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JOHN YAKABUSKI, M.P.P. - RENFREW-NIPISSING-PEMBROKE

Debate – Bill 21 (One Hour Lead-Off)

November 30, 2005

Bill 21 - Energy Conservation Responsibility Act, 2005

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I am pleased to speak to Bill 21; my first opportunity to do a one-hour leadoff. I stood down my lead last week because I was up visiting Atikokan and Thunder Bay, and I'll touch on that a little later.

Mr. Patten: Don't drink too much water.

Mr. Yakabuski: OK. That's a good idea. You don't know what I've got installed in my plumbing system, though, Richard. Don't worry about it.

This bill is entitled An Act to enact the Energy Conservation Leadership Act, 2005 and to amend the Electricity Act, 1998, the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 and the Conservation Authorities Act. The big story around this bill is conservation. I don't think that the minister has self-titled -- I wouldn't say she's that vain -- but she somehow has gained the title as the queen of conservation. She feels very good about this bill that she has brought forward and wants to get it passed through the House as soon as possible. But in the bill itself, of course, there is almost nothing. The bill is an enabling bill that allows the government to do a number of things, and we'll get back to that as well.

1700

One thing that I've heard talked about -- I only got here a few minutes ago, so I did miss some of the good debate that must have been going on with the leader of the third party, which also must have gotten under the skin of the government, which would lead me to believe that it must have been some good stuff. So I'm sorry I missed that. Anyhow, they were talking about conservation and then they were talking about coal plants and nuclear plants. We're going to get into that as well, because we do have a fair bit of time today.

First, I do want to talk a little bit about conservation. This government talks a lot about conservation, but you really have to ask yourself how much support or impetus they have actually given to conservation here in the province of Ontario. There are some things out there that could be described as low-hanging fruit, and the government has done little or nothing to encourage people to take advantage of that. I'm going to talk about our own situation here a little bit.

In the last couple of years, my wife and I made the decision that we were going to try to reduce our energy consumption in our home. Having a couple of teenage children, I'm sure that anybody who is in that position knows that that's not the easiest thing to do at times. I don't say anything disparaging

about our two children left at home, Emily and Lucas, because of course they're absolutely wonderful and we love them dearly, but they do tend to be a little careless at times with regard to recognizing that a switch that goes up can also go down, or "On goes off" type of thing. We have our issues with that, but we did want to take the steps that we could.

One thing we did was to lower the temperature of our hot water heater. That's a very important thing. Sometimes people have their hot water heaters running higher than is necessary and that is a significant issue with regard to their consumption, because of course in a standard 40-gallon hot water heater, if it's electric -- and in our case it is electric -- there are 3,500 watts of power in that heater. It's dual 3,500 watts that cycle on and off independently, so there is a lot of power used in order to heat your water. Of course, a dryer is one of the biggest users of electricity in anyone's home.

The first thing we did was to purchase energy-efficient appliances: a new washer, a new dryer and a new refrigerator. Now, the drier was not eligible, even though it's the latest technology and high-efficiency. It's still a huge consumer of power because of the very nature of what it does: It dries clothes by creating a lot of heat. But I must say, there is nobody out there who is more reluctant to use a clothes dryer than my wife, Vicky. Even in the dead of winter she's out there hanging clothes on the line because she does not believe in turning on that dryer unless it is absolutely necessary. Socks and underwear is about all of what we dry in our dryer. Of course, the clothes that are dried on the line are so much fresher and the smell is so much sweeter. When you put those bed sheets back on the bed, and they've been dried on the line, it's like you're hopping into a cloud. The freshness of the air is invigorating. We'll leave it at that.

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: Richard wants more. I'm sorry, that's as far as it goes, my friend.

The clothes dried on the line are so superior in their fragrance and everything else, and you've saved the power by doing so.

Then we thought, "We've got to do something more." So we purchased new windows for the house. We did half of them in 2004, and we've done half of them this year. My house has 24 windows in it, so we did half one year and half the next year. The house was built in 1960, so the windows were 44 and 45 years old. It was time to replace them, because they were not doing us any favours with regard to the amount of energy we were consuming in the home. So that's new windows.

We ensured that there was R20 insulation in the attic. In fact, we've got R40; there's R40 insulation in the attic.

