

***Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Wednesday, March 1, 2017***

Unedited Transcript

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Minister Sousa (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Costs

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of finance. Again as the Liberals always do they play a shell game. The latest shell game is shifting hydro bills around. We saw with the clean energy rebate interplace with the H.S.T. Rebate while people's bills still go up. The latest leaked plan suggests the costs from your hydro bill will shift to your tax bill. Mr. Speaker, H.S.T., income tax, the fees, the money needs to come from somewhere. Will this government come clean and acknowledge that in their leaked plans, taxes are going to go up. Simply –

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that we're balancing the books. I'm proud to say we've reduced our deficit of \$1.9 billion --, Mr. Speaker. We're taking every step necessary to protect the interests of all Ontarians and taxpayers to ensure that we invest in the things that matter for the long term to make it competitive.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of finance. Rather than answer a question on hydro, the government chooses to cheer their government talking points. So I will once again try to ask a question about hydro. Ontarians are struggling with their hydro bills and I would appreciate an answer to a question on hydro. This is a government, for those 30 bad contracts they're now saying they might look at, they receive \$1.3 million in donations. So my question is will the Minister of finance come clean and acknowledge this latest leaked plan is simply a shell game of shifting funds from the hydro bills to the tax base?

>> Minister Sousa: The member opposite hasn't produced any plan whatsoever. But what we have done is invested over 50 to \$60 billion in new hydro construction, more transmission facilities, more clean power plants, enabling us to get off dirty coal and ensure we protect our environment. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we have greater integrity in the system which we didn't have when the Conservatives were in power. We had blackouts and lots of Brownouts, Mr. Speaker. We are ensuring that does not happen. We are investing and we're investing to protect the interests of all Ontarians and ensuring our electricity rates go down to protect and mitigate –

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of finance. The Minister of finance brags there is less Brownouts, but the reality is there's more. Since 2012, there's been 275% more power outages. So the system is not more reliable. You signed bad contracts. This government signed bad contracts. They brought in the global adjustment. They have created a mess. And rather than simply give the government talking points, what I'd like is the Minister of finance to apologize to people of Ontario and -- Amazing, the Liberal party got for these bad contracts.

Will the Minister of finance at least encourage the Premier to return those donations for those bad contracts?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand and speak to this of course, Mr. Speaker, because Ontarians do remember those rolling Brownouts, Mr. Speaker, and the blackouts on the -- and the smog days, Mr. Speaker. Those are a thing of the past, Mr. Speaker, thanks to this government. \$50 billion, Mr. Speaker, we invested in generation and transmission. P.C.S forget what it was like when they were in government, Mr. Speaker. They're desperate to create a problem when there is none, Mr. Speaker ... Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pointing to power outages of falling trees and dump trucks hitting lines, Mr. Speaker, we've actually made sure we've built a system that is reliable. And that's what we see right across the province with the \$50 billion of --

MPP Brown to Minister Thibeault (Duguid) Re: Northern Jobs and Hydro Costs

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for Minister of energy. Since I can't get an answer on the Liberal donations for the exact contracts, since I can't get an answer -- Mr. Speaker, since I can't get an answer on this massive increase in power outages, let me try a different tack. We all know about Frank Ditorie, an absolute legend in the sector. He brought his bill to the finance committee. The bill was \$12,600 but only \$363 was actual electricity. The rest was the Liberal global adjustment delivery fees and taxes. So I understand the Minister of energy's going around saying everything's rosy. Everything's fine with hydro. Will the Minister of energy acknowledge this is a huge problem for the forestry sector?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been working very hard as a government, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we have a reliable system and clean system. But when you're looking at the forestry sector, I acknowledge the Minister of municipal affairs and the MPP From Thunder Bay, Minister of northern development and mines. They've done a great work, Mr. Speaker, of ensuring that our forestry sector is actually saving money on their electricity bills through the Neyer program, Mr. Speaker. The northern industrial electricity rebate program, Mr. Speaker, is saving forestry companies 25%, Mr. Speaker, on their energy bills. They have some of the lowest rates, Mr. Speaker, not only in Ontario, not only in Canada, Mr. Speaker, but right across North America. We're seeing a success in this sector, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to find ways to help that business to continue to grow and prosper. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of energy. The Minister of energy says they're working hard on hydro and forestry. Stop working hard, because we've lost 50% of our forestry jobs as our hydro bills are skyrocketing among the worst in North America. Again, listen to what those in the industry are saying. Frank was asked, you know -- was wondering why are we killing jobs in Ontario because of hydro? And in his own words he said -- most jurisdictions use energy costs to promote economic development, not kill jobs, which is what we're doing in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, the government can throw out any number they want, any talking point they want. But will the Minister of energy at least acknowledge we have a hydro crisis and it is killing jobs in the forestry sector. It is killing jobs in northern Ontario. Will you at least acknowledge we have a crisis here?

>> Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I also again want to thank the Minister for municipal affairs for pointing out that resolute in Thunder Bay, because of their low energy costs, not only with the Neyer program, Mr. Speaker, but with some

of the other programs that we've brought forward as a government, they actually are seeing, Mr. Speaker, this facility being either the first or second-lowest in terms of energy costs in their entire fleet, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause] But we recognize -- yes. But we recognize, Mr. Speaker, that there is more that can be done and will be done... We continue to bring forward a plan. We are bringing -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we're bringing forward a plan, Mr. Speaker. We've already helped reduce rates by 8%. We're going to be doing more, Mr. Speaker. That's a lot more than what the opposition has done because they would never invest in the electricity sector. The example, Mr. Speaker, is the rolling Brownouts and blackouts that we've seen before we took power.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of energy. The Minister of energy says they're acting -- they got rid of the clean energy rebate, replaced it with an H.S.T. Rebate. Bills are still going up. The forestry sector is still struggling. We've lost 52% of our forestry jobs. There is nothing to celebrate here. This government is killing jobs in northern Ontario. And it's more -- Passed on to the finance committee in terms of this crisis. Owe says he's been in business for 40 years. What he's seen is aside from hydro, he's actually seen red tape triple, red tape absolutely triple in the forestry sector. It took him eight months to open a gravel pit to repair roads. Mr. Speaker, it's bad enough that they've created a crisis in hydro. How can they allow a crisis in red tape?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Speaker, let's talk about red tape, because this government, this province is leading the world when it comes to releasing regulatory burdens. We've produced 80,000 regulatory burdens, Mr. Speaker, over the years, 80,000. The bill called the burden reduction bill. That's going to save between 15 million and 31 million for businesses. Mr. Speaker, we have our red tape challenge, Mr. Speaker, helping small, medium and large businesses save hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars, Mr. Speaker. This government is leading the way when it comes to reducing regulatory burdens. Our open-for-business program has been a huge success and we've been nominated more than any other province in this country by the cfib for the golden citizens award acknowledging from a third party. That we're reducing the regulatory burden for this decision better than anyone in the country, better than anyone in the world.

MPP Singh to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Costs

>> MPP Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. On Monday, the Premier indicated that she believes there's no link between public affordable hydro and lower hydro rates. So the Premier also claims to like to make decisions based on evidence. So let's look at the facts. Manitoba has a publicly owned hydro system, and their rates per kilowatt hour is 7.38 cents. Ontario's system is of course a private system, and during mid peak times, our rates per kilowatt hour is 13.2 cents, almost double. Even during off-peak hours, Ontario families and businesses pay more than Manitoba. Can the government -- These facts. That there's no link between public ownership and lower hydro rates?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to rise and respond to that question, Mr. Speaker, because of course, Mr. Speaker, Québec and Manitoba are blessed with geography, Mr. Speaker. They have legacy hydro, Mr. Speaker, and going back and talking about Manitoba -- Speaking of Manitoba, Speaker, when they were in power they cancelled the qana wap tack program, Mr. Speaker, and made sure they cancelled the conservation program as well. We've actually rebuilt the system, Mr. Speaker, that we can be proud of, that is reliable and clean, Mr. Speaker. We're making sure that we take it to the next level and make it both as affordable as possible for as many people in this province as we can, Mr. Speaker. But when we're looking at broadening. The ownership of Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, we're on track to raise the \$9 billion that we intended, Mr. Speaker, to put into infrastructure to continue to build Ontario up, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Singh: Looks like the government's unconvinced. The government mentioned Québec. Let's talk about Québec. A family across the border our neighbour in Québec, if they look at their bill. They would see a rate of just 5.71 cents per kilowatt hour. 5.71 cents. Now when an Ontario family looked at their bill and they did something as wild as trying to cook dinner for their children before off-peak hours sit in at 7 PM They could see rates as high as 18 cents per kilowatt hour. 1 cents. Now, how can the government deny the connection when the facts state very clearly that public hydro systems are more affordable and more cost beneficial than the private system that is we've seen so far?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's obvious to me now, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP Has no idea on how our energy system in this province works, Mr. Speaker. We actually need to generate power. We don't have the benefit of geography like they do in Québec and like they do in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. We need to build our generation. We do have some hydroelectric power, Mr. Speaker, but there is a cost to nuclear. There is a cost to wind. There is a cost to solar. And we built that, Mr. Speaker. We've done it making sure that

we can be clean and gleam -- clean and regreen and reliable, Mr. Speaker. The one thing that is very important for us, Mr. Speaker, is when we rebuilt this system, once the governments of all stripes forgot about, Mr. Speaker. And never invested in, we actually made sure we can rely on this system and it cost us significant money, Mr. Speaker, but we're going to make it affordable as possible for people.

>> MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, lower hydro bills start with public ownership and public control of our electricity system. It's a fact. But the problem is here's the problem for the Liberal government. The problem for the Liberal government is that public ownership -- Everyday Ontarians and it benefits all of us. But all the evidence, all the facts point to this government and this Premier wanting to only help well connected insiders. And their policies have only benefitted a small group of insiders on bay street, not the rest of Ontarians. The Premier has purposely ignored people on main street to the benefit of people on bay btreet time and time again. Why doesn't the government understand when people pay for electricity, they don't expect to pay for the profits of private companies?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The system that we have built in Ontario, the system that we've invested in, Mr. Speaker, \$50 billion in terms of generation and rebuilding transmission, Mr. Speaker, benefits every single Ontarian, Mr. Speaker. When we're receiving \$4.3 billion in health care costs, Mr. Speaker, that benefits everyone in this province. When our health care -- When our health care and our air pollution deaths, Mr. Speaker, have dropped 23%, Mr. Speaker, that is significant that benefits everybody in this province, Mr. Speaker. When we have our air pollution hospitalizations drop by 41%, Mr. Speaker, 41%, that benefits every single Ontarian, Mr. Speaker. So we'll take no lesson from the party that has no idea. About putting forward plans that makes sure all they're talking about, Mr. Speaker, is pushing ideas, Mr. Speaker, to the future. We're going to bring forward immediately --

MPP Singh to Minister Del Duca Re: Hydro and Public Transit Infrastructure

>> MPP Jagmeet Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question again is to the acting Premier. Yesterday the Premier said that she didn't believe Ontario could have affordable public hydro system and at the same time build infrastructure. She said it was an either/or. She couldn't stop her decision to sell off Hydro One. I'm sorry to bring facts into this argument, but we've been doing that for a long time actually. We've been building infrastructure and at the same time maintaining a public affordable hydro system. When the Yonge subway line was built in Toronto, the government didn't have to sell off hydro. When the university subway line was built. We also had public affordable hydro systems. When the bloor- Danforth line was built, there was N O sell-off. Even Mike Harris built the Sheppard line before trying to sell off Hydro One. It's not a surprise. In this province we have built public infrastructure, transportation infrastructure and maintained a public affordable hydro system. So why does the government think it can't be done when it's been done so many times before?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I'm delighted to have the chance to speak about the incredibly ambitious and unprecedented transit projects that our government is investing in, Mr. Speaker. No other government in Ontario history has invested as much and as consistently in public transit right across the greater Toronto area and Waterloo and in the 99 communities across this province that have public transit systems, Speaker. Those are communities by example are benefitting from the doubling of the gas tax program that the Premier recently announced just a couple of weeks ago, which is great news for all those communities, Speaker. I've said this before in this legislature. Just for once I would be delighted to hear a member of the NDP Caucus stand up and provide people in this chamber and those watching at home with any sense of a plan to build public transit in the gtha or beyond, Speaker. Never presented that - - Perhaps in the follow-up question that member from brampton will provide some semblance of a plan.

>> MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, the first will be to win the election and to remove the Liberals from power.

[Applause] For 100 years. For 100 years Ontario has had public, affordable -- Speaker, people in Ontario don't buy the Liberals' false choices that we can't have a public hydro system and still build infrastructure. For 100 years we've had affordable public hydro. We've built highways. We've built bridges. We've connected kenel Nora to Ottawa and Timmins to Windsor. We can build infrastructure and maintain a public affordable hydro system. So how can the Premier continually state that Ontario can't do this when we've done it so many times before?

>> Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. You know, I think everybody in this province knows that in the last election campaign the people of Ontario had a chance to review that very thin platform. They rejected it, Speaker. Nothing on transit. Nothing on transportation. Two and a half years later we see they still present nothing, Speaker. Every single project we've brought forward. Eglinton crosstown, support for the Scarborough subway, building the finch west L.R.T., Hurontario R.T., the Hamilton L.R.T. Support for Waterloo. Support for the L.R.N. In Hamilton. Support for the doubling of the gas tax, Speaker, and so much more we are doing in every corner of Ontario, including Bramalea Gore mal ton, Speaker. That party consistently rejects our plan to build more transit, put more transit into service, providing a stronger economy and more positive quaiment of life for the people that we on this side of the House are damn proud to represent.

>> MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, all across Ontario we've built schools. We've built hospitals. We've built libraries. We've built public pools, housing, water works. All without -- So we've built schools. We've built hospitals. We built all this infrastructure, all without sellings public -- without selling our affordable public hydro system. We've done it all. Now so when the Premier states that Ontario can't build public infrastructure, can't build transportation infrastructure, can't build public transit without selling off public affordable hydro, how does she expect the people of this province to believe that?

>> Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I have to say on behalf of everyone on this side of the House I want to thank the member from the NDP Caucus for belatedly recognizing what everybody in Ontario now as Premier Kathleen Wynne and our government are consistently building the province up, investing in infrastructure, Speaker. Hopefully with their support we'll continue to be able to do that, Speaker. Thank you so much. Greatly appreciated, Speaker. You know, at the end of the day, Speaker, what the people of Ontario expect, they expect the government that's able to do more things than one thing at a time and do it well. He mentioned education infrastructure. I'm very proud of the minute -- as Minister of transportation to be working with my Colleagues to invest more in transit and transportation. We're going to keep doing it, Speaker. I hope this new spirit of openness and honesty and forthrightness in the chamber from that caucus will continue in the months ahead. Perhaps working together and maybe even working with the Tories, Speaker, we'll get more done for the people of Ontario. Thanks so much.

