

Andrea Horwath Transcript

November 6, 2008 Question Period

Queen's Park

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. The McGuinty government is well aware of St Marys Cement's proposal to develop a massive new greenfield quarry in the Flamborough area of the city of Hamilton. The proposal is for an open-pit mine in the middle of the natural heritage system of the greenbelt, where ground water is crucial to the provision of clean, safe drinking water to more than 3,000 residents of Carlisle. Two thousand people from the area sent postcards asking the McGuinty government, once and for all, to stop this quarry, which is a serious threat to residents' water safety.

Will the minister say today when the government is going to step in and stop the quarry?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, I appreciate the question very much from the member. I would just like, for the record, to note that we are very proud of the accomplishments that this government made with respect to the greenbelt, something, by the way, that your caucus-only half the members supported the greenbelt at the time.

Let me also compliment the individuals who are here today from FORCE for their interest in the environment.

But as the member well knows, the permit that has been issued is simply for a pump test. There are many other permits that may be required if the pump test proves to be adequate and meets the ministry's requirements. There will be municipal approvals that are going to be required from the municipality. There will be approvals required from the Ministry of Natural Resources as well with respect to a permit.

We want to make sure that the testing is done properly. We decided to have the testing redone by the company because of the excessive amount of rain water that fell during the-

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This government's greenbelt is turning into a greed belt, from what we can tell. The availability of safe drinking water is at stake here. Doesn't anybody remember Walkerton? I remember when the first water restrictions and bans hit the Carlisle community when I was still sitting on city council in Hamilton. Advisers to the government have called quarries a man-made threat of provincial concern because they create a direct pathway to the aquifer for contaminants. They recommended that new quarries should not be situated too closely to a municipal wellhead protection area. The Environmental Commissioner himself has clearly told the government to screen out

development proposals exactly like this one, which put the interests and profits of the aggregate mining industry ahead of the public's water supply and environmental protection.

When will the government protect residents, farmers, businesses and schools near Carlisle by heeding the independent advice of the Environmental Commissioner and stopping this quarry development?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Let me repeat, once again, that this is a pump test; this is not a permit for a quarry. A number of safeguards have been built into this. Let me remind you and the members of FORCE who are here today.

The safeguards include that the quality and quantity of water will be extensively monitored by the ministry. Secondly, the project will receive independent oversight and reporting. Also, the rate of pumping has been reduced by 50%, and the permit has extensive consultation and reporting requirements. In order for the second test to take place, we will once again be placing the matter on the EBR for 30 days.

We are interested in protecting the greenbelt; we are also interested in making sure that there is quarry material available if and when required. But no quarry will be opened up there unless the testing that is being done here will meet our qualifications. And the other approvals from both the municipalities and the Ministry of Natural Resources have to be-

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.