

NEWS RELEASE

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Green at What Cost?

The Green Energy Act (Bill 150) sounds like a great title for a piece of legislation that you would hope would be all about protecting our environment and easy to support.

So why am I and members of the Progressive Conservative caucus asking for immediate public input on the Green Energy Act? Because, like so many pieces of legislation that the McGuinty Liberals have been bringing forward, the devil is in the details.

As many of you know, Dufferin County has been a leader in hosting wind turbines in our province. In Melancthon Township, we now have over eighty wind turbines operating and generating power for Ontario. In fact, Melancthon was a bit of a pilot project because the township worked with landowners and the developers to site the turbines. Melancthon was also able to negotiate with the developers to ensure the entire township benefited from the power generation project. As the Mayor recently told me, there is a second shift of snow clearing now as a result of the additional money being collected from the wind turbines. Under Bill 150, Melancthon would not have been able to make those arrangements.

Mulmur, Caledon and East Garafraxa recently prepared very detailed planning documents to deal with turbine siting. They each worked with planners and their community to come up with a planning document so developers and landowners could clearly understand the standards that would be acceptable to their ratepayers. Under Bill 150, that work would be meaningless.

Bill 150, the Green Energy Act removes all oversight for wind turbines from municipalities. Important details such as what the setback from homes should be will now be left to the province. Worse, the actual details are not even in Bill 150, and will only be decided by regulation AFTER Bill 150 is law. By not including specifics in the legislation, the current government can modify setbacks in secrecy through a meeting of Cabinet. No public input, no public debate.

I have spoken out before on how many legislative details are being left to regulation, and in Bill 150 it is particularly troublesome because residents in Melancthon and Amaranth have some practical experience about what type of setback is reasonable and this should be part of the discussion in deciding the standard.

The Minister is suggesting that the setbacks “may be 500 meters”, and yet in France, they demand setbacks of over 1 km. Why are the Liberals not allowing a debate on these important details?

Another troublesome aspect of the Green Energy Act is the assumption that wind and solar energy generation will be subsidized with a guaranteed rate of return. While I am

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prepared to support the need to encourage these green energies, I cannot do so with a blank cheque! As taxpayers we have a right to know what these subsidies are going to cost.

Minister Smitherman has estimated that this bill will be approximately \$5 billion. What is unknown is how much more individual electricity consumers and businesses will need to pay in higher electricity rates.

My family and many Ontarians have opted to purchase a low emission or hybrid vehicle or use only renewable power for their home. Personal commitment to improving the environment with their decision to opt for a greener alternative is commendable! Particularly when there is a premium attached to the cost. But never was this done without knowing what the cost would be. If Bill 150 passes without changes, that is what we would be allowing the Liberals to do; subsidies without having to disclose the ultimate cost to the taxpayer.

So do I support green energy? Absolutely. Do I support it without accountability and disclosure? I cannot.

It would be a disservice to the taxpayers who pay the bills of the Ontario government. It would also be a slap in the face to the municipalities in Dufferin and Caledon who have worked so hard to ensure that renewable energy can co-exist in our communities with existing homes and community preferences.

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