



Message from Queen's Park



Monthly Column by MPP John Yakabuski

July 26/2010

ECO TAX

People are angry, and rightly so. That's because they've just been hit with a new tax that further erodes their ability to make ends meet. And even though the government has finally bowed to opposition pressure, and is removing the Eco-Tax for now, it's clear they still intend to come back with something else. They say they want to "re-tool" it, when actually, at least to me, they just need more time to come up with a better way to "re-fool" us.

I guess if there's a bright spot in any of this, it's the power of an indignant opposition. This is another example of how popular anger can stand this government up, and even force them to back up or back off completely, the whole fiasco involving sex education being another recent example of this. But let's face it, as encouraged as I am by the willingness of the people to fight back, it discourages me far more that the people are placed in a position where they feel they have to fight back in the first place.

But make no mistake. The government isn't saying they're doing away with this tax. They're just going to use the time to let the heat they've taken wear off a bit. It will be back, probably prettied-up a bit, but it'll be back. And don't be surprised if they try to sneak it through a back door somewhere, which seems to be their preferred way of doing business with the people they claim to represent.

For the life of me, I don't understand the way this government goes about its business, especially with regard to the pattern they've established of what I call "no-sense" planning. To me, they appear to govern from the clouds. At some point they'll form what they think is a terrific idea, gather strength, come upon us with certainty, force us to plan accordingly or try to get the hell out of the way, then break apart back into their wispy, almost unidentifiable parts when hit with opposing weather.

A child, laying on his back on a summer day, could get a pretty good read on the McGuinty Liberals. "Look, Mom", he might say, "an elephant." His brother, right beside him, would be looking at the same formation. "No," he might reply, "that's Africa." And their mother, of course, would look up, and say, "Don't you boys know a butterfly when you see one."

My point is that people shouldn't have to play guessing games, especially when it comes to their money. Predicting the weather is hard enough. There should be a greater level of certainty when it comes to predicting government policy.

The Ministry of the Environment is full-value for the criticism it's been taking on this Eco-Tax fiasco. It's become obvious that their plan, if we want to credit it with such a term, was full of holes to begin with, was poorly thought-out, poorly implemented, and very poorly communicated.

In fact, a pretty good argument could be made that it wasn't communicated at all.

One of the most appalling features of this tax is that nobody saw it coming, and that it was intended that way, which strikes me as a dishonest effort to squeeze even more money out of people who are already taxed to the hilt. There was never any notification, no preliminary information, and no government effort to prepare people for this. In fact, having this thing take effect on the very same day that the HST landed in our laps was an attempt to slip it under the radar, and that's not an appropriate way for a government to deal with its citizens. As if the HST and The Ontario Health Premium weren't enough, they were imposing another, yet much less heralded, tax upon the people of Ontario, and worse, are doing it in a fundamentally sneaky way designed to disguise it as something else.

People need to live. Why can't the McGuinty Liberals understand that? People are angry, and I think the tipping point has long since passed. In a conversation last week, the name of the premier couldn't immediately come to the mind of the person I was speaking with. "You know," she said. "The Tax Guy." And I think that pretty much sums things up. A tax is a tax is a tax. And we've already seen too many of them from this current crowd. And it has to stop.

We already pay taxes dedicated to the environment and waste diversion in this province. Having money taken from us and diverted to some quasi-governmental body, like Stewardship Ontario, to be used as they see fit, is not the way Ontario's Progressive Conservatives do business.

That's why Tim Hudak and I offer you the promise that, once elected, this form of tax outsourcing will come to a quick end.

You can count on it.

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