



Message from Queen's Park



Monthly Column by MPP John Yakabuski

October 2008

Let me begin by extending heartiest congratulations to Cheryl Gallant on her spectacular victory in the federal election of October 14th. This was her fourth successful electoral win and she has certainly shown she knows what it takes to be victorious in Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. Well done Cheryl!

I returned to the legislature last Thursday for the first time, since my hip surgery. While I have slowly been getting back to doing appointments in the riding, I must say it felt great to be able to get back in the saddle, so to speak. Upon my return to Queen's Park, I was able to speak directly to Natural Resources Minister, Donna Cansfield on the issue of the announced closure of the Smurfit Stone pulp wood mill at Portage-du-Fort. Even though the mill is located in the Province of Quebec, it's permanent shut-down will have more negative effect on the forestry operations here in Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke than the closure of any related business in the past. The mill was the number one destination for wood residue from our sawmills. If there is no place to market the wood residue, the sale of logs will be impossible. In today's highly competitive market place, you must be able to generate revenue from every part of every tree or you can't make it pay. I'll use the analogy of a beef farmer. If the farmer can't sell the hamburger, he won't be able to sell the steak. He would simply have to price it too high for any buyer. For this reason, I made the point to Minister Cansfield that in the short term, we have to be prepared to assist our operators in securing new places to market their wood residues. I asked her to consider transportation assistance as well.

In the long term, I made it clear that there must be alternatives to pulp mills available to use our chips and pulp wood. While there are possibilities out there, it is incumbent on the government to either help them along or at the worst, not stand in their way. A couple of these alternatives could be Co-generation facilities fuelled by wood bio-mass or hardwood pelletization plants. A Co-Gen facility would accomplish two goals. It would use wood residue and produce heat and power which could help with an expected shortage of electricity over the next 6 - 10 years. We do have some issues with regards to cost of power that we have to work on. The wood pellet business is already very established. In fact, we can't seem to meet the demand that exists already. The problem is that most are produced in places other than Ontario.

In my discussions with the Minister, she conceded that there are several applications for licences to operate a pelletization facility currently active. My question then was why is ONTARIO dragging its feet while other provinces are moving quickly to take advantage. As far as I'm concerned, the McGuinty government tries way too hard to find reasons to say no, when they should be asking why not! If this growing need for pellets is filled by companies in other provinces, then it will be another opportunity lost with tragic consequences for our forestry industry. WE CAN'T ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN!

Over the next several days, Branches of the Royal Canadian Legion, as well as many schools will be holding ceremonies to commemorate Remembrance Day. While most Legions hold their ceremonies on November 11th, there are others who hold them in the days leading up to Remembrance Day. This applies to the schools as well. I encourage everyone to attend one of these ceremonies this year. It is a simple but very important way of saying Thank You to those who gave so much that we may continue to live in a land that is peaceful and free. Wear a poppy!

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