

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript - Monday, April 3, 2017

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Monday, April 3, 2017.

MIT did not receive any questions of interest.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

MSA did not receive any questions of interest.

Questions today remained largely related Ministry of Energy with questions spread over Hydro One Executive salaries, hydro rate reductions and small business hydro rates.

The official Hansard will be available later today by clicking on the link below.

http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/house-proceedings/house_proceedings_home.do?locale=en

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Sandals) Re: Hydro One Exec Salaries

>> MPP Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The C.E.O. Of the Ontario power generation earned nearly \$1.2 million last year. The C.E.O. Of Hydro One earned \$4.5 million last year. In total, the top five executives at Hydro One made a whopping \$11 million. Mr. Speaker, when people across Ontario can barely afford to keep the lights on, they can barely afford their hydro bills, how can the Premier allow these salaries that are completely out of control?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know the member -- or --E leader of the opposition makes a point that people across Ontario are struggling with their hydro bills. Mr. Speaker, that's why we're removing 25% from those hydro bills come this spring, Mr. Speaker. And that's why, for people in -- for people in more rural and remote communities, Mr. Speaker, they're going to see more like a 40 to 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker. We have a plan. We are implementing that plan, Mr. Speaker. We know that there are people who are burdened by their electricity bills across the province. That's why we have the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, and that's exactly why it is going to reduce people's bills across the province by 25%, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. He's not just the million-dollar salaries and hydro that the Premier does not want to address. It is not just the energy sector. The government has backed up the Brinks truck for executives across all government agencies. Let's take a look at the president of union Pearson express or should -- should I say the former president Cathy Haley. She resigned March 21, 2016 but she still managed to earn \$230,000, not bad for three months' work. Mr. Speaker, how does this government manage that? How does this government allow salaries that are completely out of control? And try to justify that it's appropriate, whether it's \$4.5 million for the Hydro One C.E.O. Or \$230,000 for three months' work? Give me a break. The average Ontarian can't afford their hydro bill and they're allowing this -- Not right. How does the Premier allow --

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Yes. Thank you very much. And of course after everyone knows we released on Friday the public sector salary disclosure, the sunshine list. And I think it's important to understand what's on the sunshine list. The sunshine list lists the salaries of Ontario's public service and broader public sector people who have been paid more than \$100,000. It's important to realize that that's not necessarily their annual salary. And in the case of people who have retired after serving in the public sector for a number of years, they may have vacation pay owing. They may have severance pay owing, and what you're seeing is not. 25% or 50% or 100% of annual salary. It represents those adjustments -- On severance.

>> MPP Brown: Again to the Premier. I appreciate why the Premier doesn't want to be on the record on what her government is paying executives. Hearing the talking points from the Minister that \$4.5 million salary's appropriate because there are things like vacation pay or \$230,000 for three months' work? Mr. Speaker, it doesn't wash. And the reality in Ontario is, you know, those nurses working twice as hard because of Liberal cuts, they're not part of this millionaires' club. Those main in a maintenance crews at schools that are falling apart. Aren't part of those raises. It's offensive. The reality is these salaries are out of control, Mr. Speaker, and I want this Premier to stand in this House and say that she supports this, that -- why she's allowed t.how can you pay \$4.5 million. Patrick Brown: To the hydro C.E.O. When nowhere else in Canada do they allow salaries like that?

>>Minister Sandals: Yes. Of course we recognize that \$100,000 is a lot of money. It's more than the average Ontarian makes, and what we have seen is that, when you look at the increase in salaries, the average salary in the last year is about \$116 more than the average salary the prior year. So not a huge shift. But what we do see each year is more and more people on the sunshine list, and of course that's because the legislation that created this in the first place, the public sector salary disclosure act in 1996, has the 100,000 threshold embedded right in the legislation. In fact where the threshold to having -- Speaker, the current threshold would be about \$150,000 and 84% of the people on the list would be dropped.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro One Exec Salaries

