



Hansard Official Report of Debates

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

39th Parliament

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

Legislative Debate

November 25, 2009

Ontario Tax Plan for More Jobs and Growth Act, 2009

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join this debate. It's interesting that when this government talks about cutting taxes—they stood against cutting taxes since before they were elected, and once they were elected in 2003, they hoisted the biggest tax increase in Ontario's history into their first budget. It's hard to square where they come across when they talk about cutting taxes.

Now they talk about permanent tax cuts. Who out there really believes it when Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal government say, "We're cutting your taxes permanently"? Based on the record since 2003, we all know that a Dalton McGuinty promise has a shorter shelf life than whole milk. It just doesn't last. The first time that he's faced with the choice of either raising taxes or facing tough decisions as a government that they have never been able to make, he raises your taxes, because that's the easiest route for him. He's like water: He takes the path of least resistance and he raises your taxes because he believes, at the end of the day, that the consumers out there will simply pay it and suck it up.

When this government talks about the economic effect of this tax and they talk about this tax being part of Ontario's recovery, anybody who has studied any history of recessions at all knows that what drives economies out of recessions is consumer demand and consumer spending. What could you do to dampen consumer demand more than to hoist a consumption tax on the very people you're depending on to bring your economy out of recession? That is historically what has happened: Consumer spending drives the economy back up out of recession. We're going to have a reluctance from consumers to spend, some because they will be protesting the fact that they're paying 8% more for all of those goods and services that they use every day—some of them absolutely essential—and some of them will cut their spending because there's nothing left.

The Minister of Revenue talks about, "Let's talk about this. Let's talk this out. We're here to debate." Now that you can't get this channel on satellite television anywhere in the province of Ontario, you have to ask yourself who actually is watching the debate. I don't see anybody in here. Even my fan club didn't show up today—and it's getting small, too, I know. But the reality is that if you want to get out to debate this issue, the best way to do it is to take it to the people. Why wouldn't you, as a government that wants to proceed with one of the biggest, most sweeping changes in Ontario taxation history, do what the public is simply asking you to do and what we, as the people's messengers, the loyal

opposition, and our friends in the New Democratic Party are asking for on the people's behalf: call public hearings?

You want to find out? You want to talk this out? We'll be at the hearings. I know that all of the people who are interested in this bill-and there are millions out there-will be at the hearings as well.

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The minister talks about the 591,000 jobs that they expect to be created as a result of this DST or HST or whatever you want to call it.

Interjection: BST.

Mr. John Yakabuski: BST; whatever you want to call it. But the minister cites a report that was done by Jack Mintz. No one is going to question Jack Mintz's credibility as a forecaster and an economist on these issues. But Jack Mintz is also a businessman. He doesn't do these things out of the goodness of his heart because he wants to save the world or he thinks that all of his services should be provided free of charge because he has something to offer to the people. He takes contracts just like all other lawyers or economists or forecasters or whatever.

They would have done a study before they ever brought this issue to the House, before they ever spoke about this at the time of the budget in March, and said, "We've got this study that supports a blended sales tax or harmonized sales tax"-no, no; no such study. Now, when their backs are against the wall because seniors and those people who are going to be hurt most because of this tax are rebelling and revolting across the province, they say, "Listen, Jack, we've got a little bit of money available here in the budget to pay for some studies."

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes: "These are the answers we need. Let's get all of that empirical data and anecdotal data that you can find, but at the end of the day we need a conclusion that supports what we've already decided we're doing." Jack Mintz would say, "Do you know what? I think we can do that. How much did you say you had? Yes, I think we can do that. I think we can give you just exactly what you wanted," because you know the old saying that he who pays the piper gets to pick the tune? That's exactly what would have happened with Mr. Mintz. I'm not questioning his credentials or his credibility in any way, but I also know that if I'm working for someone, I'm going to try to please the person whom I'm working for.

The government goes on and on and talks about those kinds of things, and all we've ever asked for is to take this issue to the people. They ask us what we're going to do. We're more than prepared-I'll tell you, if the Premier and the finance minister and the Minister of Revenue want to say today, "We're staying the proceedings. We're going to just put

this into limbo. We're going to say 'wait,' and we'll go to the people; we'll go to the polls, we'll fight an election on the issue," we would be glad-

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: We will.

Mr. John Yakabuski: My friend Lou from Northumberland-Quinte West says, "We will." You'll do it 14 months after it's already law and you've signed an agreement and taken a poison pill that prevents anybody in the future from (a) changing the rates for two years or (b) getting out of the agreement for five years without cutting a cheque for \$4.3 billion. Where in the name of Sam Hill, after you've driven this province into a \$25-billion deficit, are you going to get \$4.3 billion to cut a cheque to the federal government? It's just not going to happen; you know that.

So I'm saying to my friend Lou: Stay the proceedings. Say, "We're not going any further; we're not proceeding. We're going to go to the people on this. We'll fight an election on the issue," and we'll be glad to join you. We'll be glad to join you, only we'll be on the opposite side.

Interjection: Why don't we have an election?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd be glad to have that. I think the people would be glad to have an election on this issue. And then we'd see what they really like.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd love to debate this for the next five months. The member for Pickering-Scarborough East wants to debate the issue, yet they limit us to 6.5 hours of debate in this House and then they'll have time allocation on the bill. After that, they'll time-allocate the committee hearings to be held only in Toronto, shortened, and then they'll time-allocate third reading. They don't really want to talk about this. They just want it to be over with.

But because they've taken all the arrows out of our quiver, we have no tools left in the toolbox, so to speak, to register our disgust and our sadness that a government would do this to the seniors, the golden generation in this province, Canada's greatest generation, those veterans of World War II, that generation, who are still here today, fighting and clawing and trying to keep their heads above water. That's the generation that this government is attacking. They're saying, "You know what? We don't care that you won't be able to pay your hydro bills anymore. We don't care that you can't put gas in the car. We don't care that the heating of your home is going to be out of reach. We're going to hammer you, because we have a different idea and we want to make sure that our agenda is the one that matters."

With those kinds of situations and these kinds of untenable circumstances, rendering us almost unable to properly debate the issue because it will go no further than these hallowed halls of Queen's Park, we want hearings to be in Pembroke, Arnprior, Sault Ste.

Marie, Dryden, North Bay, Sarnia, Durham and Cambridge. We want them everywhere, and we'll throw in Parry Sound, if Norm would like it. But they're not going to have any hearings there.

With that being left as the only options we have-you've taken everything out of our option-

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Here we go-another 30 minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, I want you to get prepared. I want you to get prepared, Wayne. If you want to put the cotton batting in your ears, you go right ahead.

I'm sorry, but you leave me no option, Mr. Speaker. It's not you personally, but it is your government that leaves me no option but to move adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1617 to 1647.