



## *Message from Queen's Park*



**Monthly Column by MPP John Yakabuski**

March 2006

I have just returned from campaigning in the three byelections that are currently taking place in Ontario.

As a result of the resignations of Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax), John Baird (Nepean-Carleton) and Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth), these ridings have to choose a new member of provincial parliament on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

One of the biggest challenges in a byelection is making people aware that there is an election going on at all. During a general election, the lead story in the large media each day will usually centre on what the respective party leaders have been up to that day. There will be stories of what they have promised to do as a government if they are elected. We would know if any of them have made a big gaffe or were greeted by protesters along the way. In a general election, the election itself is the story and the leaders are the stars. If you don't know there is one happening, you must be sleeping.

Byelections are a different kettle of fish. The big media barely touches them, despite the fact the leaders come around to support their candidates, but even they can't get much attention. Regardless of the outcome, the government after will be the same as before. People see these as basically local elections, having no effect on the big picture. They should look at them differently. On Thursday, March 30, the elections will decide who will go into the next general election as their MPP and which party will represent them in the Legislature.

Only one person is given the privilege to speak for those who live and work in their constituency. Ideally the voter would take a byelection as seriously as they would a general election however without the pressure of the leaders and the fact that the results will not change the government, it just doesn't happen that way. Case in point - voter turnout in last year's in Scarborough Rouge River following the resignation of Speaker Alvin Curling was an absolutely dismal 18 percent, and this is not a misprint.

Byelections do, however, afford voters the opportunity to send a message to the government that they are not satisfied with their performance. In fact, that happened here in the old riding of Renfrew South in 1962 when Len Quilty of the Liberal Party was

elected in a byelection to replace Jimmy Maloney, Progressive Conservative who had passed away. Ironically, Maloney himself was chosen in a byelection following the death of Jimmy Dempsey in 1955.

What is interesting about the byelection in 1962 is the vote totals relative to the general election of 1959 in which Maloney defeated Quilty by a count of 8411 to 6356, for a total of 14,767 votes being cast. In the byelection, Quilty defeated Con Mulvihill of the Progressive Conservatives by a count of 7009 to 6865. A third candidate, Leonard Laventure of the NDP, polled 1338 votes, making the total number of ballots cast 15, 212, 445 more than were cast in the general election. Those numbers illustrate two things: One, how times have changed and two, that people in our neck of the woods have always taken a very keen interest in which their representative would be and politics in general.

Another item I want to touch on is small municipal water and sewage systems. It has become more and more evident that the smaller systems are increasingly finding that provincially mandated upgrades are placing a burden on the limited users that is getting more and more difficult to bear. It would seem to me that the province has to re-think its position that their systems must operate on a cost-recovery basis. Throughout this riding, I am finding that water and sewage charges are rising at an alarming rate, which will have a significant effect on the municipalities and those who live or operate their businesses within those communities.

If the province is going to make all the rules with regards to water quality standards, then I believe it must accept a greater responsibility when it comes to ensuring the sustainability of small municipal systems. Toronto, with millions of users, should be able to cover its costs. Places such as Barry's Bay, Killaloe, Beachburg and others with a lower number of users are going to need more help. The government must start listening more to those of us in rural Ontario.

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