



Message from Queen's Park



Monthly Column by MPP John Yakabuski

December 19th, 2009

As the calendar year draws to a close, and we journey through the season of Christmas, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some final thoughts for the year 2009.

Like all of you, Vicky and I have been very busy with preparations and planning, and this is over and above the on-going business that's part of my great privilege of serving the people of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke in the Ontario Legislature.

It's not my intention today to be overly partisan in my comments, so I won't be. Before moving forward with season's greetings, though, I'd like to make reference to a couple of things pertaining to government in Ontario, and of their effect upon us here in Renfrew County.

First, and despite our very best efforts in opposition to it, the Liberals, as we knew they inevitably would, have used their majority in the legislature to hammer through Bill 218, known better to you perhaps as the HST, or Harmonized Sales Tax. Let me simply say that, in my opinion, there's very little harmony in an arrangement where people living in one part of the province get hit harder by a tax that's sold to us as being fairer and more efficient. It's truly unfortunate that the government, in its self-styled pursuit of equity and harmony, haven't done the necessary preparation work that shows very clearly the negative impact this tax will have on largely rural ridings like Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. Please rest assured that I will do all I can, as we move forward, to hold this government accountable for a deeply flawed and inequitable tax policy.

On another front, I would have hoped that the government, by this point in time, would have taken some stronger action to get our Drive Test Centres back up and running at full capacity. As it is, a deal has been reached that's intended to re-open the centres by early January, but government dithering has resulted in a backlog of some 400,000 people seeking licensing qualifications, many of whom require this licensing in order to continue or pursue employment. This backlog grows daily, somewhere in the area of between 4000 to 5000 a day, and it represents another failure of leadership by those who seemed to be adrift on this file. While there seems to be an agreement to get these people back to work, it will still take as much as a year to clear the backlog, meaning those who are depending on the centres will face continued delays as they attempt to find or enhance their own employment.

I was truly touched and honoured to be part of activities that welcomed the passing of the Olympic Flame through the Valley. From Arnprior to Renfrew, through to Douglas, Eganville, Pikwakanagan and Golden Lake, to CFB Petawawa and Petawawa proper, the flame was carried onward,

culminating in the breathtaking experience of over 5000 people turning out to greet its passage in Pembroke. In what can only be described as a galvanizing experience, the people of this area have responded by resoundingly coming together in a common goal, that being to demonstrate for all to see their great love for Canada, and their great pride in being Canadian. I share this love and pride with each and every one of you, and it was a most profound experience to witness and be a part of. The catchy promotions ask the question "Do you believe?" In answer, the people of the Valley responded convincingly and unconditionally, and it was truly a great day to be living in the best part of the best country in the world.

A little over two centuries ago, a child was born, a birth that has served as a foundation of sorts for the way in which we're called to commit to one another in fellowship and love. While those expectations existed long before that day, the birth and subsequent life of Jesus re-connected the people of the time with these beliefs, and has served over the last two thousand years as a reference point for all those who put great faith in that message of peace, love, and hope.

Feed the hungry. Heal the sick. Give comfort to the downtrodden. Treat one another with respect and dignity. To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

And what, my friends, could be wrong with that?

The birth of Christ continues to be as vital and engaging as it's always been, calling us back to these core values. Values, by the way, held and shared by men and women of all faiths the world over.

Vicky and I would like to take this opportunity to extend to all of you our very best wishes for a safe, happy, and blessed Christmas. For us, as many of you, it's a time for family and friends, the joy of children, and re-connecting with those values we hold so dear. As it is for us, may it also be so for you.

Merry Christmas one and all.

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