>> MPP Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Over 123,000 people were on the sunshine list. Mr. Speaker, there were untold thousands more missing and some would have been at the very top of that list. Mr. Speaker, why did this government choose to hide the salaries of Hydro One's highly paid executives? Are there any more members of this millionaires club? I'm sure there is. We've seen that in the top five salaries that were required to be released. How many more millionaires did this government hide from Hydro One?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the leader of the opposition is asking how many and how much people are earning in the private sector, Mr. Speaker, in every publicly traded company and every corporation around the province. If that's what he's asking, Mr. Speaker, and he thinks there should be legislation that would go beyond what is already required in terms of disclosure, I think that he should say that, Mr. Speaker. I think he knows that Hydro One is now -- has moved into being a publicly traded company. I know, I know that these salaries are high, Mr. Speaker. I know that they're much higher than the vast majority of Ontarians. I also know that people are struggling with their electricity bill. That's why we have a plan, Mr. Speaker. That's why we are going to reduce people's electricity bills by 25%, Mr. Speaker .p We're actually taking action because we recognize that people are the challenged across the province.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Premier can't have it both ways. The government still has a majority of shares of Hydro One. And what they've allowed to T happen with these out-of-control salaries is wrong. The Premier knows it's wrong. \$4.5 million for the C.E.O. \$2.9 million for the executive vice-president. \$1.7 million paid to the chief financial officer. \$1.4 million paid to the chief operating officers, and \$1.2 million to another executive vice-president. Mr. Speaker, this millionaires club at Hydro One that the Premier has created is wrong. Everyone in Ontario knows these pay cheques are too much and, Mr. Speaker, through you, I'm asking the Premier to do the right thing while they still have majority of the shares and rein in these offensive executive salaries.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really do understand why the leader of the opposition is taking this track, Mr. Speaker, because he has no plan and no idea how he would reduce electricity bills. So, Mr. Speaker, as I said I know these salarys are high, Mr. Speaker. We know that people are struggling with electricity bills. That's why we're going to reduce people's hydro bills, Mr.

Speaker. And we remain committed to continued regulation of Hydro One. We made that quite clear, Mr. Speaker, from the outset. Hydro One is now transitioned into a publicly traded company. It's not a government agency. I would think that the leader of the opposition would understand that, Mr. Speaker. Hydro One has made changes, Mr. Speaker. In fact in the first year of their going public, Mr. Speaker, they've actually found \$60 million in savings, Mr. Speaker. So what's happening at Hydro One is becoming a better company. We knew that that was going to happen. They are publicly traded and they have to now -- they're regulated by the rules for publicly traded companies, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. In the entire sunshine list, with 123,000 names on it, only two people topped \$1 million. Hydro One has five senior executives making \$1 million. And that is only the ones we know about, the ones that the government hasn't hidden. There could be unfold others in this millionaires club. And we have the Premier, who still has a majority control, trying to have it both ways. She's allowed these salaries. The Premier knows that she could rein this in, but instead of actually taking responsibility she's blaming others. We heard one Minister blame G.O. Train riders understand. Now the Premier is trying to blame the opposition for salaries that she handed out, for salaries that she approved. They're the government. They've created this mess. Do the right thing and rein in these offensive salaries.

>>Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise and address this subject, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier mentioned and as the opposition doesn't seem to know, Mr. Speaker, Hydro One is now a publicly traded company and decisions over compensation are not made by But, Mr. Speaker, let's put some context into this, Mr. Speaker. The executive salaries at Hydro One Mr. Speaker -- Hydro One Mr. Speaker -- thank you, Mr. Speaker. So let's have some context here. The executive salaries -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The executive salaries at hydro(one make about 0.1% of their total budget, Mr. Speaker. So even if the member opposite cut the salaries in half, that wouldn't take one cent off a single customer's bill, Mr. Speaker. That just shows, Mr. Speaker, they have absolutely no plan and no idea on what to do in the electricity sector, Mr. Speaker. Our 25% reduction on average will make sure we help all business, family and --

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my question's to the Premier. The sunshine list was released on Friday and there was one very notable company name that was not on it and that was Hydro One. We know that the Hydro One c.e.o.'s salary -- the Hydro One C.E.O., rather, raked in a salary of \$4.5 million in 500% increase from the last time the C.E.O. Salary appeared on the sunshine list. Can the Premier tell Ontarians why her priority seems to be protecting the salaries and anonymity of the people at the top instead of regular Ontario families and businesses that are struggling just to get by?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, my priority is to make sure that everyone in this province gets relief on their hydro bills, Mr. Speaker. 25% reduction for every family in this province, Mr. Speaker. Electricity bill it is their homes. Relief for those small mom and pop shops on main streets in communities, Mr. Speaker. Relief for farmers. We recognize --: We recognize there are people across the province who need that relief, Mr. Speaker, which is exactly why we're put ago plan in place that the actually will reduce people's electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. People will see those reductions come the summer and that is in direct response to people's concerns about their ability to pay their electricity bills.

