

FRANKLY SPEAKING: The Liberal Party...

The Liberal Party should reimburse Ontario citizens

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Former Finance Minister Dwight Duncan told the Ontario Legislature's Justice Committee last week that the public has lost interest in the Gas Plant scandal. Do you agree?

?This is all old ground, with respect, you're not even on TV any more for goodness' sake. You got bumped from your own TV channel,? Mr. Duncan told the committee at last week's hearings. ?Ask me another question, for all 10 people who are watching it.? It was obvious that even the Liberal members of the committee were uncomfortable with Duncan's bombastic and unrepentant performance. At least the Premier issued a qualified apology in the wake of the Auditor General's report that the final cost to taxpayers will be at least \$950 million and may be as high as \$1.1 billion.

Based on what I'm hearing from constituents and stakeholders, I have a sense that Mr. Duncan may be overly optimistic. Not only are people still talking about the waste of their tax dollars through this latest scandal, there is an underlying issue that puts this scandal into a class of its own.

It was a political decision...

There is a significant difference between the political scandals of the past and the Gas Plant scandal. That difference is this: The decision that led to the cancellation of the Gas Plants and the waste of millions of tax dollars can't be blamed on bureaucratic bungling or the lack of oversight by ministers or the maladministration of civil servants. It was, as both Premiers brazenly admitted, a political decision.

Here is a quote from the Toronto Star, Thursday February 28, 2013: ?I have never said this wasn't a political decision. It was a political decision,' Wynne acknowledged.?

Here is Dalton McGuinty's contribution to this discussion. I quote from his testimony at the Justice Committee Hearings:

?I know much has been made of the decision as being political. This is how representative democracy works.?

I reject that assertion. Decisions in a representative democracy should not be driven by whether seats will be won or lost, they should be based on what is right and what is good public policy. And it was that admission, that the decision to cancel the two power plants in Oakville and Mississauga was so blatantly ?political? that gives rise to the indignation that people are expressing.

?Recoup the cost of the politically motivated cancellations?

This quote from one of the many emails I have been receiving on this issue expresses it well:

?...it seems to me that as the decision to cancel the two gas plants was orchestrated by the Liberal Party of Ontario, should we not determine if a ratepayers group or some such body would be prepared to take on a lawsuit against the Liberal Party to re-coup [partially!] the cost of the politically motivated cancellations.?

The message is quite simple. If the decision was political, then the political party that made the decision and benefited from it, should be held accountable. And it was that call for action that prompted my colleague Jane McKenna, the MPP for Burlington to bring forward the following motion which was debated in the legislature this past Thursday:

?That, in the opinion of this House, the Liberal Party of Ontario should be required to reimburse taxpayers \$950 million in compensation for the Liberal Government's decision to site two gas fire power plants in Mississauga and Oakville despite local opposition, then wasting millions of dollars by making a political decision to cancel them.?

In speaking to this motion, I stated that I believe the vast majority of Ontarians support the principle that is at the root of the motion - that principle is accountability.

Whether in our personal, business or professional lives, there is an expectation that we will be accountable for our decisions and actions. But, accountability is all too often replaced by justification, equivocation, regret or empty apologies. By doing so, we blur the lines of right and wrong and rob ourselves of the self-respect and dignity that comes with knowing we are guided by an ethical

and moral compass.

Nowhere is that lack of accountability more evident than in the realm of politics, and nothing has contributed more to people's cynicism about politics, politicians and government than the lack of accountability.

It was an interesting debate. The Liberals defeated the motion. Does anyone care?

My contribution to the debate on the motion can be seen on my website at www.frankklees.com under Current Videos on the Home Page. As always, I welcome your comments and advice.