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

Oral Question

March 3, 2009

Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation

Mr. John Yakabuski: Glad to be here. To the Premier about the going-in-the-red energy bill: Yesterday, when I asked a question about how this bill was going to give government inspectors the power to go into businesses and private residences to look for audit documents, the energy minister said, "There is no opportunity for warrantless search." Section 15 of the bill allows inspectors to go into businesses without notice and without warrant.

Premier, has your energy minister even read his own bill? When the minister doesn't know-and he had to admit on Focus Ontario on the weekend that he has no idea where these promised jobs are going to come from-it doesn't give us a whole lot of confidence. Would you confirm that the minister was in fact wrong in his answer yesterday, and that your bill, his bill, will unleash energy audit inspectors on unsuspecting businesses here in the province of Ontario?

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Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don't know if we're talking about the same bill here. I think Ontarians are going to grow ever more enthusiastic about this bill. I think they want those 50,000 new jobs, I think they want clean and green electricity, and I think they want all of us to do more in the fight against climate change.

There have been some wonderful experiences in other parts of the world where they have moved forward with this kind of legislation. This is certainly the most aggressive of its kind in North America, and we're proud to be leading in that regard, but there are all kinds of job opportunities that will flow from this.

For example, when it comes to building transmission and distribution upgrades, there will be direct jobs in construction and indirect jobs in equipment supply, equipment manufacturing, engineering/design, transportation and conservation. There are all kinds of jobs in the construction trades, specialized professions, energy auditors, building and renovation, installation contractors, technicians and the like-

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Remarkably, I don't believe he answered the question.

Again, you have to wonder whether this government even knows if it's coming or going. Yesterday, both the Premier and the minister said that when it comes to the invasiveness of this bill, they are open to positive and constructive amendments. We're glad to hear that, because the news of a mandatory audit costing \$300 or more at a time when so many people cannot afford it is strongly opposed by seniors and struggling families. Premier, will you agree to amend the bill to defer mandatory audits, or is your promise to be open to amendments another one that is not to be believed by the people of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I want to remind Ontarians that this very commitment that we have made was one that was found in the Conservative Party platform, but as they like to say over there, that was then and this is now.

We think this is a good idea. We've always said we're looking forward to constructive and positive debate. We're looking forward to positive recommendations with respect to how we might improve this bill. We're very open to ideas, for example, as to when this might take effect. I know my friend understands as well that the government, at present, is providing a \$150 rebate, so the net cost is \$150. But as I say, we're open to constructive recommendations.

I think what Ontarians want to see from us are solutions, and they'd love to hear positive, constructive suggestions coming from the opposition. We're certainly very open to those too.