



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Official Record of Debate

(Hansard)

Private Member's Bill 139, Climate Change Awareness Day Act, 2006

October 5th, 2006

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I'm pleased to have this opportunity this morning to speak briefly to Bill 139, An Act to make April 21 Climate Change Awareness Day, which has been brought forward in this House by the member for Ottawa-Orléans. I certainly want to begin by indicating my support in principle for this bill. I think that the member is sincere in terms of bringing forward this idea that we need to do more to promote amongst the people of Ontario the need for greater action to deal with climate change, and that recognizing April 21 each year as Climate Change Awareness Day will to some degree help to move towards that objective.

We have a number of bills that are brought forward in this Legislature on Thursday mornings that are an effort to symbolically recognize a worthwhile objective or challenge, and certainly this bill falls into that category. If you look at the bill, there is a fairly lengthy preamble which talks about many of the environmental challenges that mankind faces and that we in Ontario must recognize and attempt to grapple with. I think most of the preamble includes points that most of us would agree with.

I listened to the member for Ottawa-Orléans in his presentation this morning and I would agree with much of what he said. I heard him say, I think, that we are the worst polluters in the world, and I would have to say that I disagree with that statement. I don't believe that Ontario or Canada qualifies as the worst polluter in the world. I think, from what I've read, there are serious environmental problems in many other countries across the world that would be far worse than here. I do agree, though, with the member when he talked about the challenge faced by Ontario in terms of the severe weather that we've encountered in recent years. The member for Peterborough talked about the flood that affected his community in, I think it was, 2005 or 2004. Actually, last year at this time I was raising the need for the provincial government to assist a number of communities in our riding of Waterloo-Wellington because we were dealing with the aftermath and the cleanup of two very severe tornadoes that hit our area in August of last year. So I'm well aware that the provincial government needs to take action to support communities that are affected by these examples of severe weather.

Given that this is Thursday morning and it's private members' business, I don't want to be overly partisan in terms of my response, but I'm sure the member for Ottawa-Orléans would have wished that this report had come out some other week, as opposed to the week that his bill was being presented and discussed in the Legislature. The fact is that the Environmental Commissioner is a non-partisan office. He's an officer of the Legislature. He's appointed by the Legislature as a whole. When you're in government, perhaps you look forward to this report

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coming out with a little less excitement than the opposition does, but when this report comes out, I think we all have to take it very seriously.

I was glad that the Environmental Commissioner prefaced his report this year with a quote by Prime Minister Winston Churchill from November 1936. It said: "The era of procrastination, of half-measures, of soothing and baffling expedients, of delays, is coming to a close. In its place, we are entering a period of consequences." Of course, I'm sure that Prime Minister Churchill was talking about the threat faced by England from the Nazis, but in this context we have to take this report seriously, obviously.

My colleague the member for Haliburton-Victoria-Brock mentioned the fact that on page 61 of this report the Environmental Commissioner has pointed out that his office contacted the Ministry of the Environment recently, and staff told the Environmental Commissioner "that the ministry does not have a formal written plan or strategy dealing with adaptation to climate change." I'm sure the member for Ottawa-Orléans would want the government to do more, to do better in this area, and the fact that he's brought this bill forward I would hope will encourage the government to take this action so that it can, in some meaningful way, show its response to the challenge of global change, as a ministry and as a province.

I think it is fair to say that whether you look at it as climate change or global warming, it is a real concern of many people in the province of Ontario. Certainly, it's a huge concern for many people in Waterloo-Wellington; I'm amongst those people. The preponderance of scientific evidence seems to suggest that human activity in recent years is at least accelerating this change, if not a contributing factor. So obviously it's something that we all have to be concerned about, any of us who care about the future -- and all of us should, obviously. As a father of three children -- my wife and I are obviously very concerned about the world that our children and our grandchildren will inherit. All of us should share this concern, and all of us should be part of the solution.

Again, I would suggest to the member for Ottawa-Orléans that's he's done a good thing today by bringing this bill forward, and this bill has my support.