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Victoria's new Member of Parliament, Murray Rankin (centre), is joined by NDP federal leader Tom Mulcair and House of Commons Clerk as Rankin is sworn in.

An exclusive interview with Victoria's newly elected MP, Murray Rankin, LLM, QC, MP

A bright star for Victoria, Ottawa and Canada

By Jonathan Lee

The new Member of Parliament for Victoria, BC, Murray Rankin, is a rising star in today's political galaxy.

If energy and intellect can change and sustain, for the better, Rankin's recent election can only be a good thing.

In this first in-depth interview since his election, he has provided for *Lower Island News* readers a clear roadmap of where he hopes and intends to assist Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and the federal New Democratic Party, in improving the lives of Victorians and Canadians.

And further, he begins to outline many of the policies and philosophies that the NDP will bring to the country, as the next governing party, after the current Conservative government is defeated at the next general election.

Rankin is a bundle of energy and passion. We met on a bleak, pre-Christmas morning, at one of Victoria's landmark buildings on Douglas Street.

Murray Rankin could have been excused for looking to abbreviate this interview. He'd explained party policies faithfully, patiently and passionately over

the few months leading to the election, and during the candidates' meetings. He'd won the election. Now he could reasonably be allowed a little R & R.

And yet here he was again, ready to explain and persuade. Entirely understanding the nature of the task that he's been elected to perform.

It was clear from the outset that Rankin means business in improving the lives of his Victoria constituents, and in the work that he intends to undertake to make the NDP the next party of government in Canada.

LIN readers will appreciate only too clearly how grim are these current Conservative economic and political times. For so many of Victoria's residents, young and elderly, life is a daily struggle, with every tomorrow bringing another 24 hours of uncertainty.

It's this understanding that Murray Rankin seeks to address in taking his seat in Canada's House of Commons.

The recent federal by-election came at a time when even the most stubborn of Conservative voters are having trouble imagining that Prime Minister Harper's ideas and governance can lead to anything better than a continuing slide into

impoverishment for countless Canadians, and enrichment of very few.

As Rankin pointed out, in the recent election the Conservative candidate polled less than 15% of the total vote.

It's the "growing inequality" in society, as Rankin stated as he began to tick off his concerns and priorities, that drive his desire to be a constructive force for change.

For Rankin and the NDP it is unacceptable, in a country as wealthy as Canada, that people are to be found living on the streets.

But it's not only the homeless population to be found on the streets that Rankin recognizes. We need to look at the "couch surfers and people sleeping in their cars", he says. "Those who can't get a foot on the social and financial ladder."

"This Conservative government's policies have exacerbated the difficulties that people face, and have encouraged a culture of growing inequality."

Rankin acknowledges that at provincial and local levels, useful work has been done to alleviate distress, and he praises the work of Mayor Dean Fortin in Victoria for his continued efforts.

At the same time, Rankin notes that the

federal government is very much absent in joining to imagine and enact useful, long term policy solutions.

"You can't change things by doing the same thing over and over. That's a definition of insanity," says Rankin.

He praises the work of voluntary and non profit organizations such as, for example, Victoria Cool Aid Society, The Coalition to End Homelessness, Our Place, Mustard Seed and many more.

But this is not enough for Rankin. He wants to see a restoration of federal assistance. Loans and grants to fund long term solutions providing economic equality of opportunity. For example Rankin cites the promotion of housing co-ops as a proven powerful resource in challenging affordable housing shortages.

In Rankin's view not enough is done to support younger generations. Even for those with the opportunity for advanced education, student loan debts of \$30,000 - \$50,000 are unsustainable for individuals starting a career and seeking a place to live and raise a family.

Rankin believes that the federal government must do more to support a

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A bright star, Murray Rankin, from page 1

national education policy. The present Conservative government selectively cites the Canadian constitution to justify its view that education policy and delivery is entirely a provincial responsibility. At the same time Rankin notes that a similar model and rationale is not followed in the provision of Canadian health care.

Rankin believes that a properly funded and sustainable federal education policy is entirely constitutional and is as important as a properly funded national health care policy. An NDP government will move to correct this inequity, attaching provincial educational spending mandates to federal social transfers.

Rankin points out that we live in a "knowledge based economy and not an extractive economy".

Without sustainable education policies we are unable to make the intelligent strategic decisions necessary to manage our energy industries for the long-term.

Rankin moves neatly to a discussion of the NDP positions on pipeline issues, Enbridge, et al and notes that NDP leader, Tom Mulcair, has consistently been a fighter against environmentally dangerous extraction and transportation systems throughout his political career. He reminds that Mulcair resigned his cabinet position in Quebec, in the government of Jean Charest, rather than compromise his strongly held environmental beliefs.

An NDP government will promote sustainable environmental policies, recognizing the expertise, experience and rights of First Nations interests.

Rankin is passionate in his admiration and expectations of First Nations communities.

The Harper government has done nothing to engage First Nations communities beyond more of the "paternalistic" approaches of the past, Rankin says. There is a "culture of dependency" that must be ended. First Nations communities have a constitutional right to self government and the Canadian federal government needs to join in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations to find solutions to the crisis in First Nation communities.

This has not happened under Stephen Harper's government and will happen under the leadership of Tom Mulcair, says Rankin.

