



Hansard Official Report of Debates

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

39th Parliament

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

Legislative Debate

November 4, 2009

Animal Health Act, 2009, Bill 204

Mr. John Yakabuski: I say to my good friend Lou, the member from Northumberland-Quinte West: That's why we didn't notice you, because we knew-we've been keeping track of things-that you'd spoken before. But I didn't have to stand up and say, "Stop that man." I knew the Speaker was on top of this and that he was going to catch you. Nice try, Lou, nice try. I'll tell you, it's pretty hard to slip things by these folks at the table here in the Legislature. I've never, of course, tried myself, but there's always a first time.

I appreciate the opportunity, even if it was somewhat delayed, to speak to this bill this morning. I was certainly intrigued, as I always am, by the address from the member from Timmins-James Bay. He is always thoughtful in his approach and very, very protective of the people who he represents, which is exactly what he should be doing as a member of this Legislature on behalf of the constituents that he represents. Unfortunately, sometimes I believe that members on the government side sometimes have to forget about their constituents because they're getting orders from headquarters, as they say. You remember Jocko Thomas of the Toronto Star? "Headquarters," he used to say-because they get their orders from headquarters over on the other side, too. They don't like to step out of line.

It was interesting: My colleague from Leeds-Grenville yesterday, in speaking to the NDP's motion on eHealth and the Ombudsman, spoke about how members on the government side just seem to be whipped continuously into supporting whatever the Premier's office dictates. I am on topic; I know you're looking at me, Speaker, and wondering, "What has this got to do with the bill?" Well, I'm absolutely getting there. Again, this is one of those cases where the Premier's office has said, "We're going to put this through."

First of all, it's a good time to put this bill through, because we're getting a lot of people upset about what's been going on in this government, particularly with respect to accountability and eHealth and, most recently of course, the bizarre rollout of the H1N1 vaccine program where, as you saw in the papers this morning when the minister was talking about Ontario having the best H1N1 program in the world-we saw that only about 300,000 doses had been administered to people-

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Now the member is straying a bit, I think. Back to the bill.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's right, Bill 204. I can always depend on the Speaker to remind me of the number of the bill, and that is always helpful-204. I'm thinking two, four, 2.4; it's actually 2.2, 2.2 million doses of that vaccine that Ontario received, and only 300-yeah, 204.

My colleague from York-Simcoe spoke about what's very important and is sometimes lost on the government: With their tremendous propensity to legislate and regulate, they forget about the people on the other side of the equation. There is not a single person in this province who does not place a tremendously high priority on the safety of the food that we consume-absolutely a tremendously high priority on the food that citizens of this province consume. One of the things that is very, very important, if you're going to have safe food, is you have to have a healthy production industry. Our production of food-

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The member for Huron Bruce is prone to heckling and interjecting at times, unlike-

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, seriously, unlike myself when the members of the government are speaking.

She comes from a farming community, and she should understand that if we don't have healthy farmers who are given not only the opportunity but the tools and are allowed to work in the environment that allows them to be successful, then it's going to be very difficult for them to ensure that the food that comes from those farms is going to be safe. That's where this government has fallen short.

You've heard my colleague from Oxford, our critic for agriculture, speak on the total lack of support for the pork industry by this government. Even though the federal program has kicked in, Ontario won't even put in its 40% share to assist the pork industry in what is clearly the greatest crisis in its history. Yet the Minister of Agriculture sits back and ignores the problem.

What do they do? They bring in a bill. There are large portions of this bill that we can be supportive of, because, as I said in my original premise, who is going to argue against food safety? Who is going to speak against safe food? We believe that to be a prerequisite, an automatic, an inherent right of citizens to expect that the food that they consume is safe. What they're failing to recognize is that if they're not going to protect our farmers, then the safety of our food will certainly be in jeopardy as well.

I know the member spoke about the chicken farmers and how happy they were. Well, they didn't say they were happy with this legislation; the chicken farmers are just happy. One of the reasons they're happy is that they are one of the few agricultural industries that is doing extremely well. Why are they doing well? Because they're supply-managed. That

is a very important distinction that separates them from some other commodities. The supply-managed commodities in this province are the only truly successful groups. Grains and oilseeds have had some success, and they've also had difficult times as well.

