

MP Kyle Seeback reflects back on a monumental 2020

Written By SAM ODROWSKI

A lot has happened in 2020 and Dufferin-Caledon MP Kyle Seeback said there's lots to look forward to in 2021.

The biggest challenge of the year, of course, was responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, which created unprecedented levels of Internet usage while everyone stayed home, with Canadian Internet providers noting a more than 50 per cent increase.

This created challenges in Dufferin-Caledon since the service is slow or spotty in several places and extraordinarily expensive, according to Seeback.

"It was hugely challenging for people who were being told to stay home, try and educate their children online, while dealing with slow internet and, in many cases, massive data overage charges by the large internet service providers," he explained.

"I put enormous pressure on the large telecom companies, through both social media videos and letters to their presidents, saying that data overage charges to people in my riding and all across Canada during the pandemic was unacceptable."

For around four months, service providers waived data overage charges of all Canadians in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was a huge accomplishment for 2020, Seeback noted.

One of the bigger challenges when COVID-19 first started spreading here, he said, was getting all of the relevant information regarding the virus to his constituents.

Back when the pandemic started in March, all Service Canada locations shut down, so Canadians had nowhere to go to get information on government programs, other than through their member of parliament.

The result was Seeback's office becoming inundated with phone calls and emails from the public trying to get information on government programs related to COVID-19.

"That was incredibly challenging, to try and provide information to our constituents through phone calls, through social media, through our website, all of these things, but we did it really effectively," he noted.

"We were able to answer and respond to thousands of phone calls and emails over the course of that early shut down."

Supporting local businesses was another area of focus during 2020, brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Seeback has been hosting a Small Business Spotlight video series, where he brings attention to Dufferin-Caledon businesses that were nominated by people in the riding.

"I've gone around and put a spotlight on so many of those great organizations throughout our riding over the last seven months and I thought that was fun, interesting, and a great way to support our local economy," he said.

Small businesses enduring tough times economically is one of the largest issues facing the Dufferin-Caledon riding, according to Seeback. He said it's especially important to support small businesses and make sure their viable since roughly 70 per cent of Canadians are employed by them.

"Small businesses are really the ones that employ the vast majority of Canadians and when small business suffers, our communities suffer, so this is the number one issue I hear about almost every day," Seeback told the Citizen.

?Lockdowns have been extraordinarily tough, especially for my constituents in Caledon. They're in their second lockdown now, this has had a devastating effect on small business and trying to help those small businesses navigate through the programs that are available to help them.?

Seeback said promoting local businesses and the fact that people need to shop local, particularly during the pandemic, is another key priority.

?It's very easy to push a button on our phone, it's convenient, but going out and supporting our local businesses, the ones that sponsor our kids' sports teams and others, that's what we have to do,? he remarked.

Going forward, Seeback told the Citizen he's going to continue to ?beat the drum? on getting more affordable and high-speed Internet throughout Dufferin?Caledon.

?The [federal] government's announced a whole bunch of money and I expect them to deliver and not just deliver on providing access, but delivering on affordability, because people shouldn't be spending \$300-\$400 a month for home internet in 2020,? he stressed.

?The government's got to get involved, they've got to ensure that there's competition, so that we're not just getting our Internet from the two, Rogers, Bell. Competition will lower prices and also, the government has a role to play in determining what prices can be charged, especially to our rural customers.?