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

Oral Question

December 3, 2009

Forest Industry

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. When you passed the Endangered Species Act, you promised the forest industry that you would use the Crown Forest Sustainability Act as the regulatory tool when establishing habitat protection zones. You went back on your word and took direction from those who opposed logging, period. You have now filed regulations for the wood turtle that will endanger the industry itself.

At a time when forestry is on its knees from other forces, such as access to credit, a high Canadian dollar and a slow United States housing market, why would you add a made-in-Ontario burden on them with no meaningful consultations with those so deeply affected? Why would you do that?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased to respond to the member's question. The Endangered Species Act has been around for over 30 years. When we renewed the act, we had an opportunity to look for more flexibility within the act in order to do accommodation. I have said right from the beginning that the Endangered Species Act would be incorporated into the spirit of forest management plans, and that is exactly what we are doing. It is no different than what's been done in the past.

All forest management programs have already involved themselves in the Endangered Species Act. They make accommodations for turtles, snakes and caribou. All we're saying is, as the science changes, as our information changes, how do we improve? It's based on science. We work with the forest industry, and we've been doing that all along.

I had the pleasure of attending some sessions up in the Pembroke-Renfrew area where, again, I walked in the forest-

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's a nice way of spinning it, but that's not accurate. You've gone to a permitting system that simply will not work.

Minister, no one opposes habitat protection. In fact, the Crown Forest Sustainability Act had that as part of its bedrock, but your decisions need to be based on real science, not the recommendations of your political scientists.

You've dismissed all of the requests and all of the recommendations of those who represent the thousands of families in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke who depend on forestry as a way of putting food on the table. You've released no science to support your decisions, working simply on the basis of making forestry's enemies your friends.

Minister, will you not stop until there is no way left for rural families to make a living?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I am more than pleased to be able to provide some accurate information to the member. In fact, there's an organization called COSSARO. COSSARO is an independent body, separate from the government, made up of scientists who make the decisions on what species will be put on the endangered species list right from the area of concern through to determining if they've been extirpated. That particular group then makes the decision independent of government.

In addition to that, we have another group called SARPAC, made up of the industry and interested stakeholders. They advise the minister in terms of how we implement the Endangered Species Act. We have two years in which to do it, to sit down, talk with and involve people in what we do, and that is exactly what has been going on.