0940

But talk to the beef farmers. I was glad to have the chicken farmers here last week and enjoyed their chicken wings; they were tremendous. I enjoyed the beer as well; it was pretty darned good too. Even though the chicken farmers didn't produce it, they did chill it and pop the corks, and it wasn't too bad to go with those chicken wings either.

Mrs. Julia Munro: It was Ontario beer.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It was Ontario beer, my colleague from York-Simcoe says, and that's great. That's one thing I'll say for Speaker Peters: I give him great credit for insisting that Ontario products are not only served as much as possible at the receptions that we host here in the building at Queen's Park, but also in the legislative dining room. That was a great move on his part and I applaud him for his support of Ontario farmers and the products that they produce. The government never did anything. It took Speaker Peters to actually move on that, and again, I credit him for that.

One of the problems with this bill-and I know Lou is interested, is watching closely, but you're not going to get another opportunity, Lou, possibly until third reading debate. You do understand that. You will be able to visit in committee-

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, you're going to get a two-minute question and comment, yes, and we'd be pleased to hear from you. So get your notepad going there.

Anyway, one of the problems with this government traditionally, and we've seen it since they were elected in 2003, is that many, many times they use the approach-and I've heard this from my friend from Kenora-Rainy River, the former leader of the third party; I've heard him use this expression, and he's so correct when he uses it: They've taken a sledgehammer to a fly.

If you ask people in the agricultural business, when the spectre of warrantless entry and warrantless search is put before them there is a tremendous fear. It's sort of like when you get the call, Mr. Speaker-even though I'm quite certain that you've never had a moment on your tax returns where you've done anything, if you know what I mean-but when you get one of those calls from Revenue Canada and they say, "Hello? Yep, we're going to be coming down to do an audit on you," your life goes upside-down, because you think, "Oh, my God, those guys are coming in and they're going to sit down at my kitchen table; they're going to tear apart everything I've got. They're going to go back to the time when my grandfather did a little bootlegging, and they're going to find something, and I'm going to pay. I know I haven't done anything wrong, but I know those guys are going to

dig something up that I might not even know about." That's what happens when you've got this warrantless search thing hanging over you.

All of a sudden, the inspectors come in-and I know how they work. I'm going to give you an example: In the Ministry of Labour, under the guise of protecting people, they'll go into a sawmill, for example-and again, you want to talk about an industry that is struggling? I mean, unbelievable. I've talked to people who've been in this business for 60 years themselves, and they've never seen anything like it. This government is about to make it worse with the legislative regulations that they're bringing in.

I'll be talking about that a little later, maybe, but not necessarily in this bill, because, as you always caution me, Speaker, I need to stay on the subject of the bill. The bill here is about farm safety and food safety, and I want to make sure that-I see the member from Barrie is helping the Speaker. She wants to make sure that everything is on the subject of the day. I do my very best at all times to follow that-that's a standing order, I believe, Mr. Speaker.

So when you have this power, this draconian power, to just, without a warrant, walk onto the farm of these hard-working people who have invested their lives-their lives-in providing good-quality, safe food for the people of the province of Ontario-and now they're going to have this hotshot inspector walk in, fresh out of school, and he or she is going to show them who the boss is. They're going to go in there because of the notch on the gun. "I got to put another notch on the gun, because we're going to go in there and we're going to show these people who's boss."

A farm-and this is about animal health-and a livestock farm-

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: You're digging yourself into the ground.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, no, I'm not, Lou; trust me.

A livestock farm-do you know what we do? For all of those people who don't understand, you raise animals, you kill them and they're served as food. It's not a pretty business. That's what you do. If you want to have meat on your table, it doesn't come from A&P or Food Basics or whatever the heck-maybe some of those folks on the other side are getting theirs at Pusateri's or whatever, but we regular people have to buy it from the food store. But we know where it comes from. It comes from the heart and soul and blood and guts and sweat and tears of the people who give their lives to produce that food. That's where it comes from.