Then, this fall, we purchased a new heating system, a brand new high-efficiency oil furnace. It is going to reduce not only our consumption of furnace oil, but also, because it's a high-efficiency blower, it's going to reduce dramatically the amount of electricity. What people don't understand sometimes is that the blower system on your forced-air furnace uses a lot of electricity. So we've done that.

We've also taken out our old heat-pump air conditioning system, and we're replacing it in the spring. There's no sense buying the air conditioning in October. You might as well wait till the spring. So we've done that.

The other thing we've done is, there's not an incandescent light in our house. There's not one, I should say, except in the hall, which is on a rheostat, a dimmer switch. I understand that I can get a fluorescent bulb now that can be dimmed, so I'm going to look after that. That will be my next job. Working here every day, I haven't had time to get out to the store to get one, but that is on my list; I can assure you of that. So if that bulb is changed, we won't have an incandescent bulb in the house. We don't even have incandescent bulbs in the garage or the sheds in behind. They're all compact fluorescents. So we've reduced the amount of electricity that we use to light our home and to light the buildings around the home. All of these kinds of things that we have done are going to add to the energy efficiency of our home.

Now, here comes a very important point: None of that was assisted in any way except the appliances, because they were bought before this government cancelled the sales tax rebate program on Energy Star appliances. They cancelled that last September, I believe, and they have brought nothing out since to replace it. Think about that: Since September 2004, there has been no incentive to the people of the province of Ontario to purchase an energy-efficient appliance; none whatsoever. We did that, got the sales tax rebate. We purchased before this current government -- the conservation government, the energy-efficient government, the one that's going to solve all our energy needs -- cancelled the very program that would remove some of those wasteful, high-electricity-usage appliances from service and replace them with energy-efficient appliances. That's something we did under the program that had been brought in by the previous government, the Progressive Conservative government, and continued for a while under this government -- because they didn't cancel everything right away, but anything that made sense they tried to cancel as soon as possible. All of these things that we've done to reduce the energy consumption in our home, as I said, with the exception of the appliances, has been done without any help whatsoever from this government; none whatsoever.

I am not, by any stretch of the imagination, a wealthy man. But I can tell you, I have never been in a position -- I'm concerned about my hydro bill and I'm always unhappy when I see the hydro bill -- where I couldn't pay the hydro bill. Obviously, we're in a position where we could make these enhancements to our home, not only for our own level of personal comfort and enjoyment, but to save electricity and to reduce our electricity costs.

1710

However, with the absence of a program, I have people in my riding who could benefit from doing these kinds of things to their home -- they could reduce their energy consumption the same way that Vicky and I have reduced our energy consumption -- but you know what? They can't afford it. That's the reality: There are people who can't afford it. Not only can they not afford to do these kinds of enhancements, but some of them can't afford to pay their hydro bill. I can't tell you how many times -- and I can only go back to October 2003; that's when I was elected -- we have had people contact our office, my constituency office in particular, worried sick because they couldn't pay their hydro bill and were at risk of having their hydro cut off. Those people aren't going to be going out and investing in new Energy Star appliances. They're not going to be changing the air conditioning or the furnace or new windows. They can't make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, and they can't pay the hydro bill. We don't have a program in this province that looks at that because, you see, the people who can least afford to make these enhancement are the ones who are most affected by high hydro rates.

I want to take my hat off to my staff in my constituency office: Andrew Simms, Susan Fynn and Laura Lapinski, who do such a tremendous job of assisting the people in my constituency, in my riding, not only with these problems, but with every other kind of problem that comes our way. As a

member of this House, you can well imagine what happens in our constituency office, which is not unlike other constituency offices in this province. I want to thank them in particular, and also my staff here at Queen's Park: Mary-Frances Dulny, my executive assistant, and Joan Stearns, my legislative assistant.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: While you're taking a sip of water, I counted nine separate discussions going on. I think the member needs to be heard. It is his first one-hour leadoff speech, and he would appreciate, I think, being heard.

Mr. Yakabuski: Mr. Speaker, I am not deterred by that number; however, I am somewhat shocked. I would have thought that not only all of the people in the House, but those who might be in their offices or in the caucus rooms would have come down here simply on the basis that they wanted to catch this live, and that they would be captivated completely and totally by this address and would not want to miss a single word. I see the member from Huron-Bruce has reaffixed her attention on myself. I hardly expect those eyes will leave me for the rest of this hour.

