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

Oral Questions

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Energy Rates

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure as well. I think there's room for building green energy in the province of Ontario and still being honest with the people. I'd like to ask the minister: Who has been consulted, and how has he come to the conclusion that his Green Energy Act will add, as per his promise, only 1% a year to the cost of energy to consumers and will create 50,000 jobs? We have to ask, where did you obtain these numbers? Whom did you get them from? Whom did you consult? Who gave you those numbers? Tell us, please.

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to say to the honourable member that this is ground that we've had the chance to go over before, and I've taken the opportunity even beyond what happens here in question period to try and give the honourable member some further insight, because I saw that he was stuck at a certain point.

There are presumptions established in the Green Energy Act. We presume that, over a period from 2010 to 2012, an incremental \$5 billion will be invested in the emergence of green energy: in more renewables coming to life; in the transmission and distribution investments which are required; and in the efforts that we will make to enhance the capacity for you and me in the institutions like this one, and in our very homes, to use less electricity. All of those things combined, we anticipate an incremental 1% additional cost per year associated with the implementation of the Green Energy Act.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It seems that the minister is the one stuck-stuck in a hole; and good advice to anyone there is to stop digging. I didn't hear a name referred to. My question was whom the Premier and the minister have consulted. One has to wonder if maybe it was the very same ghosts that the Premier took advice from when he said he would close all Ontario coal plants by 2007.

London Economics International's latest study said that this Premier's ever-increasing energy costs would actually make Ontario less competitive than it already is, driving jobs out of the province. We've already seen over 300,000 manufacturing jobs leave this province under your watch. Minister, you're driving a stake further into the economic heart of this province and bringing Ontario further into the abyss of have-not status by scaring investment and new business away. Why don't you consider the real and true

implications of your green disguise and focus on doing everything you can to encourage and retain investment here in the province of Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: On the matter of investment, it would be nice if the honourable member would stand in his place and acknowledge that through our efforts with respect to renewable energy just in the last few years, we've seen nearly \$4 billion of incremental investment in creating sources of green energy, along the lines of those near Kincardine that I participated with the local member in opening on Friday, a substantial investment on the part of Enbridge which has created strong employment, enhances the property tax base and gives landowners and farmers another source of much-needed revenue.

The honourable member's solutions are what? They campaigned on a promise as well to close coal, and now, through many of those members, in legislative debate they said no, they want to keep the coal plants open. But perhaps they believe in carbon capture, where they're going to take the smokestacks and turn them upside down. We believe in transforming to one of the cleanest, greenest platforms of energy in the jurisdictions that compete with us, and we believe we can help people to use less-

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Not only does he want to keep digging that hole, he wants to muddy the waters that are flowing into it.

This government is using its majority-and we haven't heard any names yet, Minister-to force this bill through, limiting public hearings and keeping Ontarians in the dark on its real implications. The OPA website itself says the entire energy sector in this province employs 35,000 people. You're saying you're going to create 50,000 new jobs. Are you saying this bill is going to more than double the size of Ontario's energy sector? It's time to come clean. You said the act concerns only a portion of the electricity supply, but it's going to create 50,000 jobs. Where are you getting these numbers?

For the last time, stand up and tell this House and tell the people of Ontario, do you have somebody who is giving you these numbers, or are you just inventing them like everything else?

Hon. George Smitherman: It's ample evidence of the benefit of giving opposition members three days off in a row. They get more opportunity for rehearsal.

I think one of the things that is important-the honourable member talks about process. I'm very, very pleased that the legislative committee is going to act. They added two night sittings for those legislative hearings at the request of the opposition. Those were granted. We look forward to many, many people coming forward.

What we didn't hear from the honourable member is what several of their members have said during debate. They believe in keeping coal plants open. Where are you? Be on the

record around this. We know that we can eliminate them and we're making very good progress.

At the heart of the issue of the jobs that are created, the member must look as well to the retrofit initiatives. This isn't just a bill about creating more green energy; it's about making the investments in our homes and in buildings like our schools and our public housing to allow them to use electricity. That's part of the solution-

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.