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

October 20, 2005

Debate - NDP Opposition Day Motion

Forest Industry

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): It's a pleasure to join in on the discussion this afternoon on the opposition day motion of the third party with regard to the forest industry in northern Ontario. I would certainly like to make a few comments with regard to this issue. There is no question that the industry in northern Ontario is in a crisis: The leader of the third party recognizes that; all of our visitors in the gallery today recognize that; we recognize that; the people who live in northern Ontario recognize that; the people who write in the business sections of newspapers recognize that. It seems that the government of this province fails to recognize that.

Yes, they brought in a program, they say, to support forestry in the north, but again, it's just more of that Liberal spin and it's not going to do a heck of a lot. I ask myself, what good are matching funds to someone who simply cannot afford to operate under the current circumstances? They're not going to make an investment into their business if the climate that this government is responsible for creating simply isn't there.

Mr. Bisson: If you understand that, why don't they?

Mr. Yakabuski: Well, we're going to try to correct that in a couple of years.

Anyway, I support this motion and I recognize that it is extremely important. I had the opportunity to meet with members of the Steelworkers the other day, articulating to me the severity of this crisis and what it means to their mill, the Abitibi mill up in Kenora, 320 jobs that could be lost. I mean, the ramifications of that are huge to a community.

Mr. Bisson: Sunday.

Mr. Yakabuski: It's happening in the next couple of days, as the member for Timmins-James Bay just reminded me. That can have devastating effects on communities, so we're here to support it.

I also want to take this opportunity to speak about the forestry crisis in my own riding as well. Our mills -- Murray's, McCrae's, Shaw's, Hokum's, Gulick's, Neuman's, Stein's -- are all suffering from the same problems, not the same issues as the north, but the crisis in forestry is affecting us all.

Logging contractors, such as Barry Verch with M.W. Miller, Lidtkes, Dombroskis, are all suffering because of the high cost of energy, and that's been brought on by the policies of this government.

There was a great story in the Eganville Leader a couple of weeks ago about Hokum's mill, Ben Hokum and his father, how they started the mill and how they have worked over some 50 years, bringing employment and, as much as we can expect or try to develop in areas such as ours that are constantly being harmed by this government's policies, some form of employment and prosperity to the people who live in my riding. What I found interesting about it -- I didn't find it remarkable, because I'm not surprised -- is the forward thinking, the determination, and the will to succeed in spite of the fact that there were tremendous obstacles that Ben Hokum and his father faced, and he faces today, along with his grandson, Dean Felhaber, who runs the operation alongside Ben Hokum. It was a wonderful story about people who -- even though the cards can be stacked against them sometimes, and governments, through regulation and lack of support, make it very difficult for these companies to be successful -- still forge on because this is their life, this is their livelihood, these are the people they care about, and they're going to do what they can to make it work. Those are the kind of people we have in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

The leader of the third party talked about the power that is developed up in the north, the White Dog and the Caribou dams, places like that. That power, he's suggesting, should be used up in the north. I understand where he's coming from. In my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, on the majestic Ottawa River that borders my riding, we've got Des Joachims at 420-some megawatts. We've got Chenaux at 144 megawatts. On the Ottawa River -- what a place. I mean, here's a river that is one of the world's greatest rivers. You might not know this, but they called the town of Deep River that because the water outside of Deep River is 300-and-some feet deep in the Ottawa River. But if you go up around Deux Rivières, you'll find spots where the Ottawa River is over 700 feet deep. I mean, it's so deep that they brought the Loch Ness Monster over there, it went down in the Ottawa River and it drowned. It's never been seen since.

Laughter.

Mr. Yakubski: No, no. That's a true story, I'm telling you. So it's a tremendous waterway.

Also in my riding, we've got the mighty Madawaska River, and on that river, we've got the Barrett Chute, the Mountain Chute, the Stuartville, the Calabogie and the Madawaska dams. A total of 1,200 megawatts of power are being produced in my riding, and what are we getting from it? What are our mills getting from it? High hydro bills on the part of this government, because we don't get to take the benefits of that. Because this is falling water power, we also don't get the high-paying jobs associated with it. This is not a big fossil fuel plant or a nuclear plant where there are tremendous numbers of people working at it. These are falling water plants producing 1,200 megawatts of power.