>> MPP Horwath: Speaker, by privatizing Hydro One Premier Wynne ensured three things -- that those at the top can make massive salaries, that the rest of us will pay massive electricity bills, and that she could throw a blanket of secrecy over the whole mess, Speaker. What does the Premier have to say to Ontarians who are struggling to keep up with their hydro bills and are outraged by her continued insistence -- While hiding how much top executives are being paid?

>> Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, let me once again be very, very clear. And I know the leader of the third party loves to conflate these issues. But changing the direction on the broadening the ownership of Hydro One would not take one cent off one electricity bill anywhere in this province, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause] As much as the leader of the third party would like to pretend that that was the case, Mr. Speaker. Not one cent. Not off one electricity bill. So, Mr. Speaker, we have brought forward a strategy, a plan that is going to take people's bills down, Mr. Speaker. 25% reduction across the province, Mr. Speaker, because we recognize that people need that support. The investments that we have made in the electricity system to make it clean, to make it reliable, have a cost associated with them, Mr. Speaker. We are going to reduce people's bills on top of the 8% that people have already seen. Another 17%, Mr. Speaker, because we know that they need that support.

>> MPP Horwath: Speaker, it is disgusting that when people are suffering and some can't pay their hydro bills that we have executives at public utilities raking in millions. The C.E.O. Of O.P.G. Was the highest paid public employee last year and the C.E.O. Of Hydro One made over \$4 million. In Montreal, bombardier, a private company, listed to public pressure and is holding off on massive pay increases for the company's top staff after hundreds of Québécois rallied outside the company's headquarters. Here in Ontario, people are equally outraged by the planned pay hikes for Hydro One C.E.O., especially amid soaring hydro bills. Why won't the Premier do the right thing and rein in the salaries of the executives at Hydro One?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me just say again that I recognize that people across the province are struggling with their electricity bills, which is exactly why the fair hydro plan will reduce people's electricity bills by 25%, Mr. Speaker. That is the context within which we're having this conversation. We have a plan that we have brought forward that will reduce people's bills substantially. In more rural and remote communities, Mr. Speaker, people will see a reduction of 40 to 50%. So we know that people need that support. We know that they need those reductions, Mr. Speaker. At the same time the broadening the ownership of Hydro One is directly related to our ability to invest in infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, transit and transportation infrastructure that the leader of the third party does not support but which is necessary to the well-being of this province, Mr. Speaker. We are going to continue on that path. Hydro One has found \$60 million in efficiencies, Mr. Speaker. They a better run company and people will see reductions on their electricity bill this is summer.

MPP Horwath to Hoskins (Thibeault) Re: Exec Salaries

>> MPP Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. The problem the Premier has is that nobody believes her anymore. Nobody believes anything this Premier says anymore. The Wynne government's priorities are backwards, Speaker. It's not just in the energy sector. It's health care, too. Six of the top ten highest paid public employees in 2016 were hospital C.E.O.S. Health care dollars should make it to bedsides, Speaker, not stops at the corner offices. Ontarians need health care that they can count on and they will get it if the Premier continues to allow these exorbitant salaries while also allowing hospital hydro bills to soar. When will she finally put patients' needs first, stop her ridiculous, unwanted sell-off of Hydro One and cap hospital C.E.O. Salaries so public money actually Goss patient care?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I think all of us appreciate in the first instance that hospitals are independent corporations. But we expect them, as we do across governments that, when they make decisions with regards to allocation of public funds they take into consideration the opportunity and responsibility to allocate as much as possible towards frontline care. That high quality of care that they provide. It's no different than in our hospitals, Mr. Speaker. So that's why I'm particularly proud that we also, as a government, passed the public sector and MPP Accountability and transparency act. It sets out certain parameters millimetre and expectations that we do have. But we need to recognize that we need to provide our hospitals with the ability, as independent corporations, to be able to manage their affairs so

that they are able to truly provide the highest quality of care and allocate resources responsibly to that effect.

