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Time for leadership on coal, smog reduction

After two years advocating that Nanticoke OPG is too essential to shut down by 2007, I remain hopeful last week's broken promise will mean further investment in pollution abatement.

As many have argued, this is one commitment the Ontario Liberals had to break. The low cost of fuelling Nanticoke, coupled with the lack of replacement power, and dwindling natural gas reserves, are just a few reasons why the 2007 closure deadline was unrealistic.

I've argued constantly in the Legislature for government to do the right thing and admit they could not walk away from, up to, 25 percent of our energy production. It looks like they may have finally taken the blinders off and realized that with the instability of the current energy picture, the power produced by our 600 workers at Nanticoke is essential. However, the new 2009 Nanticoke closure date means the McGuinty team can now run on the same promise they broke in the last election when voters go to the polls in 2007.

In the meantime, we now have a very real opportunity for further investment into smog-reduction technology.

After two years of railing about smog and its effects, this government now has the chance to cool its rhetoric and get down to some real smog reduction work.

One day after the 2009 extension announcement, Environment Minister Leona Dombrowsky, talked about the need for "co-operation" with our U.S. neighbours to the south – home to 50 per cent and sometimes, in some areas, up to 90 per cent of Ontario's smog problem. This echoes the Ministry of Energy's recent report that concluded air quality improvements from coal-closure would be relatively, "small compared to the overall ambient concentrations of these pollutants. While I concur that we must "work together" with our American counterparts, I would go one step further in suggesting it's time for this government to show real leadership.

Instead of threatening lawsuits against the U.S., as Premier McGuinty did last week, it's time to stop wasting words – and legal fees – and get down to the real job of actively working to fix the problem from within.

Two weeks ago, I stood in the Legislature to state that, 'smog can be fixed; smog should be fixed, technology is available - and it's in use right now - to cut 99% of particulate matter, 96% of NO_x, 92% of SO_x from fossil fuel generators.'"

The previous Tory government paved the way for investment into fossil fuel smog reduction with a \$250 million investment into Selective Catalytic Reduction Units at both the Nanticoke and Lambton coal fired electricity plants.

Clearly, in order to put an end to the smog advisories that we have seen these past weeks, we need a government that is willing to lead the way. We know the likelihood of those coal plant closing in the United States is minute. So why not lead by example and continue to clean our plants here?

Billions are being spent in Ontario to shut down generating capacity – a move that could leave our province short of money and electricity down the road. Why not invest the billions into clean air pollution abatement efforts to lead the way in cleaning our air while ensuring the future stability of Ontario energy production.