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Please note this is the English translation of the Householder.

For the original French version, please visit my website : www.helenelaverdiere.npd.ca

Mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods

The many changes affecting our daily lives seem to be coming at an ever-increasing pace. But when these changes have the potential to affect our health, genetic diversity and environment, we need to proceed carefully and transparently so our citizens are equipped to make informed choices. This is the approach the NDP has supported for a number of years in calling for legislation to make mandatory the labelling of genetically modified (GM) foods.

Unfortunately, in May a majority of MPs in the House of Commons voted against Bill C-291, which was introduced by my colleague Pierre-Luc Dusseault, the MP for Sherbrooke. The goal of the bill was very simple: to give Canadians more information about what they eat. One of the most effective ways of achieving this goal is to provide as much transparency as possible on food labels, including information about GM ingredients.

Last year, the NDP raised concerns about the government's announcement that it would allow the sale and consumption of a type of GM salmon in Canada. The AquAdvantage salmon was genetically modified to grow twice as fast as conventionally farmed salmon. This is the first transgenic animal to land on the shelves of Canadian grocery stores, and the businesses in question do not have to label their salmon as being GM. Since it was approved, five tonnes of this salmon have been distributed to Canadian supermarkets.

By choosing to keep information about the food on our plates secret, the government went against the wishes of a very large majority of Canadians—80%—who believe Canada should adopt mandatory labelling. In fact, Justin Trudeau's government once again broke one of its own promises. The Prime Minister himself had acknowledged the importance of consumers' right to know and promised more transparency and openness during the election campaign. Many countries already have mandatory labelling of GM foods. Right now, over 64 countries have such laws, including the European Union member countries and the United States. Canada has fallen behind. Like you, I have trouble understanding how the government could reject a bill that had such broad support.

Like the vast majority of Canadians from across the country, I believe we need to implement a framework for labelling GM foods. Even Health Canada's report on food labelling found that Canadians want the government to take concrete measures on GM foods. We will continue pressing for more transparency in the agri-food sector.



Better regulation of tourist accommodations in our neighbourhoods

Increasing numbers of housing units in Montreal are being advertised as tourist accommodations on platforms such as Airbnb. Laurier–Sainte-Marie has been especially affected; a recent study showed that over 3.2% of the housing in the boroughs of Le Plateau-Mont-Royal and Ville-Marie is being used for short-term rentals.[1] This means some 10,000 units in Montreal are available on Airbnb, mostly on the Plateau-Mont-Royal. When short-term rentals are used occasionally, they enable genuine sharing and cultural exchange between travellers and local residents. However, many of these units are being rented for short stays all year round by non-resident property owners, essentially transforming apartments into hotels managed on Airbnb. This situation raises a variety of issues and affects many residents in our riding.

First, these tourist rentals are housing units that are no longer available to Montrealers looking for long-term rentals in these neighbourhoods, putting upward pressure on rental rates. At the same time, it's becoming increasingly difficult to find affordable housing in Montreal. According to data from a 2015 report of the regional Director of Public Health, 210,000 renters are forced to dedicate over 30% of their income to rent. For too many households, the affordability ratio (the percentage of the household budget going to rent) is climbing to 50% or even 80%, which is completely unacceptable.

In addition, Airbnb-type tourist accommodations in residential areas are zoning violations. They're illegal, and they create a nuisance for residents, making noise, creating waste management problems, and lowering the overall quality of life.

Finally, the income generated by these rentals often escapes the notice of governments, as GST, QST and lodging tax are not paid on the vast majority of transactions. Businesses like Airbnb do not pay taxes in Canada.

In light of this growing problem, on June 9 I took part in a news conference organized by the MNA for Mercier, Amir Khadir, to offer my support for Bill 798, along with my colleagues Alexandre Boulerice and Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet. A number of Laurier–Sainte-Marie residents attended the event to talk about how short-term rentals have made their daily lives unbearable.

