



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

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HOSPITAL FUNDING

April 6, 2006

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Tonight, I'm going to be attending the Centre Wellington Chamber of Commerce dinner in Fergus, and I know the people of Fergus are going to be asking me why it's taking the government two years to approve the redevelopment plan for the Groves Memorial Community Hospital so that that important project can move forward to the benefit of my constituents. I would ask the minister, why is it taking two years for him to give approval so that we can move forward to the next stage of planning?

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Give him good news for that meeting.

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Oh, there's the gentleman who proposes not to ever heckle, but we won't rat him out to Mr. Tory.

The story in the honourable member's community is a very simple one. It's a sad story, regrettably, that's been repeated in too many other places in Ontario, related to his party's desire in the dying days of their role in government to promise many things to people and to back those up with what are described, at best, as rubber cheques. Accordingly, we ended up with an infrastructure deficit.

I'm pleased that my colleague the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, working with our ministry and inside the government, has been able to make an investment in health care that will see our government invest more in health care infrastructure than the last five governments of Ontario combined.

We have more work to do. This has not meant every project has moved forward, but we are in the midst of a \$5-billion reinvestment in health care infrastructure that is going to produce tremendous results for the patients of Ontario.

Mr. Arnott: That was an incredible answer in the sense that it absolutely lacked credibility. Our community has raised \$15 million towards the redevelopment of our hospital. It's my understanding that the minister is now going around the province approving hospital projects for 2008 and 2009. I would ask him again, why are my constituents waiting more than two years to receive the health care benefits they would receive with that new hospital?

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Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Again, this is a question that the honourable member would be better advised to save for a Tuesday morning, and go into his own caucus and speak to the honourable member who sits just two seats away from him or the other honourable member just a few more seats to his left. They were health ministers in the government of the day that he was proud to play a role in. Regrettably, like on the energy file and so many others, while important things went on, like clock-ticking, they did nothing. Towards the end of their mandate they ran around Ontario and created expectations in one community after the other.

We have worked hard to build on those expectations, to meet them and to be partners with communities. We are the first to acknowledge that while we have made tremendous progress -- more investment than the last five governments combined -- we have more work to do. We recognize the strong support that exists in the honourable member's community. We will continue to work with them until such time as we can move forward there. But the real answer to the honourable member's question is honestly to be found in his own heart.