Now, where was I? I said I'd be undeterred, but I didn't say that I wouldn't lose my spot.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): You were thanking your staff.

Mr. Yakabuski: Yes, thank you very much, Lorenzo. I want to thank my staff for the great work they do in assisting me, not only in my role as a member of provincial Parliament, but also as energy critic here for the Progressive Conservative Party.

Mr. Leal: Oh, you're the energy critic now?

Mr. Yakabuski: Yes.

What do we do about conservation programs in the province of Ontario that would lead to these things happening in more homes than just mine? We don't have some of the programs they have in other provinces, and this is when I really have to ask myself about the commitment. When I see members on the other side of the House answer questions, Mr. Speaker -- you and I know because we don't sit far away from each other, and I know I can't involve you in this conversation -- I don't know about you, but I would like to have a running count as to how many times they use the words, "We're committed. I want the people of Ontario to know that we are committed." You hear those words over and over again, but you have to ask yourself, how committed are they to energy conservation when they have nothing in place well over two years into their mandate? In fact, the only thing they have done is to remove Energy Star appliances from the conservation picture.

Other provinces: I've got to tell you, I was in a meeting with some stakeholders, and I don't have some of my papers here, but they were talking about the program in B.C. and how their energy conservation plan has resulted in \$1 billion of power saved. They have reduced the need for power by \$1 billion. They've actually been able to cancel two hydro projects because of their conservation measures, because they have been so much more proactive and so much more aggressive than this government here. That's British Columbia.

In provinces like Manitoba and Quebec, they also have energy audits where they will come in, look at your house and tell you what you need. Then they will assist you in making those changes so that your House is more energy efficient than it would have been previously. They'll help you with that.

When this government talks about spending money, they are spending a whack of money bringing in new generation. They are working with bankrupt or soon-to-be-bankrupt companies. You wonder where that's going to take us, and that's a good question. I know the energy minister today got a telephone call from the CEO of the partner of Calpine. That should be really reassuring to the people of Ontario, that the CEO of the partnering company with the company that is about to go bankrupt, according to analysts, has phoned to reassure her. I can only imagine how many people were reassured by calls from Bernie Ebbers a couple of years ago, telling them that everything was going to be fine.

When a company is in trouble, I would expect that the CEO, anybody involved with companies surrounding that company, is going to be very quick to say things like, "Oh, not to worry, we've got it well under control. Everything is going to be fine. The energy minister is exactly right. We're going to have everything going ahead as scheduled." But we know differently. In the real world, actually, somewhere, there may have been instances where the CEO of a company has actually misled people. That may have happened.

So I'm not overly reassured, and I don't think the people of Ontario are overly reassured with the minister's response to those queries today, both by myself and by the leader of the third party, who has great concerns, as we do, about the solvency of companies this government has sort of hopped into bed with, because what has happened is that they are desperate. They have an energy policy that has forced them into a corner. And when you're nervous and you're desperate and you're scared -- you know that old saying, "Haste makes waste"? That's an old one. My mother used to tell me that, and she was very right. My mother was a very wise woman. This is what has happened with this government. My mother was a very wise woman and kept us, tried to keep us -- I was going to say kept us, but let's just say tried to keep us -- on the straight and narrow, and that was wonderful. I was very fortunate in that regard, to have such guidance in my life.

1720

Mr. Leal: Your father was a great member too.

Mr. Yakabuski: Yes, he was. Thank you very much. The member from Peterborough alludes to my father's record in this House. I'm very proud of my father's record in this House and the fact that he made it possible for me to be here in this position today.

Mr. Leal: Tell us about Conway. He was a great member too.

Mr. Yakabuski: I don't want to get too far off track, but the member for Peterborough says, "Tell us about Conway." Of course, "Conway" refers to my cousin Sean Conway, who was the member for my riding before I was the member for my riding.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I didn't know that, John.

Mr. Yakabuski: I'll bet you did. Keep listening closely and you'll learn a few other things.

