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

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Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier. Premier, in February of this year, you said your Green Energy Act will “make it perfectly clear that NIMBYism will no longer prevail when it comes to putting up wind turbines....”

In practice, the rule applies to everywhere in the province but the Minister of Energy’s riding in Scarborough. The setback for the rest of the province is 500 metres. This summer, cabinet made an exception in the minister’s hometown by creating a five-kilometre setback that appeased families who don’t want wind turbines obscuring their view of Lake Ontario.

Did the Minister of Energy declare his conflict of interest and recuse himself from the decision and discussions to keep windmills out of his backyard?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my honourable colleague knows the difference between the setback requirements for land-based wind turbines and those that are located offshore. There is a difference there. If we focus for a moment on those that are land-based, we have the most aggressive setback requirements in all of North America, and some of the most aggressive in the world. As well, while there can be challenges associated with wind turbines, they’re related to location. That’s what our setback requirements are designed to address.

But you cannot get beyond the challenges presented to the environment and our health when it comes to burning coal. It would be nice for the member opposite to stand up on behalf of his party and say, “We’re no longer going to burn coal in the province of Ontario. We’re going to do everything we can together to shut down all coal-fired generation by 2014.” Now, that would be a commitment to the environment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: We’re no longer going to break promises in the province of Ontario.

When my colleague the member for Dufferin–Caledon asked the minister about conflict of interest, he just sloughed it off, but it is not up to him to pass judgment on his own conflict or appearance of conflict. In fact, if he brought the issue to cabinet or participated in the discussion to give special treatment to his riding, his judgment is in question and his response to my colleague cannot be trusted. So it falls upon you, Premier: Were you

concerned enough about the appearance of conflict to ensure that the minister took no part in any discussions to keep windmills out of his backyard?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This is a standard, province-wide policy. My honourable colleague is aware of that.

We have one policy for land-based wind turbines. In fact, we have a proposal at this point in time for offshore turbines, and it's one that will apply across the province. So I think it's rather interesting and creative on the part of my colleague to allege what he is alleging, but the fact of the matter is, there are so many Ontarians who live near water throughout the province.

This is something that stands to benefit all of us, and we will be working hard to make sure we get it right offshore, as we have got it right on land.