Report From Queen's Park



Julian Reed MPP, Halton-Burlington

Conservation and the quality of life undoubtedly remain two of the most important concerns in Ontario today. It is interesting to note that while the concerns for pollution and the awareness of ecological matters preceded the energy crisis, the concern for the environment now seems a little more than a fad compared to the prospect of not having oil for our furnaces or gas for our cars.

What is often not realized, however, is the link between these two crises. If one is solved then the other can also be solved.

No doubt the best solution is conservation. For example, the efficient use of energy would cut pollution and measures taken to reduce pollution would have the effect of conserving energy.

The challenge before us is to balance the public benefit or urban and industrial growth against the public harm of yet greater deterioration of our natural and human environment along with the massive gobbling up of valuable farmland.

Difficult though the task may appear at least one choice is clear; either we allow the future to develop merely as an extension of the present or else, we choose to develop policies which reflect the concerns for the well-being of ourselves, our planet and those who will follow after us. All decisions which we make today will have a ripple effect through time.

Many situations exist in Ontario today which may endanger human health, and there is increasing evidence that more dangerous situations may be developing. Radiation in the mines of Elliot Lake and the Town of Port Hope; asbestos in Peterborough; mercury pollution in the English-Wabigoon River system, DDT, polychlorinated biphenyls and other cancer causing pollutants in Lake Ontario, all are examples of this problem.

In fact, scientific estimates cite that 80 percent of cancers today are environmentally caused. The majority of those are caused by pesticides and other chemicals produced by Industries and allowed to enter the air, land and water.

It is imperative that the government in Ontario address itself more forcefully to the basic environmental issues. We can no longer take comfort in the environmental policies which have been applied in the past. Too often, anxiety over adverse publicity has seemed to outrank concern for people in the province.

In almost all cases of industrial pollution and industry related health hazards the government has helped to foster fear by trying to confuse facts, deny individuals information and to skirt problems. Piecemeal answers and solutions, as has been the case in the past, can no longer

be tolerated in the future. I hope that we are beginning to understand that we can no longer continue to act on the basis of some of our oldest and most ingrained assumptions. In particular, our assumption that we would never run out of room or of resources and as a result that we could forever be free and easy with both; or our assumption that if, for a time, we found ourselves in a serious situation, that we could in the nick of time and out of nowhere find our unrivalled technology to free us from these difficulties.

Unless we start taking care of these things that belong to nobody in particular and everybody in general, we are going to find ourselves not only with a narrower range of choices, but individual ones that are less worth making.



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