I remember talking to Sean Conway back in 2002. It was at a Remembrance Day service at the Legion in Barry's Bay. The people on the other side of the House, particularly those who were here prior to 2002, will remember that at that time, Sean Conway was the energy critic. How interesting that I'm now the energy critic for the opposition, as he was the energy critic for the opposition. I remember talking to Sean that day. It was after Sean had announced that he was not going to run again. We were talking about energy and nuclear energy and he said, "I've got to tell you one thing, John" -- here's a guy who was 28 years in this House, serving his constituents in Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke or Renfrew North or whatever; he had different riding names -- "You just wouldn't believe how complicated that energy business is." Well, I can tell you, having been the energy critic for only a few short months now, how absolutely correct he was. I hope we continue to investigate and learn things as they go on and as the industry itself evolves, because it's going to be constantly changing even as we speak.

So there: I can't give you the history of Conway's 28 years here because it would be too long, just as I can't give you the history of my dad's 24 years, but I'm quite thankful and proud that I'm following them here in this great Legislature.

Back to conservation: There are so many things we could be doing to help people in the conservation field. I know this bill enables the government to do some things, but what the heck have they been doing for two years? For God's sake, what have they been doing to help people for the last two years? Nothing, and that's the shame of it. Because they've been so fixated on all of this other stuff they've had to bring in -- legislation about gummy bears and sushi and pit bulls and all that kind of stuff -- they haven't done their job on the conservation file. So these are some things that they could help with tremendously.

But as we go forward in the energy field, in the energy sector here, I hope this government does something positive with regard to conservation, but even in respect to that, we're still going to see significant and severe price increases for hydroelectricity in this province under this regime. Much of it is going to be due to their failure to recognize the reality and their failure to open their eyes to what is out there and available to them with regard to clean coal technology.

It's kind of ironic: The federal minister of energy -- I think it's John McCallum -- was at a breakfast last Friday. I was supposed to go to that breakfast but couldn't because I was engaged in my riding. As you know, I have a long drive to my riding on Thursday nights.

Mr. Chudleigh: How long is it?

Mr. Yakabuski: It's a long drive; it's well in excess of 300 kilometres. I was going back Thursday night because I had engagements in my riding on Friday, and I couldn't do that breakfast.

The federal minister of energy was talking about how committed the federal government was to investing in -- now listen carefully. Listen carefully.

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: Did you want me to wait a minute? I don't want you to miss this.

The Minister of Energy was talking about how important it was, and how committed -- that's a word that you Liberals over there use a lot -- the federal government was to investing in clean coal technology.

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: Yes. And how they were going to be assisting Alberta, which is investing in clean coal technology. Do you know what that means? That means lower-cost power and cleaner air for those jurisdictions: clean coal technology.

This government continues to hold on to the position that they're going to shut down coal-fired generation in this province by 2007.

Interjection: By 2009.

Mr. Yakabuski: Oh, sorry; correction. They changed their mind on that. They moved it to 2009 because they already realized they were out of line. They didn't know what they were doing. They made a commitment -- again that word "commitment" -- that they couldn't fulfill, and then they had to backpedal on it.

The Premier was just in China -- of course, that's one of the economies that Canada is competing with -- and he made the proclamation, when he got off the train or the plane -- he might as well have gone on a train. How about a slow boat to China? That would have been a good place to put him.

Anyway, he got off the plane and he made the proclamation, in this sanctimonious way, "I'm absolutely certain now that we are right in our coal shutdown policy." By getting off the plane in China, somehow he had some kind of lightning bolt or an epiphany strike him that reinforced what he wanted to do. But when he gets home, the reality is different.

They are building over 100,000 megawatts of coal power in China: within the last couple of years, under construction and to be developed within the next couple of years, over 100,000 megawatts of coal power in China. Do you know where they're building coal power? They're building it in Germany and Denmark -- whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. Those are the places that are the world leaders in capturing and harnessing the wind. But why are they investing in coal? Because they've invested in clean coal technology.

What has this government done? It has sat there and wiggled and jiggled like a wiggle worm and done nothing to clean up our existing coal plants.

What's going to happen in 2007 and 2009 when they're not able to complete their "project," when they're not able to shut down those generators like they said they would? But remember, that's just a Liberal promise. You pages over there, don't take any Liberal promises too seriously. They're not going to be able to shut down those plants. Where will we be? We will be in a position where we've actually burned the coal plants for four years without investing a nickel in making them clean.

