



Message from Queen's Park



Monthly Column by MPP John Yakabuski

December, 2005

There always seems to be more to write about in a monthly column than the space available will allow but I will try to cover a couple of the bases in what will be my last column of 2005. I'm sure I feel the same as many of you do when I say that each year seems to go by faster than the previous one. I suppose that means that we are keeping busy and enjoying what life brings our way.

This past week Education Minister Gerrard Kennedy introduced the Education Statute Law Amendment Act, Bill 52 Learning to Age 18. The act is all about politics hoping people will buy into the government's position that they will be able to get positive results by forcing students to stay in school to age 18. Let's be clear – I, like almost everyone would want and strongly encourage each student to remain in school to achieve what ever level is necessary to accomplish their goals as far as a career is concerned. There is no doubt that those who drop out of school will be afforded fewer choices and options than those who finish. Having said that, I believe that the Ministers position does not meet reality. There are some students who do not want to finish school no matter how much their parents, teachers or peers try to convince them that dropping out is the wrong thing to do. The question is how does one deal with this. Forcing someone to stay in school does not work. The only way to change the mind of a disinterested student is to make school the place that engages them in such a way that they decide school is where they want to be and that learning is what they most want to be doing.

The government has decided that if you aren't in school then you won't have a driver's license either. They have also said that it could result in fines of up to \$1000 for parents and employers. The privilege of driving should be dependent on ones fulfillment of their obligation to drive safely, obey the rules and pay their fines if there are any to pay. It should not be conditional on fitting into Gerrard Kennedy's mold of what makes a good citizen. The liberals are up to the practice of social engineering again. This initiative will as usual have far reaching consequences particularly in rural Ontario. In short, you can't force someone to learn, but, if you create the right environment you will have a much better shot at making them want to learn. Another significant issue that the minister offers no accounting on is the cost of enforcing this kind of law. What he will be doing is creating another arm of big bureaucracy that will accomplish very little other than to further the political plans of this government. I find it appalling that while the minister of education has continuously ignored our pleas for significant improvements to the transportation funding formula for rural schools he has no problem creating another expensive liberal nanny state bureaucracy to chase down

17 year old truants. His indifference to rural school transportation funding poses a tremendous challenge for rural students and their families. If the minister is truly concerned about the circumstances of rural education, this should be a priority.

Yesterday, December the 15th my private members bill, Bill 3, passed second reading in the legislature. This bill would ensure that all municipalities, not just those with a public transportation system receive a share of the provincial gas tax rebate. I believe very strongly that this is a fundamental issue of fairness and an opportunity for the legislature to show that the issues affecting rural Ontarians are important. I was very pleased to have Warden Bob Sweet join me in the legislature yesterday offering his support. Warden Sweet has been very active at bringing the concerns of Renfrew County and rural Ontario to my attention and that of the provincial government. We are grateful for his support as we continue our fight to bring this bill to the next level.

Finally in this blessed season of Christmas I hope that each and every one of you are able to take some time with your family and friends to relax and reflect on the past year as well as Christmas memories from years gone by. From Vicky, our children and I best wishes for the peace and love of Christ to you and yours as we celebrate his birth and may you find health and happiness in the New Year.

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