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Costs

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thank you, Speaker. Good morning. My question's for the Minister of energy this morning. Speaker, Ontarians are tired of these vague Cabinet leaks and shell games with their hydro bills. If you believe the leaked story this morning in "The star," the Liberal government is about to make all Ontarians pay for the colossal failures of this government over the last eight years in the electricity crisis that they've created. Is the government extending the payout period for electricity companies that donated \$1.3 million to the Liberals? We want to know yes or no. Is that going to happen in their plan? Why don't you deal with the actual crisis in electricity, which is the skyrocketing costs that go along with these fixed contracts signed with renewable energy contract. Is this government committed to no longer signing expensive fixed-rate contracts?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know on this side of the House we're actually very proud, Mr. Speaker, of the work that we've done with our renewable energy sector. I know canwea is here today, Mr. Speaker. We've actually ensured that we've built a system with a supply mix, Mr. Speaker, that relies on renewables, that relies on nuclear, Mr. Speaker, relies on gas and water. We have a system, Mr. Speaker, that is the envy of North America, Mr. Speaker. We have the states, many subnationals and many of our partner provinces calling us and asking us to help them with a system we built, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue, Mr. Speaker, to find ways to reduce rates for people and families and businesses that are having a hard time making those payments, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work hard. But right now we're going to make sure that we bring forward this plan. We will make sure that we have immediate relief for Ontarians. In the very near future but no decisions have been made at this time, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Smith: Speaker one day the Minister is saying what a great job we did. The next day he's apologizing for the crisis they've created in electricity. The next day he's saying he did a great job again. You stick a quarter in this jukebox, you're going to get one of those records from this Liberal Minister. Speaker, if it was easier -- if it was as easy as this morning's vague Cabinet leak to fix this problem, then why didn't you do it years ago? Why didn't you do it -- why didn't you fix the problem when xstrata left Timmins to go to Québec? Why didn't you do it when the greenhouses in southwestern Ontario went to Michigan? Why didn't you do it when businesses were telling you that their electricity prices were going up by double digits year after year after year? Why did you wait until a year out from an election to announce that you suddenly. Have a plan to solve the crisis that you created in electricity --

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'm very pleased to rise and answer the question, because you know, Mr. Speaker, the one thing that

the opposition member forgets about is that actually this government that actually had to rebuild that system, that actually had businesses shut down, Mr. Speaker. They forget about that so quickly, Mr. Speaker. I know the Minister of economic development and growth will want to talk about the constant growth we're seeing in this province, Mr. Speaker, thanks to the efforts that we're making, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we can keep jobs, high-paying jobs in this province, Mr. Speaker, . One thing that the opposition member also forgets -- and there's a lot of things they forget to talk about. 42,000, 42,000 high-paid clean sector jobs, Mr. Speaker, are now in this province. Thank you to the investments that we have made, which they voted against every single time, Mr. Speaker. So I know the Honourable member forgets a lot of the things, Mr. Speaker, that we do as a government, but I know the people of Ontario won't, and I know our industry players, Mr. Speaker, they don't forget. That we are the party that's invested in --

MPP Armstrong to Minister Thibeault Re: Seniors and Hydro Costs

>> MPP Teresa Armstrong: Speaker, my question's to the acting Premier. I've been meeting with seniors in my riding who lived on fixed in connection. -- Incomes. They told me they're force today make tough choices at home during the day. They are being forced to turn off their heat. They can't cook their meals. Speaker, they can't stay up all night to shift their hydro usage to off peak hours. Hydro is not a luxury for seniors the way it is for the Premier. Will the Liberal government scrap their ineffective time of use hydro pricing policies as the NDP Has proposed and reduce hydro bills for seniors?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'm pleased to rise. Mr. Speaker, that's the whole reason why we're actually bringing forward a plan, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that those families, those seniors who are struggling, Mr. Speaker, who are seeing the benefit of our economic rebound, Mr. Speaker, who don't necessarily see the benefit of us rebuilding the system that we can actually find ways to help them even more, Mr. Speaker. We've done that with the 8% reduction but we know we can do more, Mr. Speaker. The Ontario electricity support program is something that seniors can use that many other families can use. Those that use electric heat, those that need medical devices, Mr. Speaker. But that's why we recognize that we can find a way, Mr. Speaker, to do more. And that's why we're actively working right now, Mr. Speaker, to find immediate relief. I know the opposite member talked about the NDP Proposal, Mr. Speaker. There was nothing. Nothing in that proposal that had immediate relief. We're working on, Mr. Speaker, finding a relief package that will be immediate, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Armstrong: Speaker, the Liberal government's own report show that time of use pricing does not encourage conservation or shift the demand away from -- shift away the demand the government has hoped for. All it's done has punished ratepayers who can't use hydro during off-peak hours, like seniors, like stay-at-home parents and like businesses. The Premier can reduce the bill of these ratepayers immediately by scrapping the time of use pricing as the NDP Has proposed. Will the Liberal government scrap their ineffective time of use pricing policies now?

>> Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not because what the NDP Doesn't see by scrapping time of use, the rates for every single ratepayer in this province, Mr. Speaker, will go up. And, Mr. Speaker, we're making sure that that's not going to happen. That's why, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that there are some families that actually could benefit from a different type of plan rather than time of use. And so we've worked, Mr. Speaker, for the last six months with our system operator on having them looking at, Mr. Speaker, coming up with some

alternatives for that type of program. But that type of program, Mr. Speaker, that type of change won't be immediate. And that's what we're working on, Mr. Speaker. Immediate relief for families. They're talking about maybe some things that possibly might add up, Mr. Speaker, in the very, very far distant future. We're working right now for immediate relief.

