian to be elected in any Legislature in the history of this country. I very much value his thoughtful input in public service. He has done this for many years as a jurist and in many other capacities. So I want to thank the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for his leadership here in Parliament.