>> MPP Horwath: Speaker, the sunshine list also brilliant again this year but because of -- grew, but because of her wrong-headed decision to sell off Hydro One the salaries every executives are hidden from the public. Thanks to the Premier's meddling we don't have any idea how much public money was spent on salaries at Hydro One. How can the Premier claim to care about the mess that she's created in our public hydro system if she won't -- won't even open the books at Hydro One? What is this Premier afraid of, Speaker ?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know, as the Premier said, our government strongly believes in ensuring public salaries are fair to employees but also reasonable, Mr. Speaker, to the public purse. When it comes to Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, and O.P.G., following the process laid out in our government's framework O.P.G. Sought appropriate comparators set for compensation at a level that is restrained but competitive for that industry. I understand the salaries at O.P.G. Can seem surprising, it is important to remember key facts, Mr. Speaker, that these are experts, technical, nuclear experts and we want these operators in our plants to be the best in the world, Mr. Speaker. So the most recent framework for o.p.g.'s leadership team reflect performance leadership only paid out, Mr. Speaker, if the company attains certain goals during refurbishment which, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say right now is ahead of schedule and under budget, Mr. Speaker, because of the dynamic team that we have at O.P.G.. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Horwath: Only a Liberal Cabinet Minister would say million-dollar salaries are restrained. Only a Liberal Cabinet Minister would have the gall to say that. The sunshine list this year reminds Ontarians that this Premier and her government are only out for themselves and those at the top. She's refused to disclose salaries at Hydro One, even though the government has yet to finish its sell-off. She's allowing millions to be funneled to top hospital executives while Ontarians get less and less frontline health care -- funneled. The people of Ontario need a leader who will fight for them, not just allow those at the top to rake in millions while protected by a veil of secrecy she has thrown over her on popular decisions.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again we recognize that we brought forward a framework, Mr. Speaker, to help keep salaries restrained, Mr. Speaker. Talking about Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, in that time, since we've broadened the ownership of Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, they have become a better-run company, Mr. Speaker. They sure have. It's providing better service and better value both to its customers and to the province, Mr. Speaker. Just a few of the customer initiatives they've taken out in the last few months, Mr. Speaker, introduced a more active customer communication, calling customers directly with issues. Of course introducing Of course introducing a voluntary ban on winter disconnections, giving customers choice with their billing cycles, Mr. Speaker, helping them to manage their bills better. Introducing e-billing, Mr. Speaker. Working towards mobile billing. Ending the practice of secure deposits for new customers, Mr. Speaker. And last year, Mr. Speaker, that executive group. Saved \$60 million.

MPP Yurek to Minister Hoskins Re: Medical Assistance in Dying

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Speaker, last week during public hearings the government's medical assistance in dying bill we heard from several conscientious objecting doctors concerned they'll be forced to participate by making

an effective refusal. The Minister announced coordination service that allows patients to seek medically assisted dying themselves. Account Minister guarantee the conscious rights of all physicians will be protected and no doctor in Ontario will be forced today make an effective referral?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to receive this question this morning, as we proceed through the various legislative components ultimately. Hopefully with the passage of the bill responsible for medical assistance in dying, Mr. Speaker. And I have said many times here in the legislature and also publicly outside of the legislature my deep respect, profound respect for those -- anyone, let alone those health care professionals who do, for reasons of conscience, have made that decision that they do not want to participate in medical assistance in dying. I respect that. The federal legislation, the provincial legislation that's proposed in no way requires them or asks them to participate in medical assistance in dying. And in the supplementary, I'm happy to speak. To two other measures we have and will be putting in place, which will provide additional supports, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Yurek: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister. Speaker, the Minister cites concerns about access to medical assistance in dying but the policies in British Columbia and Alberta that don't require doctors to make referrals have shown that conscientious rights protections are not a barrier to access. If the current policy is upheld and doctors are forced today to make effective referrals to medical assistance in dying, many fear they'll have no other choice than to leave the profession together. If doctors are forced to make effective referrals, how many doctors will be

forced today to stop practising and how many more patients in Ontario become orphaned?