MPP Milczyn to Minister Chiarelli Re: Infrastructure Investment

>> MPP Peter Milczyn: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of infrastructure. On this side of the House we know infrastructure is more -- about more than just bricks and mortar. It's about creating and sustaining jobs and growing the economy and enhancing quality of life for all. And that's why I'm proud that our government is making the largest investment in critical public infrastructure in this province's history, building the schools, the hospitals, the roads, the bridges, the public transit Ontarians need to thrive in the 21st century in communities all across Ontario including my own of Etobicoke lakeshore. This is not just putting shovels in the ground. It is ee putting people to work. But, Mr. Speaker, the opposition has been claiming that we just pay lip service to this. This is simply not the case and the leader of the opposition repeating --Speech, is hoping -- he's hoping nobody's paying attention to the facts. Facts still matter in this province. So my question is to the Minister. Can he share --The facts about our infrastructure investment?

>> Minister Bob Chiarelli: Thank you to the member for the question. Speaker, there are over \$14 billion in major projects under way in this province as we speak and infrastructure Ontario is in the process of procuring \$11.8 billion more, Speaker. And we have delivered 29 brand-new schools, new courthouses in Durham, St. Thomas and Thunder Bay. Herb gray parkway, union Pearson express and highway 407 east. We have finished 100 major hospital projects, including a \$474 million mental health facility, and the lead -- in the leader of the opposition's own riding. Now he has been telling everyone who will listen that this government can't get shovels in the ground. The last three years of the Harris government -- And now they have to go to lecture us when we're spending six times that amount. Mr. Speaker, our investments in infrastructure are at historic levels.

>> MPP Milczyn: Unfathomable to me that anyone paying attention could claim this government isn't getting shovels in the ground. Where there's over \$14 billion of projects under construction as we speak. But perhaps the opposition isn't paying attention. If they were, they'd know that in their leader's riding, the government is providing more than \$10 million in formula funding this year alone. Great importance to the Premier and Minister to ensure we are building up communities in every region of the province from small towns to big cities. And I know there's many funding programs, such as the Ontario community infrastructure fund and clean water and waste water in place to help municipalities of all sizes. Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of infrastructure please explain what our government is doing to ensure. Communities everywhere, including the leader's riding, are benefiting from this historic infrastructure investment.

>> Minister Chiarelli: Thank you, Speaker. The member mentioned chip and water, programs we are very proud of and that have been warmly welcomed by our municipal leaders. We are investing \$100 million in expanding natural gas access to underserved areas in the province, something that party has never done. We are tripling our community infrastructure fund to \$300 million. And we negotiated with the federal government to ensure that clean water and wastewater funding flows through every municipality in Ontario. That means every member in this House, including every member opposite, will see investments in their riding. Everywhere you look at our great province, there's evidence of a major investment that is getting shovels in the ground and putting Ontarians at work. Mr. Speaker, the leader of the opposition should look in the mirror and vote for Kathleen Wynne.

MPP Arnott (Thompson) to Minister Murray Re: Stewardship Program

>> MPP Ted Arnott: Mr. Speaker my question is for the Minister of the environment. On Monday in this House, the Minister refused to accept responsibility for the Ontario tire stewardship program, suggesting instead it was the fault of the previous government. That statement was false. The Ontario tire stewardship was established in 2009, six years after the Liberal government was first elected. Last February the Minister told this House that he'd have the Ontario tire stewardship wound up within a year. Today is the first day of March. The year has now passed. Will the Minister explain to this House why he missed his deadline for winding up Ontario tire stewardship and why he is now planning to extend it by another 22 months?

>> Minister Glen Murray: Thank you. I'm glad they're doing fact checking, Mr. Speaker, because the entire legislation that turned out to be problematic, which the moment opposite agreed was not working, was passed by the Conservative government in 2002. LED to a series of market failures. You're quite correct about the tire stewardship organization but I think a little humility on both sides would be helpful here because the system didn't work. We had bill 91, bill 93, both of which we couldn't get through this House and bills stalled by the opposition which would have fixed this years ago, Mr. Speaker. We had not a single question for 18 months on any of the I.F.O's or stewardship programs by the government -- by the party opposite as how the government last year. Had bill 151 and there was a "Toronto star" story. We got our first question. We'd already fixed -- Mr. Speaker, before they even --

>> MPP Lisa Thompson: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister. Speaker, I find it passing strange that this Minister was not doing his own job, passing oversight on his own eco tax program, and now he's missing his own deadline. Speaker, beyond the alleged theft of half a million dollars under his nose, there's another issue the Minister needs to own. O.T.S. Has a surplus of \$50 million that's right. O.T.S., an agency of this government, gouged Ontarians for an extra \$60 million, when Ontarians buy new tires this spring, Speaker, we're still going to pay that Aiko -- eco tax. Will the Minister tell us where this extra money is going and what is it being used for?