What have we done to enhance and improve the quality of air in the province of Ontario in four years under this government? We will have done nothing. So they're really worried. Then, when you see things like Calpine probably going bankrupt, it throws a real wrench into their plans to proceed and fulfill their commitment.

1730

What are they doing in Germany and Denmark? Germany, by the way, gets about 15% of its power from wind. It's one of the leading nations in the world; Denmark is the leading nation. But you see, for every megawatt of wind they've got, they also have -- probably not on a one-to-one basis but pretty close, because we can only depend on wind to operate at about 25% to 30% efficiency. The windmill here, down at the waterfront in Toronto, operates at about 25%; at the max, you're going to get about 30%. So for every megawatt of wind that they've got on the ground, they've got to have pretty much an equal amount of spinning reserve that they can dispatch at the call of the operator, because you can't depend on the wind. You can't say, "In three hours, we'd like 150 megawatts from your wind farm." There is a little problem if the wind doesn't co-operate. The good Lord controls the wind, but OPG can control the coal plant. So if they want to dispatch 150 megawatts and the wind doesn't blow, they're going to get squat. If you're depending on that wind to blow at one particular time or another, you could be in trouble. You will be in trouble unless you've got something that you can dispatch to make up for that shortfall.

Germany and Denmark have invested in clean coal technology. We always talk about them as being the ones most committed to wind. Well, they recognize the limitations of wind. We recognize the importance of wind. I want to make one thing abundantly clear: We should be making every investment we can in renewables in this province. Our party believes in investment in renewables, but we can't spread the silly notion that this government wants to spread: that somehow they're going to be able to solve the energy needs of this province on renewables alone. We support renewables: Any kind of energy that you can get without burning anything is good energy -- damned good energy, in my mind. It's good for the province and it's great for the environment. We support that 100%. But we have to be abundantly clear as to the limitations of that kind of technology.

As I've said, we support investment in renewables, but we don't want to confuse people with what the actual numbers are. You see, the minister talks about 9,000 megawatts. She always says, "We've brought on 9,000 megawatts." What kind of bunk is that? You haven't brought something on until it's actually spewing out power and I can turn on my lamp based on that commitment of power in the lines. They're talking about it, they're thinking about it, they even may have made some kind of an agreement with somebody -- maybe with a bankrupt company, who knows -- but it isn't ready yet.

When she speaks about that -- and I want to caution the member from Peterborough. I believe that he's a former teacher, right?

Mr. Leal: No.

Mr. Yakabuski: No? I'm sorry; I apologize. But I know you're smart and you're good at math. I know you're good at math.

You see, when the minister talks about 975 megawatts, like she did when she made the announcement last week, we've got to do the math. When you're investing 975 megawatts in wind renewables, you've got to do a little something that we took in about grade 3 or 4, and that's called division. You've got to divide it by three, at the best, and you've got to bring that down to about 325 megawatts, and that is the absolute best. It's more likely about 280 megawatts that you could actually consider to be working out of that amount of power. So, 975 megawatts, guys. Don't try and fool the people, and stop trying to kid yourselves. I think it's very important that you recognize that those things are not exactly right.

I want to read some things in letters from other people. Maybe we'll get to them. We will, I'm sure, have plenty of time for that. Sometimes you kind of lose where you are, because these people who are listening so intently they throw you off your train of thought sometimes.

We're still on that coal. I don't want to spend all of my time --

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): It's those members who are interrupting.

Mr. Yakabuski: Oh.

I certainly want to make it clear that we have taken every opportunity to try to get this government to reconsider some of the mistakes they've got in their coal policy and, if not invest, at least investigate what is out there.

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: We have to be aware. The member for Peterborough says something about the United States. Well, let's not kid ourselves, folks. The United States built five new coal plants in our airshed last year. There are at least 15 currently under construction.