>>Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shortly after the federal legislation became law in this province, we created a clinician referral service, where any health care professional can contact that service which is run through the ministry of health to identify practitioners who are prepared to provide advice, do an assessment and a number of them also, if required and requested to provide medical assistance in dying. We also have committed publicly and we are close. I would say next month, perhaps even at the end of this month we will have in place a care coordination service, which is available to any Ontarian, including patients, loved ones, caregivers to directly interact with health care professionals to seek advice. Help them secure that pathway should they so decide to pursue medical assistance in dying.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>>MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question to the Premier. In 2015, then energy Minister BOB Chiarelli promised privatization of Hydro One wouldn't drive up hydro rates. In fact he said and I will quote -- Hydro One will now be an even stronger performing customer service focused company. And any efficiencies created can be passed onto customers to help reduce rates. Unquote. Well, late last Friday, Hydro One filed a distribution rate application for 2018 to 2022. Instead of reducing rates, as promised, Hydro One wants a 6.5% rate increase next year and a total increase of 20% by 2022. 20%. Will the Premier finally admit what 80% of --

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise and address this, Mr. Speaker. So let's remember something important here, too, Mr. Speaker. Our government is lowering bills by 25% on average per household. As many as half a million small businesses and farms starting this summer, Mr. Speaker. It's the single largest reduction in the province's history with rates also held to inflation for the next four years, Mr. Speaker. We will achieve this reduction no matter the outcome of this application, Mr. Speaker. In fact Hydro One's rural customers will be seeing even greater reductions from our fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker. We're expanding the support for these customers facing the highest delivery costs in the province, Mr. Speaker, including Hydro One's rural customers. As a result of some of these Ontarians will see reductions as large as 40 to 50% on their bills, Mr. Speaker. These are truly substantial savings and the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, will work for all.

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. In 2015, the Premier's privatization czar Ed Clark said, quote -- private sector discipline would mean lower rates for Hydro One customers. Private sector discipline means that Hydro One C.E.O. Salaries now six times what the previous C.E.O. Had been earning, paid for by ratepayers. Private sector discipline means Hydro One is fighting to keep the benefits of a \$2.6 billion tax cut that would normally benefit ratepayers. And now private sector discipline means a 20% increase for Hydro One. So Ontario families can pay more profits to private incest tors -- investors. Ontario ratepayers can't afford any more private sector discipline. Will the Premier stop her shortsighted sell-off of Hydro One and return it to public ownership?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the O.E.B., our judicial regulator, makes sure that they will review this application, and if in the past, Mr. Speaker, they have denied applications, they have decreased applications, Mr. Speaker, and of course we're not going to prejudge where they're going to go with this, Mr. Speaker, unlike the opposition. When it comes to Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, as mentioned, \$60 million in savings. That do benefit and go back to the ratepayers, Mr. Speaker, unlike what the opposition is saying, Mr. Speaker. Again better-run company, Mr. Speaker. Voluntarily bring forward the introducing that -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course introducing a voluntary ban on winter disconnections, Mr. Speaker. Giving customers choice with billing ISS. Helping them better manage their bills, Mr. Speaker. Let's not forget a 40 to 50% Hydro One r1 and r2 customers, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Vernile to Minister Leal (Thibeault) Re: Small Business and Hydro Fees

>> MPP Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister responsible for small business. By contrast to what the opposition has been telling the public, the facts show that small businesses in Ontario are continuing to thrive under the government's watch. Ontario has created 700,000 new jobs since the recession and the unemployment rate has dropped to 6.4%, the lowest in eight years. In the first three quarters of 2016, Ontario LED all G-7 nations in economic growth but sadly, we've heard the opposition talking down Ontario's economy rather than promoting all the advantages our province has to offer. From our highly educated workforce, clean air, clean water, renewed roads, bridges and transit, and our nation-leading health care system. On this side of the House, Speaker, we understand -- The important contribution small businesses make in the province. Speaker, could the Minister please update this House on the state of the small businesses in Ontario?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Kitchener Centre for the question this morning. Interesting enough, Mr. Speaker, our daughter Shanay was in Kitchener over the weekend checking out Laurier University as a possible destination for a school this fall. She said, dad, I want to pass on you. Make sure you tell the member from Kitchener Centre that things are booming in Kitchener these days. Things are booming. And let me say, with over 500,000 small and medium sized enterprises in Ontario, S.C. M.s main make up 99.7% of all businesses in Ontario. Kitchener year. Between 2012 and 2014 69% of S.T.M.S in Ontario reported increased average yearly growth of sales. Through eastern Ontario development fund and northwestern development fund. We have funded over 200 projects, 35,000 jobs, more than \$1.7 billion in investment.