Bill 798 would better regulate tourist accommodations in order to preserve the housing stock and prevent abuse by certain property owners without jeopardizing the sharing economy. The bill would enable residents to rent out their homes for up to 60 days per year without a certificate.

On August 29, the Quebec government took a step in the right direction by reaching an agreement with Airbnb to collect lodging tax when units are rented, but much more needs to be done. I believe all three levels of government must work together in order to regulate these rentals, as other cities and countries have done. I will continue working to achieve this goal.

Rail crossings

Let's call on the Government of Canada to help people cross railroad tracks by allowing the construction of safe, well-marked pedestrian bridges and level crossings that promote active transportation.

On May 17, the Liberals used their majority in the House of Commons to block my private member's bill that would have given the Minister of Transport the power to order the construction of safe level crossings. But I'm not conceding defeat.

To make sure communities have the safe crossings they need, the environmental group Conseil régional de l'environnement de Montréal and the rail crossing advocacy group Collectif pour des passages à niveau have launched e-petition E-1224. I will be pleased to table it in the House.

SIGN THE PETITION HERE: <https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-1224>

Rail crossings: Years of struggle

In Montreal and across the country, railways too often split neighbourhoods and communities in two. For example, between Rosemont–La-Petite-Patrie and Le Plateau-Mont-Royal, the CP (Canadian Pacific) railway is a major obstacle for pedestrians, cyclists, strollers and wheelchairs. When people face long detours, they often decide to use unsafe rail crossings instead.



For 20 years now, pedestrians, cyclists and businesses have been urging CP to be a good corporate citizen and work with the City of Montreal to create safe level crossings. But CP refuses to make the necessary changes, citing safety concerns—when in fact, it's the lack of suitable places to cross that is dangerous. We know that the accident rate for trespassers is twice as high as the rate for people who use safe level crossings.

The Minister needs to act to ensure that people can move freely about their city.

Inspiring meeting with auto body repair competitor Vyolaine Dujmovic

I had the pleasure of meeting Vyolaine Dujmovic, an inspiring young woman with an amazing background in a male-dominated field: auto body repair. Like a competitive athlete, she trains at the École des métiers de l'équipement motorisé de Montréal (EMEMM), the largest trade school in this field in Quebec, which is located in Laurier–Sainte Marie. Vyolaine will represent Canada in auto body repair at the WorldSkills Competition to be held in Abu Dhabi from October 14 to 19, 2017. She will be the only woman out of 25 competitors selected from around the world. I wish her the best of luck!



Listening to you

As usual, many of you have contacted us to share your concerns, questions and opinions. Our conversations are always interesting and enjoyable, and they help guide my work in Ottawa.

National Energy Board

In recent months, many of you have written me about the National Energy Board (NEB). We share your concerns about the future of the NEB and the current approval process for energy projects in Canada. The previous Conservative government dismantled Canada's environmental protections and gutted our environmental laws. Despite their promise to reform the NEB and its processes, the Liberals proceeded to approve controversial projects using the same faulty legislative measures and processes that the Conservatives adopted. We're working hard to make change in this area. We will continue putting pressure on the Liberals to carry out a comprehensive reform of the NEB and create a credible and transparent review process.

Environmental rights

You also contacted me about environmental rights. I totally agree that citizens' legal rights need to be expanded. We should have access to information about the environment, we should be able to take part in reviews of environmental projects and decisions that affect the environment, and we should have the legal capacity to hold governments to account for their environmental record. That's why the NDP has introduced a bill to establish a Canadian environmental bill of rights.

Laurier–Sainte-Marie Bulletin Board

Business Development Bank of Canada: Support for small businesses

About 95% of Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) customers are small- and medium-sized businesses. BDC provides a range of services: financing, investment and advice on strategic planning, human resources management and even marketing. BDC is devoted to supporting entrepreneurs, so consider talking to them if you are thinking about starting a business or expanding an existing one.

www.bdc.ca

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