>> Minister Murray: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is passing precious and strange. The decision to turn the entire operation over to for-profit companies and pull the public sector out of it was a decision of the government opposite. We inherited that when it was all deployed, Mr. Speaker, and tried to fix it on three separate occasions. It was this Premier that two years ago, Mr. Speaker, said I'm not happy with -- We then proposed radical restructuring, the elimination of the

I.F.O's in consideration that there were these risks. Then we ordered an investigation, which is currently out of the way. Without any prompting from the opposition. Look at the owl. Look at the eagle. We've done our job. When are you going to do yours?

MPP Natyshak to Minister Thibeault Re: Rural/Northern Hydro Costs

>> MPP Taras Natyshak: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, question's to the acting Premier. A constituent of mine from Amherstburg Mrs. Linda Eaton shared her hydro bill with me. Last year her bill was \$372 for January. The Premier promised that her bills would go down for rural ratepayers like Mrs. Eaton but that's obviously not what happened. This year her January bill was over \$500 for roughly the same amount of energy used and her hydro delivery charge has doubled in two years. Will the Premier provide real relief for ratepayers like Mrs. Eaton and reduce her rural delivery rates to what urban ratepayers pay as new Democrats have proposed?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise and respond because, Mr. Speaker, for those Hydro One r2 customers which are 330,000 House holds, Mr. Speaker, they have seen a \$60 reduction off of their delivery line, Mr. Speaker, and that's because we acted when we heard that many in rural and remotes in north part -- northern parts of our province are paying a higher amount, Mr. Speaker. We do recognize that we need to do more and that's why we're looking and working on a plan right now, Mr. Speaker, to provide more relief to specifically like the person that the Honourable member mentioned, Mr. Speaker, because r2 only provides that relief to 330,000 House holds, Mr. Speaker. This he do get that 8% and we do recognize, Mr. Speaker, that those folks that do live in rural, remote or northern parts of our province do pay a higher proportion on their bills. So, Mr. Speaker, that's why. We're continuing to act. They're seeing the benefits of a clean system, a reliable system and green system. We're now going to make sure, Mr. Speaker, we make it as affordable as possible.

>> MPP Natyshak: Speaker, forgive me but it sounds like another Liberal stretch goal like the 15% off auto insurance that we never saw. We won't hold our breath. Speaker Mr. And Mrs. Eaton are seniors living on fixed incomes. They don't have access to natural gas and they don't have a chance but to heat with hydro. They've done everything that the Premier has told them to do in order to lower their bills. They do their laundry and their dishes in off peak hours. They keep their living room temperature at 18°. They even keep their kitchen temperature at 13° but their hydro bills keep going up even though the Premier has promised that they would go down. Will the Premier get rid of unfair rural delivery rates and reduce the bills for families like the Eatons?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first part of that question I would like to respond to when it relates to natural gas, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to also highlight that our government is investing \$100 million in a grant program, Mr. Speaker, to make sure we can get natural gas out to as many

communities as possible. I know the Minister of infrastructure has been spearheading that at and doing a great job with that, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to, Mr. Speaker, doing more for families like the Honourable member mentioned, we do agree, Mr. Speaker, that more needs to be done and that's why, Mr. Speaker, we're working very hard right now, Mr. Speaker, on a plan that will provide immediate relief. And, Mr. Speaker, we will make sure that we work on this plan and roll it out as quickly as possible, Mr. Speaker, because we do understand that, while we've invested in the system and while we've made it clean and while we've made it green. It needs to be as affordable as possible and that's why, Mr. Speaker, we're working very, very hard to ensure that we can get this done as quickly as possible to do just that.

MPP Vernile to Minister Damerla Re: Seniors Affairs

>> MPP Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of seniors' affairs. The Minister 's now leading a new full-fledged ministry that's dedicated to the well-being of Ontario seniors and it's reshaping how we view aging in Ontario. This decision shows commitments of both the Premier and all our members are making to support older adults. In my riding of Kitchener sentary the head of a local retirement home told me recently today seniors want to be active and lead a life of purpose regardless of their age. We have long-term care facilities, community centres and educational programs designed especially with today's seniors in mind. Minister, we know that you've been very busy working to transition to your new role and you have some very interesting ideas on shaping this ministry. Speaker, cot Minister of seniors' affairs share with us some of her aspirations in this new important role she has?

>> Minister Dipika Damerla: I want to begin by thanking the member from Kitchener Centre for the question. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, I I'm truly honoured to be the Minister of seniors. I can't think of a better time than the year 2017 to create this stand-alone ministry, and that's because, Mr. Speaker, as we all know 2017 is that watershed year. This is the year when in Ontario there's more people over the age of 65 than children under the age of 16. There's 2.2 million seniors in Ontario, Mr. Speaker, and I say that's 2.2 million very good reasons to create the stand-alone ministry of seniors. Mr. Speaker, we have a vision that we want to make Ontario the best place in the world to grow up and grow old in, and I commit to giving life to that vision. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. And I want to thank the Minister for her answer. It's very encouraging to hear that we are addressing the changing needs of seniors and to see the transition to a full ministry. The Minister has been documenting her activities on social media. This is a really good way for all of us to stay informed of her activities. You've been out almost every day meeting with seniors and stakeholders, hearing their concerns and offering them support. This is a very important undertaking, listening and it's no doubt greatly appreciated by the people with whom you have visited. It's important for all members to get out and to hear feedback from people that we are working to support. So, Speaker, could the Minister of seniors' affairs please tell us about her recent tour? She's been crisscrossing Ontario, chatting with people, listening to them. I for one would like to hear what happens to her.