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to thank the Minister for his response. Should his daughter choose to attend Wilfrid Laurier University, we would welcome her with open arms. Speaker, we know that development funds are having a major impact across the province in helping owners grow their businesses and we've certainly seen this in Kitchener Centre. But, Speaker, business owners must deal with a number of input costs and pressures when trying to manage their bottom line. Recently the cost of electricity has been of particular concern. There's no doubt that the investments that we've made in cleaning up and improving our electricity grid puts serious pressure on small businesses as it did for

House holds. The government has taken action to help Ontarians across the province with the cost of electricity through the fair hydro plan. We know this is going to help not only House holds and small businesses as well. Speaker, could the Minister please clarify how the fair hydro plan is going to impact small businesses in the province?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for that question. Of course our plan to lower bills across the province by 25% will help every single House hold, Mr. Speaker, but it will also help a half a million small businesses, Mr. Speaker, and farms. The Premier has recently had the opportunity to visit many of these businesses, Mr. Speaker. Businesses like the bookshelf in Guelph which own both a bookstore and restaurant in the same building, Mr. Speaker. This bookstore and restaurant will be saving about -- more than, Mr. Speaker, more than \$1,000 a month under our plan. Door finds cheese and chocolate located near Barrie, Mr. Speaker. They will save as much as \$350 a month during the summer. So, Speaker, this is a business -- the leader of the opposition's own riding. Ontarians are beginning to wonder, Mr. Speaker, will the opposition be supporting our plan to lower rates for homes and businesses? Or will they simply continue to throw mud and offer no credible plan on their own, Mr. Speaker ?

MPP Scott to Minister Leal Re: Small Business Hydro Rates

>>MPP Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of rural affairs and small business. I'm sure the member heard about the closure of rural steak House a local instueltion in the Peterborough area. Roland's has operated for 60 years. The restaurant was a popular fixture in the community and was a contributor to the local economy. Do you know what finally drove them to close their doors? The outrageous hydro costs resulting from this government's misguided policies. Shared his hydro bills with me. After seeing them I'm not surprised why he was forced to shut down. Rising hydro costs are hurting the rural economy in our area. And the government's poor excuse of a relief plan will do little to undo more than a decade of runaway increases. So my question to the Minister is how much longer will he stand by watching successful rural businesses like roll land's close as a result of the government's mismanagement of the hydro rates?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I really want to thank the question from the member of Haliburton-kawartha lakes- Brock. But there's another story to Roland's. Ant mayor of Peterborough, Darryl Bennett, on his cogeco cable show on Friday set the record straight. The fact of the matter is the owners, who I know very well, were offered a substantial amount of money for a buy the property for commercial development. The mayor was very clear. This was strictly a commercial development. The owner was offered a substantial amount. I know the area very well. It's a stone's throw from my House in Peterborough. There's going to be a substantial commercial development. The other thing that was explained to us, Peterborough is very fortunate that a franchise came to Peterborough because they have confidence in the Peterborough area. Hallmark set up a steak House in Peterborough. The mayor of Peterborough set the record straight.

>>MPP Scott: Well, again to the Minister. We're not talking about some abstract idea here. This is a real business. From last January -- Last January, the owner paid over 2,000 for hydro. This past January, his bill has jumped to over 4,000. That's double in just one year. After all this after spending \$23,000 replacing all of the lighting with efficient L.E.D.S. Mr. Speaker, with the trend in hydro going upwards, things were only going to get worse for Roland's. In the owner's own words, he saw no chance for survival. So again, when will the Minister take the concerns of rural businesses seriously and ensure that they are not driven out by the consequences of your government's decisions?

>> Minister Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the supplementary from the member from Haliburton-kawartha lakes- Brock. But I would strongly suggest -- and I will organize Mr. Speaker, I would volunteer to organize a viewing. We'll get the fair from Cogeco. His worship, mayor Darryl Bennett, the mayor of Peterborough, and he will provide well, Mr. Speaker, the folks opposite are questioning the veracity of the mayor of Peterborough. I'll certainly give them a call about this today.