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: Well, they're going to invest in clean coal technology. They're investing in clean coal technology, but the existing plants, you're right, are dirty. Even if we shut down our five coal plants, where do you think the air is coming from, folks? Less than 10% of the coal, the effects of coal in our airshed, comes out of Ontario. That's the Ministry of the Environment's own numbers: 10% of the SO_x in our atmosphere from coal comes out of Canadian coal plants; the rest of it comes from the Americans. We have to ask ourselves what we're going to accomplish here. What we are losing the opportunity on is four years of cleaning up coal. We could clean up every coal plant in this province, every unit of every coal plant, for about \$1.3 billion. Take those numbers and think about what we've invested or what we're investing already in other forms of energy generation in exchange for that.

Let's talk for a minute about smart meters. Again, this bill is enabling legislation with regard to smart meters, which doesn't tell us a whole heck of a lot about smart meters. But there's a lot of concern out there with regard to smart meters and what they will and will not accomplish, and what the cost may or may not be. The ministry says they think it's going to cost about a billion dollars. Some people say it could cost as high as \$4 billion. Tom Adams of Energy Probe says it could add as much as \$8 a month to the average person's electricity bill. What are we actually going to get out of it? We're going to get a variable rate structure starting next year, May 1. We're going to be in a situation where, if you're using power, if you've got one of these so-called smart meters -- but they're not two-way meters or anything else -- they're just going to tell you that this is what you're burning and it's within this time frame. If you're burning power between 7 a.m. and 11 a.m., you're going to pay 6.4 cents a kilowatt hour. If you're between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m., you're going to pay 9.3 cents a kilowatt hour. If you're between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m., you're going to be back to 6.4, and between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m., you're going to pay 2.9 cents a kilowatt hour, if you've got a smart meter installed in your home.

What are we going to actually accomplish? Are we just going to move, shift the load from one point of the day to the other so that some people can maybe affect their own energy usage at one time of

day or another? If we're talking about conservation, are we actually going to reduce the amount of energy we use? In fairness, we will reduce the amount of energy we need at peak times, if that works. Do we really want to create a situation where people are running down to the basement or up to the laundry room, wherever it may be, at 4 or 3 or 2 in the morning to put clothes in the dryer, and then have to sit there with the clothes, because it is very inadvisable to put clothes in the dryer, turn it on and then go back to bed? It's not very good. Clothes dryers are one of the prime causes of fires. They create a lot of heat and can actually be one of the reasons why fires happen in a home. So you don't put your clothes in a dryer and then go back to bed. What kind of quality of life is that if we have people who feel they've got to rush down there, throw the clothes in the dryer and then sit up and watch them?

1740

If they are talking about two-way meters, they might accomplish a little more in the way that they can feed information back and forth and we're actually on timed intervals. The other thing is that if we had everybody on -- you see, we had a program, the previous government had a plan, that they were going to put smart meters in every new home that was built --

Mr. Leal: Oh, so you had a plan for smart meters too?

Mr. Yakabuski: That's right, and actually the fact that people would then be able to voluntarily buy into that -- this is not going to be voluntary. It's going to be forced on everybody. So could you envision -- I'm just thinking of a retail business now, or the mall -- a hot, hot July like July 13 of this year, where we hit an all-time high of 26,160 megawatts of power used in the province of Ontario: What have we got? We've got people flocking from their homes, flocking from their apartments, and they're all going to the mall. Do you know why? Because it's air-conditioned. They can't afford to run the air conditioning at home because they can't pay the high cost of power as a result of the policies of this government. So they're flocking to the mall, and then of course the retailers are going to have to have their air conditioning pumped up to keep the temperature down. The cost is going to be doubly hard to bear for those establishments, but they're not going to have any choice but to keep those temperatures down for the comfort of the customers.

The experiments and the history of smart meters in other jurisdictions should cause people to ask themselves whether or not we should be making this kind of massive commitment -- again, that's the word: commitment -- to this kind of across-the-board, absolute -- and right now, we don't know that they're going to be smart meters. The things being bandied about, or the proposals being bandied about on them, could mean that they're going to be dumb meters that don't do the job a real metering system does. If they are going to be that, we have to question how much energy, and whether the savings will even approach what the additional cost of the meter is.

As I said, Tom Adams has speculated that it could go as high as \$8 a month. For those people I was talking about before who cannot afford the hydro bills today, at five cents a kilowatt hour, up to 5.8 if it goes over the 750 kilowatt hours or the 1,000, now the ceiling -- if they can't afford those bills now, can they afford another \$8 and can they afford the rates they're going to be paying under this government because of their energy policies?

