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MPP looks ahead for 2017

While there were many successes in 2016, life continues to get harder in Ontario ? especially in rural Ontario.

Prince Edward-Hastings MPP Todd Smith said decisions made by Premier Kathleen Wynne and the provincial government drove electricity prices higher.

?It was just a few years ago that Ontario had the cheapest electricity in North America. That was one of the key reasons businesses and manufacturers thrived here. It's remarkable how a number of irresponsible government decisions in the last decade have resulted in Ontario now having the most expensive electricity costs on the continent.?

Looking ahead to 2017, Smith said energy will continue to be a sore spot for the Liberal government for the foreseeable future. Not only is the government making electricity more expensive, it will now drive up the price of natural gas and other home heating fuels by bringing in a disastrous cap-and-trade system.

?Mark my words, this is the next Liberal mistake. Cap-and-trade has already proven to be a failure in all other jurisdictions where it's been implemented. Serving as one of the energy critics with the Official Opposition at Queen's Park and as Critic for the Hydro One Sale has shown me first-hand just how damaging Liberal energy policies have been on every sector of Ontario.? Smith concluded.

?The eight percent rebate on electricity bills coming on New Year's Day is welcome, but, isn't enough. Not when people are seeing double digit increases every year. Our schools have even seen increases of 40 per cent in one year. It's heat or eat for way too many people in Ontario because of this government.?

?Rural school closures were also a major focus at the end of the year.? Smith specified. ?Hastings County did a great job forcing the issue on behalf of some communities in North Hastings. But with how the Liberal government has changed the regulations, this could become an annual fight that always threatens these communities.?

The MPP said he thought 2016 was a productive year on a number of local files. He said he hoped that the string of victories carried over into important files in 2017.

He's thankful that the government assisted with funding for a handful of infrastructure projects in local municipalities but many more have had their needs ignored.

?While it was rewarding to see the efforts of some municipalities like Bancroft, Wollaston and Limerick receive over $4 million in Ontario Community Infrastructure Funding, many other worthy projects have waited another full year with no results. My office will continue to advocate for much needed infrastructure funding in 2017.?

Smith cited fighting for the government to keep Sagonaska Demonstration School in Belleville open, and a reversal of government cuts to senior's prescription drug costs and autism programs, as successes in 2016.

?Sagonaska School was a major file this year.? Smith stated. ?When we found out early in the year that the government was planning to close the provincial schools, which provide an essential learning environment for severely learning disabled students, the effort to keep them open became a priority at my office. When the government announced in the spring that they'd be keeping demonstration schools open next year, it was a huge victory for the parent councils all over the province who led the fight.?

He noted local parents were essential to overturning the government's decision to cut autism services.

?When it came to autism services, parents across the province were active on this one. ? Smith added. ?They kept it on the front burner at Queen's Park to the point where we were hearing from government MPPs that they disagreed with the Premier on how autism services were being handled. Without parents getting involved, that doesn't happen. The government would still be cutting autism services.?

It has been more than five years since Todd Smith was elected as MPP for Prince Edward-Hastings. The old riding boundaries will be changing ahead of the 2018 provincial election to mirror the federal electoral jurisdictions.

Smith said he will continue to advocate for all residents in Hastings County throughout 2017.

?There will be many challenges ahead in the coming year and I look forward to working with municipal council colleagues and residents across North Hastings to fight for a better way of life in rural Ontario. On behalf of my family and staff best wishes on a happy, healthy and prosperous 2017.?

Submitted by MPP Todd Smith