But what do we get out of this government? We get a fat "no" when it comes to sharing gas tax revenue in this province. I have reintroduced my private member's bill. I hope those people on the other side of the House recognize that ridings like mine that supply the power to this province need a fair shake when it comes to sharing their gas tax that they're paying to your treasury.

As a matter of fact, folks, when you look at the per capita amount of gas tax being paid, we're the folks doling it out, the rural people. We can't jump on a bus. I asked the Premier in my column back in September, what time does the bus go through Quadeville, Dalton? Well, it doesn't. You've got to get into your vehicle and pay high gas prices and drive on our roads that we're not getting the support for so can we can refurbish those roads, rebuild them, make them better, because you're putting all the

gas tax into urban Ontario. We need to have rapid transit, we need to have public transit, but we need our roads too.

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Mr. Bisson: In my riding, there are no roads.

Mr. Yakabuski: I hear you.

Another thing I want to talk about is, you're hearing some stories these days about these groups that want to shut down logging in Algonquin Park. Well, that is not going to happen. That can't happen. Anybody who wants to shut down logging in Algonquin Park is going to be in for the fight of their lives, ladies and gentlemen. I remember in the 1970s when my father was a member here and there was talk about shutting down logging in Algonquin Park. As he said then, "Over my dead body." There are thousands of people whose livelihood depends upon the multi-use concept of Algonquin Park in this province.

The Minister of Natural Resources is on record as saying, "Logging in Algonquin Park is safe," but that's a Liberal promise. I want to be very clear on that, ladies and gentlemen: That's a Liberal promise. I want to be on the record today as letting you know, Minister of Natural Resources, that logging has gone on in Algonquin Park since before this Legislature even existed. It will continue, because that is a vital part of the livelihood of people in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

How am I doing for time, Laurie? OK?

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): Keep going.

Mr. Bisson: You're on a roll. Go, John.

Mr. Yakabuski: OK.

Let's get back to the hydro costs of people operating forestry mills in Ontario. I talk to people in my riding. Dean Felhaber tells me what has happened to his hydro bills this year. These are people who are employing hard-working Ontarians. Oh, but the minister said today, "Those hard-working Ontarians -- good news." Actually, she was going to show up in a Santa Claus suit but they had made it for the previous Minister of Energy, before the cabinet shuffle -- well, we don't even have to go there. So the suit wasn't used as a prop today, but she came out there like Santa Claus, telling all these people in Ontario -- an epiphany for the cabinet in Ontario -- "Here we are, folks. We've decided that what we should do is give you back the money we took from you in the first place. We're not going to pay you interest. We've kept it for all these months, for 16 months, but now we're going to give it back to you, just in time for Christmas. And maybe you could remember that it was a Liberal minister at a press conference who did the spin on it." It's quite remarkable that they could have a press conference to give back to somebody what was already theirs.

I want to reiterate the importance of forestry in Ontario, the importance of forestry to northern Ontario, because without forestry there ain't going to be much there.

I guess I could ask the minister, what's the plan with the generating station at Atikokan? I know I saw something in the paper about him saying, "Up there, did you know, I think what we should be doing

is converting that to peat and biomass and keeping it going," because the Liberals' plan here is just to shut down Atikokan. But, you see, it's all part of their plan. How are you going to shut down Atikokan if the people up there need the power? Well, what you have to do ahead of time is make sure all the mills close. Then nobody needs the power and we can shut down the Atikokan plant.

I tell you, they're pretty sharp, but they're heartless when it comes to the people in this province. And that's what you should be asking yourself: Has this government forgotten about the people we are supposed to be serving? Have they forgotten about people? Those people who live up there, the people who live in my riding, can't just up and go wherever they want. They've lived there all their lives. These are their homes. Goodness gracious, let's face facts and admit that this government has turned its back on everybody in rural Ontario, in northern Ontario and all across this province.