



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

BORDER SECURITY

May 16, 2006

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Tourism. We've heard a great deal of partisan bluster from this minister this afternoon but very little in the way of constructive solutions.

Last Friday, the minister, I'm told, attended a forum organized by the Binational Tourism Alliance in Niagara-on-the-Lake to consult with the tourism industry on the challenge we face because of the pending US passport issue. Our caucus is hopeful that this issue will be resolved, that we will achieve a Canadian exemption or, at the very least, a delay in the implementation of the western hemisphere travel initiative.

Surely the minister offered this group last Friday some new ideas on how he plans to solve this important issue. Will the minister inform the House what new steps he is undertaking to seek a resolution to this problem?

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I have to tell the member, because he would want to know, that it is the government of Ontario that has been taking the lead on an issue which really should be taken right across the country. But we have taken that lead. The Premier has met with the Great Lakes governors. I met personally with the governor of Ohio when he was here in Toronto. I have met with several officials from both sides -- from the private sector, from the municipal sector. He will remember that the Premier and I were in Washington last year, last March, meeting with senior officials in the US administration, hosting at the embassy of Canada at the time an opportunity for people to be aware of the issue. So on an ongoing basis, the Premier and I have been engaging senior political leaders on the American side, who I want to report to you are on our side. This is not a Canada versus US issue. This is an issue of the people who reside along the border and understand the ramifications of the passport issue, who are fighting together for a better solution. That's what we're advocating.

Mr. Arnott: Blaming the federal government, as this minister has done repeatedly in this House, will not wash. The minister knows as well as I do that the Paul Martin Liberals were entirely ineffective in solving this problem, and they were in power when the American passport law was moving through Congress, when it could have been nipped in the bud. Why has the minister focused his efforts on assigning blame to the federal government when he should be focusing all of his energies on working with the federal government to seek a solution?

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Hon. Mr. Bradley: That is exactly what this government has been doing. I want to tell the member that as recently as February 10 I wrote a letter to Maxime Bernier asking that the council of tourism ministers be brought together for a national meeting on this issue and other issues. And the minister, to this point in time, has refused to have that meeting. But I did approach somebody in the last government, the Martin administration, a man by the name of Mr. Emerson. I spoke on October 20 to Minister Emerson to suggest that we needed to convey a united tourism message to our US neighbours. Apparently he wasn't prepared to do it as part of the previous administration, and then, when he was lured across the floor by Prime Minister Harper with heaven knows what to get him from one side to the other two weeks after the election, he still isn't prepared to do anything about it. What we need is for you people to quit apologizing for the Harper government and come on side, stand up for the province of Ontario and continue to --