



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

TOURISM
May 4th, 2004

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): Would the Minister of Tourism inform the House what, if anything, he has done to advocate for Ontario's hospitality industry, which will be impacted negatively by Bill 53?

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I'm always advocating on behalf of Ontario's tourism industry, whether it's on Bill 53 or whether it's on a topic that I know is near and dear to the heart of the member: the passport issue that exists at the present time.

As he would know, and I know he's on our side on this issue of the passport, we have a situation now where we have Canadians and Americans, business people on both sides, chambers of commerce, Republicans and Democrats, Liberals, Conservatives and New Democrats on this side, and all of us recognize the importance of that issue.

Just as I would advocate on behalf of the tourism industry as it relates to Bill 53, I'm also advocating on part of that issue. I'm pleased that there are many allies in all of the caucuses that are on our side on this particular issue. I know that there are people on both sides of the border who will continue to press the issue very hard, to the benefit, I think, of the people of this province.

Mr. Arnott: The question was about Bill 53, the city of Toronto bill, containing within it a provision which will allow Toronto council to levy yet another tax on drinks, which are already taxed three times, according to the Ontario Restaurant, Hotel and Motel Association.

They say this will reduce their sales, lower operating margins and jeopardize thousands of jobs in Toronto's restaurants and bars. This comes at a time when Ontario's tourism business people are struggling, during a time when US visits to Ontario have plummeted to a 33-year low.

I will ask the minister once more: Will he go on the record today and represent Ontario's tourism interests, as I know he would want to do, and express support for an amendment to Bill 53 to get rid of this pending new tax?

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Hon. Mr. Bradley: As the member would know, we'll be interested in all the representations that are made to the committee on this piece of legislation and the other piece of legislation. I note, because I've heard many of the questions that have come from his fellow caucus members about the federal budget, that in fact there was an increase in some alcohol taxes in the federal budget. I would have thought that in the supplementary question to me from the excellent member opposite, the critic in the field of tourism, he would have asked me what I think of increasing the alcohol taxes in the federal budget and what effect that would have on tourism. I can say to him that it may well have a detrimental effect on tourism in this province. I'll call upon him to speak to all of his friends in the federal Conservative caucus on this particular matter, including Mr. Flaherty, the finance minister.