



NEWS RELEASE

Ted Arnott, MPP
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Minister of the Environment still twisting in the wind

(Queen's Park) – Ontario's Minister of the Environment has again refused to account for his contradictory promises on industrial wind farm consultations.

The minister's opportunity to clear the air came during a special "late show" debate held April 19 in the Ontario Legislature, at the request of Wellington-Halton Hills MPP Ted Arnott. He took the minister to task for being less than candid to his constituents.

"On numerous occasions, this minister has failed to clarify his own remarks to his own constituents," he charged. "For failing to correct his own record, for failing to uphold even the most basic standards of truth, he owes his constituents an apology."

No apology was forthcoming. Neither did the minister, John Wilkinson, refute or deny Mr. Arnott's main points.

"This minister still hasn't taken responsibility for his own misleading statements to his constituents," Mr. Arnott said following the debate. "Either he didn't know what he was talking about, or he deliberately misled the people who turned out to express their legitimate concerns about wind farm proposals for their neighbourhoods."

Mr. Arnott was referring to a meeting held May 2010, when the minister appeared to promise that if municipalities refused to sign off on wind farm applications, the Ministry of the Environment would not approve them. Both the Wellington Advertiser and the Drayton Community News reported his statements in their May 21, 2010 editions.

One of the minister's constituents attended that meeting and, in a recent email to the minister, copied to Mr. Arnott, backed up the media's account: "You gave us the impression that the municipality had the right not to sign if they felt the company had failed to address concerns by the municipality."

But by allowing a wind farm proposal for Mapleton Township to proceed even though it lacked the municipal consultation form, he betrayed his previous statements. Both municipalities chose not to sign the minister's form.

"Instead of doing the right thing and acknowledging he was wrong, he chose to attack me," Mr. Arnott said. "But it's not about me. Opposition MPPs have a responsibility to hold the government to account; when a minister makes misleading statements, we must call attention to them." He continued: "In the final analysis, his constituents will hold him accountable as well."

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Attached: Ontario Hansard

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ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

WIND TURBINES

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Wellington–Halton Hills, you have five minutes in which to give your question.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Here we go again, discussing the Minister of the Environment's contradictory statements on wind farm approvals. The last time I felt it was necessary to trigger a late show on this subject, which we had on October 5, the minister sent his parliamentary assistant, the member for Oak Ridges–Markham, to defend his own remarks. While her comments were intended to explain the approvals process, they did not in any way explain the minister's contradictory public statements—but that's hardly surprising. He gave her a near-impossible task: to defend the confusing and rapidly shifting words of her minister.

It's highly unfortunate that this debate is even necessary. Little has changed since last October, when I called the minister to account for his own contradictory statements regarding the municipal consultation process on industrial wind farms. At that time, I asked only that he repeat what he'd told his constituents at a meeting in Mapleton township. He failed to do so, necessitating a late show debate. And here we are yet again, at another late show debate on the same issue, because the same minister continues to duck responsibility for his own remarks.

I want to remind the House of our last late show debate, in a brief summary. Two community newspapers reported the remarks of the Minister of the Environment before he became the minister, when he was still the Minister of Revenue. In both the *Wellington Advertiser* and the *Drayton Community News*, in their May 21, 2010, editions, the minister appeared to promise his constituents that if municipalities refused to sign off on the wind farm applications, the Ministry of the Environment would not approve those applications. I'll read from the article verbatim:

“One resident in the gallery asked point-blank if there is anything the township could do to stop wind farms if the proponents have otherwise met all the government's criteria.

“Wilkinson replied companies must obtain the signature of the township for the application to be complete.

“‘If the application is not complete, the’ application ‘will not proceed,’ he said.”

Again, let's imagine the minister taking questions at that meeting, at which the atmosphere was no doubt very heated. It was, of course, his Liberal government that imposed the Green Energy Act, and no doubt he supported it.

One of the minister's own constituents recently wrote the following to the minister, copying me: “Since I was present at that particular council meeting, I can say that you indeed said that an REA must be signed by the municipality in order to be deemed complete. You gave us the impression

that the municipality had the right not to sign if they felt the company had failed to address concerns by the municipality.”

And so we have the minister, under fire, attempting to shift the blame for the wind farms to the local municipal government, implying that they could somehow veto the project application by denying a signature. Of course, we now know that’s utter nonsense. The McGuinty government stripped municipalities of their power to stop wind farms, and it’s time the minister finally admitted it.

In October, the minister failed to categorically repeat his earlier assurances. Instead, he told this House that a wind farm proponent “must submit a complete application, and that includes a review and a consultation with the municipality....”

I go back to the minister’s constituent who wrote to him recently: “Stating in the paper that a municipality merely has to be consulted is not what you said. Please explain why you felt the need to alter your statement.” He still hasn’t provided that explanation.

