



## *Message from Queen's Park*



**Monthly Column by MPP John Yakabuski**

**January, 2009**

Now that we're all endeavouring to shed those few extra pounds we tend to acquire over Christmas and Americans have sworn in Barack Obama as their 44<sup>th</sup> President, it's time to get back to the tasks at hand. As President Obama said in his inaugural address "there are great challenges before us that must be met." How one meets those challenges will go a long way in defining them as a leader. Here in Ontario, so far, we have heard almost nothing from Dalton McGuinty as to what his liberal government plans to do to help Ontarians recover from this economic recession we are in. It seems McGuinty's only strategy is to demand that the Federal Government fix the problem. What he should be doing, is working with stakeholders, including the opposition parties to forge a framework for recovery. PC Leader, John Tory, wrote the Premier to offer our help in a non-partisan way, to jointly look for solutions to the problems we face. Mr. McGuinty rejected his offer.

The government should also commit to the early tabling of a budget. The events of last fall changed the circumstances we are living in most dramatically which call for timely action on the part of the Province. As they say, you need to have the right tools in the tool box in order to get the job done. Last year's budget has been rendered irrelevant. It is time to retool the tool box. We can't wait until the end of March. We need to send a message to those who work or create jobs that we want to partner with you to bring Ontario back. Let's take the lead.

Speaking of leading, John Tory recently announced that he will be running for a seat in the Legislature in the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. My colleague, Laurie Scott, has graciously offered to step down to give John the opportunity to lead the opposition from the benches of Queen's Park. This will allow us to focus on being our most effective as her Majesty's loyal opposition. A big thank you to Laurie, for acting so unselfishly. It is now up to the Premier to call the by-election. It would be in the best interests of democracy if he were to do so without delay.

On January 16<sup>th</sup>, I was pleased to join many of my caucus colleagues, as well as John Tory as guests of the Eastern Ontario Warden's Caucus. The purpose of the meeting held in Kingston, was to outline their priorities for the year and to choose a new chair. The Warden of Hastings County, Ron Emond, was elected as the chair. Ron is well known to many of my constituents particularly those in the southwest corner of the riding as the very effective and approachable Mayor of Hastings Highlands. Our new Warden, Don Rathwell, was

participating in his first EOWC meeting as well. I'm looking forward to working well with both of them and all members of the EOWC as we move ahead. At their meeting, the Wardens cited broadband connectivity for rural areas as a top priority that must be addressed by all levels of government as well as the private sector. In this information age, knowledge based economy, you cannot compete without high speed capabilities. Blanket broadband coverage throughout rural Eastern Ontario would give those outside urban areas, the opportunity to do just that. Let's all get together on it.

On January 20<sup>th</sup>, the government along with Ontario Power Generation, announced plans to look at fuelling our coal-fired Power Plants with bio-mass. Pilot projects have produced very good results at the Atikokan Generating Station. Further to the announcement, requests for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) were issued to evaluate the availability of bio-mass to fuel the larger stations at Nanticoke and Lambton. This could present an excellent opportunity for our local forestry businesses to replace the markets for wood residue that have been lost with the closure of Smurfit in Portage and the shutdown of ATC Panels in Pembroke. There is a keen interest by local operators to build a wood pellet facility here. We will be watching closely to ensure that any bidding process to provide pellets gives our people a fair shake. There are too many jobs at stake.

John Yakabuski, MPP  
Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke

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Office Contact Information:

Constituency Office  
84 Isabella St.  
Pembroke, ON  
K8A 5S5  
[john.yakabuski@pc.ola.org](mailto:john.yakabuski@pc.ola.org)

Queen's Park Office  
Room 202 N.W., Legislative Building  
Toronto, ON  
M7A 1A8  
[john.yakabuski@pc.ola.org](mailto:john.yakabuski@pc.ola.org)