

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? What I heard at the ROMA conference

In January, I attended the annual Rural Ontario Municipalities Association (ROMA) conference in Toronto. The ROMA conference is the annual meeting of rural municipalities from across Ontario which allows them to come together, discuss their concerns and share best practices.

At this year's conference, municipal delegations from across Ontario, including councillors and staff from municipalities in Dufferin-Caledon, had meetings with government representatives and members of the opposition parties. I participated in many of these meetings along with my Progressive Conservative Caucus colleagues. Many of the meetings had a similar theme, in that municipalities need key investments in natural gas and internet infrastructure. Others were more specific, for instance the government's lack of action regarding the GTA West Highway Corridor and the proposed expansion of the Greenbelt.

Many municipalities said they wanted a larger role in choosing when and where growth and intensification occurs. I agree. That is why in 2010 I introduced my private members' bill, Planning Amendment Act (Renewable Energy Undertakings). The bill would have ensured that municipalities are willing hosts when there is an application to build industrial wind turbines. Unfortunately, while my bill has received support from my PC colleagues and we have tried many times to have the bill passed, the Liberals and the NDP refuse to support this important change. I am pleased that the PC Caucus has committed that if elected we would repeal the Green Energy Act and restore the local planning authority over renewable energy projects.

The PC Caucus and I also support a plan that would provide key investments in natural gas and broadband expansion. Natural gas and broadband are essential drivers to the rural economy. Natural gas allows families, farmers and business to have access to a less expensive form of energy than skyrocketing hydro rates. Broadband is key for businesses as more and more of our information and business communication occurs online. That is why our plan includes measures to help up to 70 new communities and 38,000 additional customers access natural gas. It would also include an investment of up to \$100 million for broadband and cellular infrastructure.

Finally, municipalities also shared their concerns about the ability to provide the service and investments in infrastructure that their residents need and deserve. That is why we have committed to investing \$124 million in recreational infrastructure and restoring the \$70 million Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund, because the Liberals cut the program in 2013.

The ROMA conference is an important way for us to strengthen the communication between municipal and provincial governments. Working together we can ensure that our communities prosper.