>> Minister Damerla: Thank you, Speaker. I want to again thank the member for the question. I'm really glad that my staff has been diligently posting my tour on social media. This winter, Mr. Speaker, I travelled across the province to meet with seniors face to face, because I wanted to hear from them first hand what

their concerns are and that's why, Mr. Speaker, I visited elderly persons centre in Ancaster and Hamilton, met with seniors in cobourg not once, Mr. Speaker, but twice and spoke with university students about tackling the challenges of an aging population at Trent university with Mr. Leal and listen today a diverse group of advocates in Etobicoke and newmarket with MPP Milczyn and MPP Baker. Mr. Speaker, I was in northern Ontario with Minister Zimmer and met with first nations, nycashwin -- I visited sandy lake to announce funding for a new elders hub but I'm not done, Mr. Speaker. I intend to continue touring the province.

MPP Scott to Minister Leal Re: Agriculture and Hydro Costs

>> MPP Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of energy. Last month the leader of the opposition and I visited the sullen farms in the town ship of Peterborough where we heard from local farmer Bulluck that his hydro has tripled over the past ten years. He still has the same number of cows he did a decade ago. Es'd been improving the efficiency of his business and even milks the cows by hand to save hydro costs. The government's 8% rebate is nothing but a drop in the bucket. The hard working farmers across rural Ontario are tough and proud but as Randy puts it, it is just too much. So my question to the Minister of energy is when will the Liberal government stop forcing agriculture, one of our main economic drivers, out of the province with their irresponsible hydro costs?

>> MPP Jeff Leal: Hal Burton Kawartha Lakes Brock for the question this morning. Just to give you a little insight, particularly the dairy industry in the province of Ontario. Over the last two years the dairy industry province of Ontario quoted an increase of 6% each and every year. What does that tell you, Mr. Speaker ? That tells you -- That tells you the dairy sector is growing significantly in the province of Ontario. Agriculture and agri-food processing, Mr. Speaker, contributes \$36 billion to Ontario's G.D.P. Each and every year. It's a growing sector. You know, Mr. Speaker, this morning at 5:30 A.M. -- Mr. Speaker, at 5:30 A.M. This morning, 800,000 Ontarians woke up to pursue their careers in agriculture. The Honourable lady says the quote increase has nothing to do with that. Yes, it has everything to do with it. We work with dairy farmers --

>> MPP Scott: The cost to agriculture because of the rising cost of energy is real. You can't ignore that. The government's response to the ongoing hydro crisis has been something to behold. For years they denied there was a problem. Then they blamed the problem on anyone else but themselves. Finally they admitted they are responsible for the hydro mess but offered Ontarians a weak and tone-deaf response. Ontarians' saw through the government's actions and told them they were doing far too little far too late to respond to the growing energy problem in the province. Today we hear they're once again scrambling to try to buy back Ontarians' trust but how can Ontarians trust this government to do anything to solve the mess that they themselves created over 14 years of mismanagement? Tell that to the dairy farmers.

>> Minister Leal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just want to reply to the supplementary. The Honourable should know dairy quoted Ontario is worth about \$6 billion and growing each and every year. The party opposite when we proposed a risk management program, for everybody else outside of the supply management sector they didn't support it. Mr. Speaker, on the back extensions of Ontario, we're hearing now that the leader of the opposition -- we're hearing in the back concessions of Ontario that the leader of the opposition may be

endorsing Maxine Bernier as the next federal Conservative leader. Mr. Speaker, you know what mad max wants to do is to get rid of supply management --

MPP Mantha to Minister Murray Re: Grassy Narrows First Nation Contamination

>> MPP Michael Mantha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to you. My question is to the acting Premier. On February 13th, your government released a statement that said you are completely committed to identify all contaminated sites and clean up the English wabigoon river of the Mercury that has been poisoning the grassy first nations for two generations. Will the acting Premier tell this legislature and the people of this province exactly what promises the Premier made to chief for business ter in a meeting held with him on February 10th? -- Chief forebusiness ter.

>> Minister Glen Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Honourable member for the question on something we both agree is a critical issue. It is incredibly shocking to me that, from the 1960s on, this problem festered to the degradation of the environment. More importantly in this case people's health. We have invested over \$300,000 now with the first nation to do study. We have now identified both approach and remediation of the river. We are now moving to have Dr. Rudd finalize that work. We have identified the second source. We now have to figure out the nature of the source whether it's groundwater or sediment. And then we have to start the engineering work. We're going to be advancing additional funding and I want to thank Dr. Rudd and his team, because after a lifetime, almost as long as I've been alive on this planet. I think all of us in this House wish we had behaved differently over the last 50 years. I don't think anyone has clean hands here, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Mantha: Again to the acting Premier. A report released yesterday, funded by the government, said that there is strong evidence of an ongoing source of Mercury contamination at the old mill site down the river of grassy narrows. Yet this government has said repeatedly that the mill site is not an ongoing source of Mercury. Why has this government never bothered to test the river next to the Dryden mill?

