



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

Oral Question

May 11, 2009

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Education. As a result of your failure to follow through on your oft-repeated promise to introduce a new funding formula with respect to rural transportation funding, school boards in Renfrew County have been forced to implement limited staggered bells. No one likes this. Parents and students and teachers are against this. Municipalities have passed resolutions opposing this. The boards have proceeded, reluctantly, only because you have threatened them with penalties if they don't comply with your order to cut transportation funding. Keeping your promise would solve this issue. Would you commit to fair funding today for rural school boards and transportation or would you simply tell us what you have against students and families and people in Renfrew county and rural Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Quite the contrary. Our support for transportation in this province has increased every year, and if we look at Renfrew County Catholic District School Board, transportation funding has gone up 17.7% since 2002-03. Transportation funding for the Renfrew County District School Board has gone up 41.2% since we came into office. What I will say to the member opposite is that we have worked with school boards across the province to put into place consortia so that there is a rational transportation process in the province, so that boards are working together to make sure that those transportation facilities are being used, those vehicles are being used as efficiently as possible. It means that boards do need to work together, but we think that's a good thing.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: My goodness, the Minister's been busier than Ruby Dhalla's nannies.

The staggered bell system may work in Toronto, but you need to understand that Renfrew County is nothing like Toronto. You need to get out of the city more. You need to see what it's like getting students to and from school safely in rural Ontario.

Last week your government once again showed its bias against rural Ontario but voting against my gas tax fairness resolution.

Minister, we're not asking for swimming pools. We're just asking for enough money to get our children to and from school safely and without putting them and their parents into unacceptable situations. Minister, it's time for you to step up to the plate and base funding on where the needs are, not where the votes are.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been to Renfrew county; I've seen the rural community that the member opposite speaks about. In fact, this year rural boards have received \$131.6 million in new investment. That's in the face of seriously declining enrolment across the province. What we have done as a government is we have continued to increase investments because we recognize that even when there are not as many students in the system now as there were a few years ago, boards still have those costs. Boards still have to look after their schools. Boards still have to have principals in the schools. In fact, the school foundation grant that we brought into the funding formula guarantees that any school a board deems viable will have a principal and will have a secretary. That's a major change from the funding formula the party opposite introduced that did not guarantee those resources at all. We have support—

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