

Promised land: What the Liberals have said they'll do for Ottawa

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In an election campaign, promises can be as thick on the ground as lawn signs — and almost as unlikely to take root once the voting is done.

But with nine new Ottawa-area MPs in Prime Minister-designate Justin Trudeau's new government — a majority government, at that — the capital might have more reason than in some past elections to expect solid, close-to-home results on pledges made during the campaign.

Here's a look at some of those promises and what they could mean for Ottawa.

Justin Trudeau, prime minister designate: Bridges and housing

For Canadian cities, infrastructure is the new Liberal government's big-ticket promise. The party says it will steadily increase federal funding for roads, bridges, public transit and the like over the next decade.

Already for Ottawa, the Liberals have pledged to support the extension of the new light-rail service by covering one-third of the cost of the \$3-billion project. Housing investment is also expected, with the Liberals saying they will provide municipalities with an "unprecedented level of long-term predictability in funding" to help create affordable housing.

The Liberals vowed to ensure that the views of Ottawa and Gatineau are represented on the National Capital Commission's board of governors and that the cities have "sufficient local representation." They have not, however, agreed to give Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson and Gatineau Mayor Maxime Pedneaud-Jobin seats at the table.

And for Canada's sesquicentennial in 2017, the new Liberal government says it will consult with provinces, territories and cities to put a plan in place quickly to address the "pressing need for clarity in federal funding and programming."

Will Amos, Pontiac: Employment

The new Liberal MP has promised to tackle an unemployment rate that hovers at around 11 per cent in parts of the Quebec riding. Improvements in seniors' housing and public transportation, funded by the government, could help create jobs.

"I will be a champion for Pontiac to ensure that we get our fair share of the proposed \$150-billion Liberal infrastructure program," Amos said.

He also vowed to identify federal resources to fund improved services — including health, transportation, housing, environment, agriculture, forestry and Internet access.

Chandra Arya, Nepean: Tech investment

A former technology executive, Arya has committed to working on promoting Ottawa as a hub for the defence electronics industry. Arya envisions transforming the capital into a base for hardware and software manufacturers, since Ottawa already has a strong tech base and companies working in Ottawa would have ready access to the decision makers in government and the military.

As chief financial officer with D-TA Systems Inc., a manufacturer and exporter of high-end defence technology products, Arya led a consortium in 2013 in an attempt to set up an Ottawa-based Centre of Excellence in Defence Electronics.

Consortium members then included Defence Research and Development Canada, Royal Military College of Canada, Carleton University, Memorial University, General Dynamics, Raytheon and about 10 other technology companies from across Canada.

Francis Drouin, Glengarry-Prescott-Russell: Support for farmers

Drouin has said he will support the recommendations of former MP Marc Godbout's report on Alfred College, a francophone agricultural college that is a satellite of the University of Guelph. The college, low on enrolment and high on expenses, is on the brink of closing. Godbout's report recommends that the government — provincial, that is — invest in the college to help increase enrolment.

Drouin has also spoken of the need for investments in infrastructure, particularly for Highway 17 linking Hawkesbury with Ottawa, and the importance of maintaining supply management for the riding's dairy farmers.

Greg Fergus, Hull-Aylmer: Homes and transit

Fergus has promised improved transit services and the construction of at least 1,000 social housing units (in partnership with Gatineau and others) by the end of his mandate. He will also work to increase small- and medium-sized businesses in Hull-Aylmer to broaden the employment base.

All three specific promises are linked to the Liberal pledge of massive infrastructure investment. He has “guesstimated” the Liberal pledges would mean tens of millions of dollars in Hull-Aylmer.

Andrew Leslie, Orléans: Federal jobs

The new MP has vowed to make good on his promise of bringing more federal government work to the east-end riding.

On Monday evening, after he was declared elected, he said he will present his colleagues in the new Liberal majority the idea of moving a federal department from elsewhere in the capital to Orléans.

“Why shouldn’t a federal department come out to Orléans, considering that we’re a beautiful community that has a great balance of anglos and francos, and federal departments are bilingual?”

He didn’t say which department he’d like to see move to the suburb but had said during the campaign that it should be “a big one.”

Leslie has also promised to continue federal funding for phase 2 of Ottawa’s light-rail project, which would bring trains to the Place d’Orléans shopping centre. He said he also supported funding a further extension east to Trim Road.

Steve MacKinnon, Gatineau: PS protection and a new bridge

Steve MacKinnon has promised to “be the champion” for a bridge to Ontario, though without being tied to a particular location. This sets him up on the opposite side of the issue (and the river) from fellow Liberal and re-elected Ottawa-Vanier MP Mauril Bélanger, who is anti-bridge.

He has also promised to protect public service jobs. And he promises a closer federal relationship with Gatineau than it has enjoyed under Conservative government. He promises to “put the needs of Gatineau back on the agenda.”

“Job One is to work with our partners in the city and provincial government to make sure that Gatineau is able to benefit from the commitments of the Liberal government,” he said Monday night. This includes investments in infrastructure.

Karen McCrimmon, Kanata-Carleton: A strong voice

Sticking largely to the Liberal playbook, McCrimmon didn’t pledge anything specific for Ottawa, other than to hold town hall meetings and round tables with constituents.

She also promised to be a strong voice inside government, arguing for an extension of the Canada Pension Plan and a more civil relationship with public servants.

“We need a relationship with the public service based on respect, based on recognition of what they bring to the table,” she said.

Catherine McKenna, Ottawa Centre: New library, Canada Post rethink

Over the campaign, McKenna touched on everything from postal service to bike paths. In particular, she hopes to take advantage of her party’s promised infrastructure fund to see that Ottawa gets a new central library. The fund might also help pay for a light-rail spur to the airport, she said.

McKenna is committed to rethinking the proposed location of the Memorial to the Victims of Communism, and in repurposing the old U.S. embassy on Wellington Street from offices to a public venue.

More vaguely, McKenna seemed to suggest the Liberals could order Canada Post to restore home delivery. “The mandate (of Canada Post) is to provide services to Canadians in a cost-effective manner … So that’s why we say we are going to be putting an end to Harper’s cuts to home delivery, step back, and look for a way to meet its mandate.”

She committed herself to repairing relations between the government and public servants.

Anita Vandenbeld, Ottawa West-Nepean: A ready ear

The new MP’s riding-specific promises in Ottawa West-Nepean centred on style rather than policy.

Vandenbeld, whose expertise is democratic development, said she will focus on building consensus by listening to her constituents’ ideas and taking them to Parliament, rather than imposing decisions from the top down.

“We have a very diverse community and a lot of people are struggling,” she says. “If we listen to people’s ideas, we can make better policy by uniting people, not by dividing people.”

As MP, Vandenbeld intends to continue to listen to people at weekly sessions at a west-end Tim Horton’s. “It’s the one way to make sure I never get into the bubble.”

Ideas, she said, should not be shot down just because they come from another party. “We need to get back to listening to people, listening to the expert opinions of our public servants and scientists and making our decisions based on inclusion, based on different voices.”