

Looking out for Ontario's small and rural communities

Dear editor:

The Ontario Liberal government believes we are One Ontario where all communities both rural and urban can succeed.

Over the past year we have moved forward on a number of policies that support our economic plan to invest in people, build modern infrastructure and create a dynamic and innovative business climate.

Strengthening rural communities is a central part of our plan. As Minister of Rural Affairs, I have travelled across the province listening to residents, municipal representatives, and community groups.

I want to thank each and every person who took the time to write, attend a consultation or contribute in some way. I have brought your insights and ideas back to Queen's Park and these have directly informed our government's decision making.

You told me about the importance of investing in rural infrastructure. That is why our 2013 Budget provided \$100 million to small, rural and northern communities to help build roads, bridges and other critical infrastructure. As a former municipal representative, I know how important stable funding for infrastructure is to communities. Our government is developing a permanent rural infrastructure fund to be included in the 2014 Budget to meet this need.

You told me about the need to create jobs and grow rural economies. In August I announced the re-launched Rural Economic Development (RED) program. RED helps rural municipalities and businesses create jobs and attract investment by promoting innovative partnerships. Our government also launched the new Youth Jobs Strategy, which is helping create 30,000 job opportunities for young people across the province.

You also told me about the importance of protecting services like health care. That is why we have created 37 Community Health Links across Ontario to provide better care for residents with unique and challenging needs in rural communities.

As we begin a new year, I look forward to continuing to work on behalf of Ontario's small and rural communities.

I wish you and your family a safe, healthy and happy holiday season.

Jeff Leal,

Minister of Rural Affairs