I want to go back a little bit to what they're doing in Germany and Denmark with regard to biomass, cogen and even tri-gen, and that is what they're doing to reduce the CO₂ emissions in coal, because the technology is there to eliminate 98% of the NO_x and 96% of the SO_x in coal. This is what the government talked about. But do you know what? They're not talking so much about NO_x and SO_x

now, because they know that NO_x and SO_x are beatable, and can be beat. So now they're talking about CO₂. But if you bring in biomass, cogen and even tri-gen, where you're burning wood pellets and other agricultural biomass with the coal, you can reduce that CO₂ level to as good as natural gas. Natural gas has CO₂; let's not kid ourselves. Natural gas will emit about 40% of the CO₂ that coal emits, simply because there is less carbon in natural gas than there is in coal.

So we have ways of mitigating the effect of burning coal by burning it together with carbon-neutral biomass and reducing the emissions in that way. But this government is not interested. They would rather simply proceed the way they've been proceeding: blinders on. Just like a horse going down the side of the road, the blinders are on because the operator of the carriage doesn't want it to see the traffic and panic. But that's exactly what this government is doing with regard to their energy policy: They're panicking.

Let's talk a little bit about nuclear.

Mrs. Mitchell: OK.

Mr. Yakabuski: I hear the member from Huron-Bruce has awakened. Hello, again.

I know she's very pleased with the announcement recently. I believe that plant is in your riding. Is that correct?

Mrs. Mitchell: Yes.

Mr. Yakabuski: We're very supportive of that. We're very supportive of nuclear. We believe that the government should be moving in the direction of new-build nuclear as well, because we have to ensure that we have the baseload capacity in Ontario. If we don't have baseload capacity, we're going to be in big trouble. What this government is doing with regard to investing and calling investments in other technologies true megawatts is not correct. We want to ensure that, as older plants are decommissioned, we are in a position to ensure that the lights will stay on in Ontario and that the manufacturers who need that power so badly will have that power available to them.

But we also have to remember that nuclear has its limitations. It has its issues with regard to the management of waste, which we have to ensure we're dealing with, but it is also a baseload power, plain and simple. We can't use it as a peaking power because of the nature of nuclear, as you know. Compare peaking power, like a coal plant, to the accelerator on your car: When you need a little more, you accelerate, and if you need a little less, you pull back on that accelerator. With a nuclear plant, as we know, it's the pedal to the metal. Put a block on it and forget about it. You're running it full out. So it is a baseload power, not a peaking power, and we have to ensure that we have baseload capacity in Ontario.

We have to ensure that we have that peaking capacity too, and it appears to me that under this government's regime we're not going to have that peaking capacity under their present timetable if they go ahead with their ill-conceived decision to refuse to invest in the right technologies.

I want to read a couple of things about smart meters. Many people have opinions on smart meters and, in fairness, I say that a number of people are very much in favour of smart meters. But I want to read a couple of things here.

This is from the Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal. I was up in Thunder Bay last week, and also in Atikokan. I must say that the decisions of this government to convert the Thunder Bay plant to natural gas and to close the Atikokan plant are absolutely dumb. Those decisions are dumb.

1750

First of all, converting an existing coal plant to natural gas is in no way going to make that plant efficient. It's not designed to be converted to natural gas and then have the same kind of efficiency you would have from a new combined-cycle natural gas plant. It's not designed that way. By simply converting it to a different type of fuel, you're not going to get the efficiencies.

One of the reasons that they claim natural gas is better than coal is because of the efficiency at which you can burn it. You can get about 58% efficiency out of a natural gas power plant, and you can't get as high an efficiency out of a coal plant. Do you know where you get the most efficiency out of natural gas? Right in that furnace in your own home; you can burn it at 95% efficiency. That's where you should be primarily burning natural gas. If you want to be the best in the environment, burn it where it burns most efficiently.

Up in Thunder Bay, that's what they are planning on doing. Converting that plant to natural gas is going to be inefficient and is going to mean expensive power.