Now, incredibly, he’s changed his story once again. First, the minister suggested municipalities have an effective veto over new wind farm proposals. Then he suggested that the wind farm proponent need only submit proof of their consultations, in the form of a complete application. Now, incredibly, he suggests that the application need not be complete after all.

Here’s a fact: The Wellington Advertiser reported on March 25 that the county of Wellington and the township of Mapleton have refused to submit the municipal consultation form on a wind farm proposal in Mapleton township.

The minister used to say that a complete application requires the municipal consultation form. But now we know he accepted the NextEra wind farm application, even without the required form, nine days before the county of Wellington took its stand.

This clarifies something important. For months, municipal officials have been trying to understand the minister’s contradictory remarks, trying to understand exactly what he meant by “consultation,” but this latest development makes one thing clear: The minister’s consultation isn’t even worth the paper it’s written on. That paper, in this case, doesn’t even exist.

We now know, notwithstanding the minister’s empty promises of consultation and complete applications, that this government is determined to foist industrial wind farms on places where the elected municipal governments don’t want them. On numerous occasions, this minister has failed to clarify his own remarks to his own constituents. For failing to correct his own record, for failing to uphold even the most basic standards of truth, he owes his constituents an apology.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has up to five minutes in which to respond.

Hon. John Wilkinson: It’s a pleasure to rise today and expand on the values behind the Green Energy Act. Mainly, these are the right to clean air, respect for our municipal partners, and transforming our economy with good-paying green jobs.

But first I want to touch on what I would call the evolution of the MPP for Wellington–Halton Hills. There was a time when you were on this side of the House and you supported protecting the environment.

In 1997, you said in this House, "Protecting the integrity of our natural environment so that future generations have clean water, clean air and a safe environment requires commitment, political will and action."

Obviously, you knew that green energy was the right thing to do, because in 2002 you said in this House, "We are aiming for green energy.... It will benefit all Ontarians."

But my friend's commitment to the environment and green energy has subsided. When recently debating green energy policy, he said in this House, "Who in their right mind would promise to shut down a fifth of Ontario's generating capacity?"

I'll tell you who: The McGuinty government made the promise of cleaner air to all kids and families who are suffering from dirty air, and we are fulfilling the promise we made despite your objections.

Is the \$3 billion in annual health care costs or the great number of people in this province who suffer or die due to poor air quality affordable?

I'll tell you where I stand. I'm with the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, the chief medical officer of health, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, the Ontario Medical Association, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, the Asthma Society and the Lung Association.

On this side of House, we value our municipal partners. When you were in government, I say to the member, you wiped 50% of them, including my hometown, right off the map of Ontario through forced amalgamations, completely getting rid of them with the stroke of a pen. In contrast, we have uploaded literally billions of dollars in costs that your party forced on them and that never should have been placed on the property taxpayer in the first place.

Municipal consultation is an essential part of the renewable energy approval process. We want to hear from municipalities. Our act actually says that, by law, companies must provide municipalities an opportunity to have their say. I encourage all municipalities to fill out a municipal consultation form because we will make the company address any reasonable comments or the project will not go forward. But they are not limited to that form. We will take their comments in any form they choose to provide them. That's why I want to put on the record that I am so very pleased that Warden White in the county of Wellington wrote to me. Their feedback is now included in the submission that will be thoroughly reviewed and decided upon. I want to be clear: Not signing the form is not a veto, but we will say no unless the municipalities have had an opportunity to have their say.

I want to say in these last few minutes that it's best to touch on the third value: creating new jobs and supporting our farmers. The Green Energy Act is good for our environment and our economy. Just ask the more than 20,000 Ontarians who support green energy and signed up for the microFIT program. Many of those people are local farmers, small businesses and families in my riding and in the riding of the member opposite.

That's who I'm standing up for today. They work hard every day to underpin our rural economy. That's why I'm proud to be part of a government that is supporting them.

We already know that your leader wants to rip up those contracts. Kris Barnier, a staffer in his office, said, "We need to be perfectly clear ... a PC government will shut down all of the planned expansion of the ... microFIT plan. There will be no new contracts."

I say that I believe that your plan will hurt farmers, it will hurt local business owners and it will hurt parents wanting cleaner air for their kids.

You have repeatedly accused me of being contradictory, so let me be clear. I believe that your position has evolved over the last few years. I remember when you were with Mr. Harris and you thought the environment was worth protecting. No wonder he didn't put you in the cabinet. I remember when you were with Mr. Eves: Then you said that you thought that we should have green energy. What happened there? The lights went out. So obviously Mr. Eves wasn't listening to you. He would have valued, as would have Mr. Harris, your wise counsel.

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But now we have Mr. Hudak in the House, and what does he do? He supports the member from Haldimand–Norfolk, who's all for dirty coal.

On this side of the House, clean air trumps all. That's why we're moving ahead with green energy. We'll do that in consultation with our municipal partners, as we always have.