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

Oral Question

September 16, 2009

Government Services

Mr. John Yakabuski: To the Minister of Government Services: Minister, your decision to close privately operated licence offices in the city of Pembroke and the town of Renfrew in of my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke will have serious negative repercussions on the people of those communities. Jobs will be lost, businesses will close and, according to everyone I've spoken to, service will be reduced.

Minister, you made this decision without any consultation or due consideration. Will you do the right thing, rescind your decision to close these offices and restore good services to these communities?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think I answered this question yesterday too, but let me just repeat this again.

This whole initiative is about increasing services by modernizing our ServiceOntario centres. We are also expanding health card services to all 300 ServiceOntario centres; it is now only available in about 27 centres.

This is about expanding services; this is about increasing services. In rural Ontario alone, services will go from two locations to about 163 locations for health cards. In northern communities it will go from six locations to 67 Ontario centres. It is all about improving services.

We are evaluating the situation. If we feel that in any community the service being provided is not up to the standard of the services being cut, we will evaluate the situation and take steps to make sure that the right services at the right levels in the right communities are being provided.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Minister, you can slice that and dice that and you can spin it any way you want, but it still comes up baloney.

You are going to be closing privately operated offices in the province of Ontario and in communities in my riding. Those offices have consistently been the best-run offices anywhere in Ontario. Whether I talk to average citizens on the street or to auto dealers in

my riding, they tell me that your decision will result in reduced services to them and their communities.

I am going to ask you one more time: Will you reverse this ill-considered decision that was made without consultation and restore the proper services to those communities and all the other communities across the province, including those in the Minister of Agriculture's riding, so that we get good services in our licence bureaus?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think the member was very, very emotional and I'm not sure I really got what he was saying.

Let me just quote what he said before. When we announced this initiative in July, here is what the member said. He said: "It just makes sense ... I'm pleased that after six years the government is listening with respect to amalgamating these services under one roof... This is a positive announcement." It's the same member who said this.

On September 28, 2008, the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke said: "We have driver licence issuing offices throughout the area that are equipped with the staff, cameras and the secure computer system that could easily handle the issuance of health cards in the same effective and timely manner as they do driver licences"-

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