But even more so, in Atikokan there's a community that this government has simply washed its hands of. I know that the finance minister made a trip up there this week for pre-budget consultations -- we know what a sham that is -- in Atikokan. Two years ago when he was energy minister he took his parliamentary assistant up there, who is now the energy minister, Ms. Cansfield, and they toured the Atikokan plant. They talked about how they were not going to let this community suffer. What have they done? They appointed some people to study it, but what have they actually done? What can they do to replace the kinds of economic activity and economic input that are going to be taken out of that community if they close down the plant in Atikokan? This community is going to be devastated. Their tax base is going to be down by up to 20%. Some of the best jobs in the community will be gone.

It's questionable whether the CN will keep the train running there, because 6,500 cars a year to that community are going to be gone, and another 6,500 to Thunder Bay, plus the cars that transfer the fly ash out of there. Why would CN keep it open if they've got no reason to, even though they've said -- kind of iffy -- "We don't plan to close it down"? They're a business too.

When the Minister of Natural Resources was up in Atikokan, he commented that he'd like to see that plant converted to biomass. I would like to hear the Minister of Natural Resources stand up in this House, and stand up at his cabinet table, and demand from his colleagues, "If you don't convert that plant to biomass or something, I'm going to resign my seat." Then he'd really be standing up for the people in the north. However, it appears that they have one thing to say here and another thing to say there.

Interjections.

Mr. Yakabuski: Hard to believe.

In two years they've done nothing to assist this community. I talked to people on the street in Atikokan. I stopped in at some stores. They are so worried and feel that hope is lost. What else are they going to do? What else is coming to Atikokan?

It was our government that built the plant in Atikokan to save a community that had been decimated because of the fact that the mines had shut down. This government is doing nothing to replace that, and that is regrettable, but it's not unusual for them to turn their backs on people. They've turned their backs on people everywhere in rural Ontario, including my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: I was just getting to that editorial from the Thunder Bay Chronicle. I am going to do that right now.

"Are Smart Meters Really a Smart Idea?"

"Hydro One customers will soon have to start setting the alarm clock to do the dishes at 1 a.m., and get up again at 4 a.m. to turn on the clothes dryer.

"Energy Minister Donna Cansfield has introduced legislation to replace Ontario's 4.5 million electricity meters by so-called 'smart' meters by 2010 at a cost of \$1 billion...." They're using her figure, which is probably way low. Is one company going to get this contract to replace these smart meters? Are they going to be in a position to fulfill these kinds of commitments: 4.5 million electricity meters? Unbelievable.

"The new meters, which will allow utilities to charge consumers based on the time of day they use their power, is a key part of the power-starved province...." There's the key. Listen carefully over there: "power-starved province."

Their reaction to being power-starved: "Let's cut our capacity by another 20%."

"While advocates of electricity conservation applaud the plan, will it work and is it realistic?"

"It's definitely going to add costs to your already inflated hydro bill and require some major changes in lifestyle if any savings are to be realized."

We have to talk about lifestyle. We have built, particularly under other governments, a thriving economy that has given people wonderful lifestyles in Ontario, and this government wants you to trade them in for a smart meter. You have to really ask yourself, when you've worked so hard to enjoy the fruits of your labour, if now you're going to be spending your time checking the meter at 2 in the morning. But that's this government for you.

I do want to wrap up because, as I look at the clock, heavens to Betsy, I'm running out of time. It is certainly a pleasure for me to do this first lead, and I'm hoping, with some of the ideas that a number of my colleagues have imparted already, that this government will take a long, hard look at what it's doing.

As I said from the start, you're not going to get a bigger supporter of conservation than yours truly, John Yakabuski, right here. I've articulated what we have done in our own home to reduce our energy

consumption. We've done this without any help from this government. If this government is truly serious about conservation, they'll enact regulations through this legislation as quickly as possible to ensure -- you know, we even have these energy-efficient light bulbs I'm telling you about.

Mr. Leal: Did you sell them in your hardware store?

Mr. Yakabuski: You're darn right I did.

What do we do to help people get them? We charge sales tax. If you want to get an energy-efficient light bulb in every socket in this province, at least remove the tax on energy-efficient light bulbs. They can't seem to see through it. You see, this government is so addicted to taxes that they can't even remove them from light bulbs. I wish the lights would soon go on.

The Acting Speaker: The time being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 10.