>> Minister Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we tested the mill. We tested all the sites Mr. Gla wacky pointed out. Domtar has been required to monitor the wells and sites and no one could find this. We also invested -- we're funding Dr. Rudd's work and finally, on the fourth try, Dr. Rudd found it. It is very difficult to find these things. The reason we know where the second source is is because this government has put hundreds of thousands of dollars into a crack science team to locate it. I wish someone else, when all of us were in power during those periods of time, and not one party prior to this government was in power, took action on that so maybe we could all have a little humility and hopefully we'll get the engineering work, the water treatment facilities and we'll get this fixed and restore. Some respect for the people who live there, which they

are owed, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Martins to Minister MacCharles Re: Bill 59-Door to Door Salespeople

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Minister of government and consumer services. I hear time and again from constituents in Davenport about commission-dependent salespeople aggressively pressuring residents into signing contracts for air conditioning units, water heaters and heating units. Unclear contracts are misrepresentations by sales people to convince residents to enter into contracts with exorbitant fees. This aggressive door-to-door marketing tactic has been a long-standing consumer protection issue, as it is often the most vulnerable consumers who are targeted. Unfortunately it is often the socially isolated and less well informed consumers who are particularly susceptible to this type of marketing. This is especially true of my riding of Davenport which is home to a large number of seniors a large number of immigrants who do not have English as their first language and cannot communicate, read or write it well in English. Could the Minister explain what measures our government has in place to protect our most vulnerable from being taken advantage of by these unfair marketing tactics?

>> Minister Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Davenport for her important question and her strong work on behalf of her community. It's incredible dedication. As the Minister of government and consumer services, I am committed to protecting consume nurse their home from overly aggressive and deceptive business practices. Currently our consumer protection act gives consumers special rights entering contracts in their home. Consumers have the right to cancel contracts for any reason within a cooling-off period, as well as specific requirements for contracts to provide specific information. Otherwise consumers can cancel them within a year of signing. However, we know, Speaker, that there is more to be done to protect consumers and our most vulnerable members of society from being misled or taken advantage of. And that's why we introduce bill 59. Happy to talk more about that in the supplementary.

MPP N. Miller to Minister Thibeault Re: Northern Hydro Costs

>> MPP Norm Miller: My question is for the Minister of energy. Speaker, we know that the effects of hydro prices on our rural communities are placing a strain on families and businesses. Unfortunately this new reality of living in Ontario is now set in arenas and Curling Rinks as they become increasingly expensive to run. Arena staple of the community has seen generations of figure skaters, hockey and ringette players learn on its site. The hydro bill now comes in at about \$50,000 per year. Combined with other maintenance costs, the municipality is seriously considering closing the arena. Speaker, will the Minister explain how he expects communitys to keep their arenas open in Ontario with Ontario's outrageous electricity costs?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again I'll reiterate many of the things I've been saying today and for the last eight months since I've been Minister, Mr. Speaker. We are continuing to find ways to put rates in a position of being lower not only for ratepayers and families, Mr. Speaker, but of course for municipalities and for arenas. Yesterday I know the MPP From Timiskaming- Cochrane talked about his Curling rink. Many of us have these facilities in our ridings and it's very, very important for us, especially as this government as we continue to invest, Mr. Speaker, in infrastructure and building Ontario up, that we continue to find ways to lower rates for those institutions, Mr. Speaker. I used my example yesterday of the Curling club in greater Sudbury, Mr. Speaker, that was able to save thousands of dollars, Mr. Speaker, by actually utilizing the programs that we've put in place, Mr. Speaker, to actually help them, Mr. Speaker. Help them bring their rates down, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Able to lower their rates, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP N. Miller: Again the Minister of energy. Speaker, it's truly hard to believe that we're even having the conversation about how to save recreational facilities in our small communities. Like the Bala arena the Huntsville community club is a community staple. The club recently hosted their annual family day open House to allow young curlers to get introduced to a new sport. It's sad to say however even if they really enjoyed it, the increasing costs to play has brought fears that this will be a Barrier to new members. One third of the current membership fee already goes to keeping the lights on. The fact is Curling clubs don't have many tools to offset rapidly increasing hydro costs. As costs to play rise, organizers fear membership numbers will continue to decline over time. So, Speaker, would the Minister please explain how hydro prices were allowed to get this out of control under his government's watch?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know in most parts of the province, the great work that our Minister of tourism and sport is doing to encourage people to play sports and Curling is one of those sports, Mr. Speaker.

We're seeing more and more people actually engaging in this sport, Mr. Speaker, and that's a great thing. But when it comes to making sure, Mr. Speaker, that we have this conversation, the one conversation that they overlook, Mr. Speaker, is they actually left our system in shambles. We actually had to build the system back up. \$50 about I don't know we had to spend, Mr. Speaker, to invest in transmission, to invest in generation, Mr. Speaker. Now what do they want to do, Mr. Speaker ? They want to rip up all of our renewable contracts. Stop renewable energy in this province, Mr. Speaker, and that is not something that we on this side of the House agree with, Mr. Speaker. That brought in billions of investment. Created tens of thousands of jobs, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to invest in the province and in our recreation facilities.