Murray Rankin speaks with authority in these matters. As a lawyer he has acted as a negotiator, advocate and representative, looking at many perspectives of First Nations policies.

He deplores the lack of federal consultation with the AFN and mentions the 'Idle No More' campaign, current at the time of the interview. His expertise and longstanding concern is well known to the Friendship Centre in Victoria.

Rankin sees the failure to respect and

attend to a dialogue with First Nations leaders as another example of the failure of this Conservative government to address yet another example of economic inequality, which an NDP government will correct.

Underlying Rankin's positions are the beliefs that the economic and budgetary priorities of any government quickly explain how that government sees its task.

An NDP government will radically change Conservative spending priorities to better serve and enable provincial governments to distribute federal funds more effectively and fairly.

To the charge that NDP policies might be more "tax & spend", Rankin is dismissive.

NDP policies are designed to distribute existing resources more effectively and fairly. An NDP government, for example, will not replicate the cost overruns that can be seen with the current order for F35 jets rising to \$46 billion from the \$9 billion initial estimate.

Rankin cites other examples of gross cost overruns and compares those costs with the opportunities for cost effective savings and redistribution presented by encouraging lower carbon producing industries, for example.

Rankin sees the necessary redirection in spending priorities as an investment. Not a cost.

He returns to discussion of housing policy and says that an NDP government will engage closely with a BC provincial government, headed by Adrian Dix, to find ways to combat homelessness, using Libby Davies' Bill C400 as a model for the creation of more affordable housing.

For Rankin, this is not a partisan issue. It's an issue of concern to all, regardless of party affiliation, and he seems genuinely at a loss to understand why any Canadian government would not seek to engage constructively to solve these social problems and inequalities.

He mentioned that he has consulted personally and extensively with developers and property owners, seeking their ideas and requirements so that the housing needs of Victoria communities can be better served.

Given his extensive experience and background, Murray Rankin presents as the most unpretentious of people. A persuasive negotiator and litigator he certainly is, and there is no question that he has earned his credentials in public service and as a QC. But fundamentally his record shows that he is a man of the people and will be a sincere and able representative of Victoria residents, in Ottawa.

He is at pains to express his admiration for the work of his predecessor, Denise Savoie, and promises that he will continue her tradition to make himself regularly and readily available to meet with constituents.

He recalls the leadership of the late Jack Layton. "A remarkable human being and the antithesis of the 'phony politician'."

For Murray Rankin, Tom Mulcair is a worthy successor. "A warm and impressive leader, doing a brilliant job". Tom Mulcair has shown himself to be more than a match for Stephen Harper, says Rankin.

Rankin had no news to give when asked if he had been offered or accepted a critics position.

He observed that the NDP caucus was now rich with talent and as a "new boy" he would happily await any instruction and preference of Mr. Mulcair.

For Victoria voters and Murray Rankin, this is the beginning of what must be a

long and creative association.

The NDP is now a government in waiting.

It's a party not only committed to protecting the environment and preserving and redirecting resources, but it is also a party that understands that credible policies are required of government at every level, to serve countless needs.

He welcomes the support of Green party voters, in due course, understanding their invaluable work in speaking to the topics of environmental dangers and the solutions that can work to preserve and protect the planet.

As an environmentalist Rankin also understands that a government must promulgate realistic policies on multiple issues and as such the NDP values the input of all progressive thinkers, in a spirit of partnership and consultation.

The NDP holds the largest number of parliamentary seats of any opposition party in the past 30 years. It has taken its responsibilities as the official opposition very seriously and will displace the Harper government at the next election.

Rankin mentions that a recent study by the Canadian Department of Finance, no less, credits NDP governments across the nation with the best track record of public fiscal management.

Management of the federal budgets will be handled with equal efficiency, Rankin says.

Murray Rankin seems to have hit the ground, running. Victoria has chosen well.

For Rankin, personally, as a 36-year-resident of Victoria, it means many changes in routine. He has closed his law practice, wishing to be entirely free of any suggestion of conflicts of interest.

He'll be mostly a weekend visitor for his spouse, Linda Hannah. He expressed his gratitude to her for enabling him to accept the opportunity to serve as Victoria's MP and noted that she intends remain in her career as Regional VP of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, based in Victoria.

His sons are now grown and happily engaged with their own careers. The youngest recently graduated from Harvard, and is now job hunting, Rankin says.

Rankin's clear message now is that in holding Denise Savoie's NDP seat in this recent by-election, he was provided a chance to listen closely to the concerns and expectations of Victoria voters.

The next election will be a general election and will change the government.

To be sure that we are able to address Tom Mulcair as Prime Minister after the next election it's critical to understand that the preference for a progressive new NDP government is expressed at the ballot box and not just at political rallies.

It means getting out and voting. Murray Rankin and Tom Mulcair understand that low voter turn-out is the friend of the Conservative party and the Conservative party is no friend of an equal opportunity Canada.

Victoria has a sincere, exceptionally experienced representative, now, in Ottawa.

He's an MP who will listen. He's an MP who learns and he's an MP who will not tolerate the mismanagement of Canada's resources while its citizens struggle for food and shelter.

Murray Rankin expressed clearly that he is an optimist. With his energy and intellect we all can have cause, now, to be optimists.



Victoria's new MP Murray Rankin takes the opportunity to meet with Mila Puharich, Canada's first female apprentice steel fitter.
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