All they want is a fair shake from this government. And where is this government when farmers are in trouble? They dance around the issue. You'd think they were on-what's that show on Monday nights? My wife always wants to watch it.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Dancing with the Stars.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Dancing with the Stars.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Look at them dancing over there-dancing. Shame on you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: But they're not having waltzes. I'm trying to think of-I'm never going to be on that program because I don't know all those dances, but I'll bet you my friend from Parkdale-High Park knows those dances.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Used to.

Mr. John Yakabuski: But it would be one of the dances where you kind of get close but you never really touch. You show some emotion but then you slip away. It would be one of those dances where you never actually get intimate. That would be the approach of the government. They want to be there with the farmers; they want to be there for the photo ops; they want to be there and they want to make all these pronouncements. They want to make these pronouncements about how the McGuinty government is the farmers' best friend, but the farmers know different.

From time to time, of course, they get these third party validations-and Geri Kamenz, the former president of the OFA, was great at those third party validations. And what did he get for it? My friend from Nepean-Carleton would know. He got himself a cushy government appointment when his time at the OFA was done. You really have to ask yourself: Was he speaking for the farmers or was he padding his nest, preparing for the day when the folks from the other side, the appointments secretary of the Liberal Party, would come calling and say, "Geri, you've done us well. We're paying you back. Don't worry. You'll be looked after"?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, the member for Huron-Bruce is upset because they don't like to see-the average person out there doesn't know probably that that appointment came immediately after the end of his term at the OFA.

Do you know the old story about if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a duck? Well, I'll tell you, that was a mallard in full glory, that little game that went on between Kamenz and the government and the pay off that existed after all of those third party validations on every announcement they made over his term while he was president of the OFA.

0950

One of the things that is in this bill, although they have no enforcement powers or anything until the feds actually produce a piece of legislation, is traceability. People understand the importance of traceability when it comes to protecting food, but the

minister herself, when she tabled this legislation, spoke about it, saying that they need the federal government to have legislation that they can piggyback on in order to have this aspect of the bill actually functioning here in the province.

I don't have much time, but I want to talk about one thing. You talk about support for farmers. My friend from Durham gave me a piece of news coverage here that says, "Farm's Lights Back On, For Now," where a farmer who had invested huge amounts of money in his operation had the power cut off. He was a hog farmer, of course. That's that part where I was talking about how they've never been in a greater crisis, and the Minister of Agriculture sat back and is continuing to sit back while they spiral into worse and worse conditions on a daily basis. Thank goodness the creditors have agreed to pay that outstanding hydro bill. It was Wayne Bartels, and his 4,500 hogs are out of the dark for now.

Wayne and his hogs are out of the dark, but sadly, this government for the most part remains in the dark. It is fixated on staying out of the news on its scandals, the summer of scandals has turned into the autumn of scandal, it will be the winter of scandal, and this government is wrong-headed, bringing in legislation when it really should be dealing with the crisis that it created.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate the comments from the members for Parkdale-High Park, Northumberland-Quinte West, Nepean-Carleton and Durham.

I want to focus on what the member for Northumberland-Quinte West said when he talked about manure. It reminds me of when Mitch Hepburn, the former Liberal Premier, was on a campaign stop one time and he wanted to speak to the crowd. He wanted to get elevated so that they could see him, and it was a farming community. All they did was they brought out this manure spreader and they got him to stand on the manure spreader while he addressed the crowd. Partway through his address, he alluded to the fact that he felt a little uncomfortable delivering the Liberal platform from a manure spreader, and immediately, the interjection from the crowd was, "Well, wind 'er up Mitch, because she's never carried a bigger load." And that is exactly what you're getting from the member for Northumberland-Quinte West. That is what the whole Liberal policy is when it comes to farmers in this province.

Let's get a couple of things straight. When the Liberals want to talk about Walkerton, they should read the whole Walkerton report and read about the drunks who deliberately falsified records and failed to report, thereby jeopardizing people's health and causing the deaths of several people. They faced criminal charges as a result of that. Let's call a spade a spade about what happened in Walkerton and stop pretending that that was somehow anything but a failure of individuals who deliberately falsified records in order to protect

themselves, thereby causing the ill health of over 2,000 people and the deaths of seven.
Let's get the record straight when you want to talk about Walkerton.