BLIZZARD

BS detector overloads on statements by Ontario government

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Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa on April 24, 2015. (Ernest Doroszuk/Toronto Sun)

TORONTO - In Cockney rhyming slang — the vernacular of working class Londoners — a lie is called a pork pie.

The way rhyming slang works, you drop the part that rhymes when you're using it in conversation.

Hence, if you say, "He was telling a load of porkies," you're saying someone's giving you a lot of BS.

I think I must have had a BS detector implanted in my psyche at some point in my childhood, because any time a politician or, more likely, one of their flacks, runs a porky by me, I get a jolt.

It's like those movies where you see the needle moving to the red danger zone when a submarine's plunged too deep. Or when some explosive device is under immense pressure and is about to explode.

All the alarms on my BS detector went into the danger zone this week as I watched Finance Minister Charles Sousa tie himself in knots trying to make the credit downgrade by Standard and Poor's appear to be good news.

Then Energy Minister Bob Chiarelli followed suit, dismissing real concerns about the cost of electricity raised by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC).

If spinning porkies were a Pan Am sport, Sousa would win gold.

On Tuesday, when S&P announced they'd slashed the province's credit rating to A+ from AA-, Sousa put out a bizarre release, making it sound as if this were some kind of an endorsement.

"In its report, S&P notes that its rating is supported by its view of 'Ontario's very strong economy which despite recent slow growth remains well-diversified and wealthy.'"

I don't know how he said that with straight face, considering the scathing review S&P gave of the province's budget performance.

Here's what they said: "The downgrade reflects our view that Ontario is a sustained and projected underperformer on its budgetary performance and debt burden versus domestic and international peers."

No sooner had I posted a column about the S&P downgrade online than I got an e-mail from one of Sousa's minions, asking if I'd seen his quote on the latest announcement by another rating agency, Fitch, that the province was keeping its AA- rating.

"Fitch's decision to confirm our rating is an expression of confidence in our balanced plan to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18 while investing in the economy to create jobs," Sousa said in that release.

What he didn't mention was that Fitch's already downgraded the province's credit rating to AA- from AA, last December, citing fears about the province's mounting debt.

Sousa didn't even have a news conference to talk about the downgrades.

Just when I thought the BS was done, Chiarelli chimed in with another porky.

He responded to the OCC report about businesses leaving the province due to the high cost of electricity.

It was an exhaustive report with many recommendations.

One suggestion was that the government not end the debt retirement charge on residential consumers, as it has said it will do at the end of this year.

The OCC argued it would be fairer to keep the DRC on all hydro users in order to retire the debt faster.

Chiarelli cherry-picked that recommendation to slam the OCC, saying it recommended, "hardworking Ontario families and seniors pay higher electricity bills."

Well, newflash. We're already being gouged on our electricity bills.

"We're proud of our commitment to remove the debt retirement charge from residential bills beginning Jan. 1, 2016 — fully two years earlier than planned," Chiarelli continued.

Except at the same time they're removing the DRC, they're also eliminating the Ontario Clean Energy Benefit, which reduces bills by 10%. So they're not really giving you anything.

That's when my BS detector went into overload.

There's only so many porkies I can take.