



Message from Queen's Park



Monthly Column by MPP John Yakabuski

Monthly Column – May 2017

It seems as often as not, water is an issue when springtime comes to Ontario. We're either lamenting its shortage or damn near drowning in it. I recall some years when there was next to no snowmelt and very little spring rain. In one of those years, the Bark Lake Reservoir did not fill until the first week of July.

As everyone knows, this year has been quite different. While there have been years where we have had flooding on the Ottawa River, other years on the Madawaska River, and yet other years on the Bonnechere River—this is the first year that I have seen extensive flooding on all three. Extensive is probably not the right word, unprecedented would likely be more appropriate. I've never seen anything like it in my lifetime, and others who have been around a lot longer than me concur. At the time of writing this column (May 11th), the waters have just begun to recede for the second time. They first peaked a few weeks ago, but unusually high rain across the entire basin of each of the rivers (and their tributaries) turned an improving situation into one that became almost unimaginable for many people.

For those affected first by rising water levels, and then flooding, it has consumed much of their lives for well over a month. Unfortunately, they will be dealing with it for some time to come. Even without more heavy rain, it will still take a while for the waters to decline to normal seasonal levels. At that point, people will be able to more accurately and completely assess the damage to their properties. I expect the cost to be significant, but whatever it might be, it cannot take into consideration the toll exacted upon the lives of those affected. They have been in my thoughts and prayers since this crisis began and will continue to be.

I am grateful that Bill Mauro, the Minister of Municipal Affairs responded positively to my request—and the requests of our municipal leaders—in activating the *Disaster Recovery Assistance Program* only four days after I had raised the issue in the Legislature. I am certain this will be of some comfort to those who are wondering what their next steps might be. My office has been extremely busy fielding questions and inquiries from constituents, addressing various aspects of this year's catastrophic event. I am sure that my municipal partners have been no less busy.

Many of their inquiries center around the application process for assistance under the program. My office can continue to help in that regard.

There are many questions that need to be answered regarding this spring's flooding and I plan to convene a meeting that will hopefully accomplish exactly that. But for now, while all affected are still bailing water, we must concentrate on that immediate task.

One of the most gratifying results of this whole mess has been witnessing once again, the manifestation of what makes the Valley special: our commitment to each other, neighbours helping one another; those not directly affected are helping those who are – doing what they could to mitigate the effect of Mother Nature's wrath. Whenever there is a crisis, afterwards it always makes me prouder to say, "I'm from the Valley." I am sure you feel the same way too.