



Message from Queen's Park



Monthly Column by MPP John Yakabuski

August, 2008

I want to say, I hope everyone is having a great summer but we all know that the weather has been anything but summer-like this year. Farmer's have been having a heck-of-a-time getting hay and grain off the fields. The past week there has been some improvement and I saw many farmers trying to take advantage by "making hay when the sun shines" as they say. Even with the recent improvement, this year's weather will likely result in lower yields and lower quality which will translate into higher costs down the road. Not the kind of conditions our farmers needed at a time when so many forces seem to be working against them already.

On August 24th the Association of Municipalities of Ontario begins its annual four day conference in Ottawa. It was at this conference, two years ago that Premier Dalton McGuinty promised a new financial agreement with municipalities, to replace the current arrangement. He said a new deal would be presented within 18 months, thereby neatly side-stepping the issue until after the 2007 provincial election. When the deadline approached this February, McGuinty announced that they were not ready and that the report of the fiscal and service delivery review committee would be released on June 20th. Well it's August 18th, (Our daughter, Emily's 19th birthday) as I write this column and nothing has been released as yet. While the province did announce the upload of Disability and Drug Benefits as a pre-election ploy, this only served to undermine the work of the committee which was tasked to undertake a complete review of the funding agreement and present a comprehensive alternative that addressed the municipal circumstances in totality. A series of one-offs is not what was supposed to take place. This spring there was additional funding made available to municipalities, as a result of a larger than expected budget surplus. This was certainly appreciated and will help with the infrastructure programs within our municipalities. It does not deal with the long term sustainable funding formula that our municipal partners need to allow them to plan ahead. A surprise injection of funds won't happen if there is no unexpected budget surplus. The likelihood of this year's surplus being repeated is slim, given the state of the economy. That is why it is imperative that the McGuinty government follow through with a new formula. Without it, municipalities will continue to present themselves cap in hand, at the end of a fiscal year hoping to receive whatever crumbs the province may have left for them, or they will be forced to, once again, hope that their number comes up in a lottery style contest for specific project funding. I'm hopeful that the government will present something concrete at the "AMO" Conference and that it provides a solution for the funding gap that municipalities face especially our small urban and rural

ones. (DID someone just say GAS TAX?) If they don't, then one would have to ask what the whole exercise was all about.

This has been a summer of anniversaries across the riding with many municipalities and organizations reaching important milestones. I have enjoyed what I've been able to take in, although it tends to be in small bits, as it seems there is always more to get to, than there is time. Congratulations and Thank You to all those who have made each of these celebrations so memorable.

It's back to school soon and I'd like to wish the very best to students and teachers as they return to class. Our youngest (Lucas) will be starting Grade 12. Where does the time go?

To end where I began, in spite of the weather, I hope that everyone is having a great summer here in the valley.

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