MPP Sattler to Minister Hoskins Re: Mental Health Services

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Premier. Ontario medical students are here today to lobby MPP S about mental health and one of their top priorities is to reduce wait times for services. I commend these students for their advocacy and I listened to the Premier as she talked to them this morning. I was struck by the contradiction between what she said to the students and what is happening in London, where her government is refusing to approve an innovative partnership between the hospital, the E.M.S. And mental health and addictions crisis centre to get nonacute patients much quicker access to service while reducing E.R. Wait times. If the Premier is serious about reducing mental health wait times, why is she not finding a way to allow our London pilot project to proceed so we can start helping people now?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. So it is accurate that, since last fall, the Middlesex London emergency medical services approach sought support from the ministry of health for review a decision on this suggestion for a pilot program for a diversion protocol. Because the crisis centre's not a designated hospital, that would have solved the problem had they decided to come under the auspices of London health sciences centre. In fact in March of this year, after extensive discussions including with my ministry and the IHN and proponents in the crisis centres themselves, the crisis centre opted not to pursue that site designation. So as a result we're left, Mr. Speaker, with the situation where there are two acts, the ambulance act and the health insurance act. And the ambulance act. Looked at patient care standards. The health insurance act looked at what is an nrd service. I'm happy in supplementary to go into the challenges, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. Two weeks ago my constituent Angela cam Ron jolly was forced to wait 7 days in a hallway stretcher in the mental health E.S.R.. This weekend Londoners were appalled to learn of Angela's experience in the pages of the London free press. They were ashamed of a broken system that treats mental health patients so callously. I received an e-mail that sums up how Londoners are feeling -- I am horrified this is a reality. To the elected officials we owe our friends, Neighbours and families better than this. We owe Angela and all the others so much more. A solution seems possible in having ambulance able to transfer to the crisis centre. It is worth trying on a temporary basis. Let's get this done." Does the Premier agree that Angela deserves an apology? And will she approved the pilot project now?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by acknowledging our medical students who are here with us today. And particularly the focus on mental health. I think that with the investments the province is making, but they know better than anyone just how important this is to their practice but also to the patients, the clients that they're trying to support. We're working hard with all of the proponents: I would suggest to the member opposite that she join that process and work with me. If she wants to continue to raise this, this is the fourth time in the legislature. I actually -- I think most Colleagues around this legislature know I actually work hard with my Colleagues to find solutions. I'm confident that we will find a solution in this case. But it is challenging because there are two acts. I'm not prepared to break the law. At the same time -- there's a meeting taking place this week. Between the ministry and all of the partners involved. I'm confident, together with the support from the --

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Del Duca Re: Connecting Links Project

>>MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of transportation. Speaker, I know that the members on this side of the House recognize how important it is for our province to have a comprehensive transit and transportation network. To have that network, we need to have good roads. Our roads help the economy thrive and they connect us to one another. Speaker, it isn't just about our provincial highways. If the people don't have a way to get onto our highways, they don't serve much purpose. In Barrie we have highway 26, which is classified as a connecting link, because it connects people in my community to a number of our provincial highways, the closest being highway 400. Speaker, I know that the Minister of transportation recently made an announcement about our government's commitments to these vital roads. Would the Minister please provide the members of this House with more information on his recent connecting links announcement?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. Of course I want to begin by thanking the member from Barrie for her question and for being such a strong advocate for her community, Speaker. I was please today actually just a few days ago on Friday to be in Sault Ste. Marie, Speaker, to announce that municipalities are receiving funding for the 2017 2018 provincial connecting links program. This year, Speaker, we have \$25 million in funding available that we are using to support 19 projects right across the province and this, Speaker, includes nearly \$45,000 for the rehabilitation of bayfield street from Coulter street to cundall street on highway 26 in the member from Barrie's community, Speaker. Our government is investing in these roads because we understand how vital they are to communities across Ontario. Speaker, we especially know how important these roads are to small rural and northern Ontario and that's why the majority of fund some.hing going towards connecting links in those communities. Our government will continue to make the investments that both our municipal partners and our residents depend upon and deserve. Thank you very much.

>>MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for his answer. I know this is welcome news in my community of Barrie and that the funding will help make for a much smoother ride on highway 26. Speaker, I remember when our government announced in the 2015 budget that we were introducing the new connecting links program. I also remember back in 2016 when the Premier announced the program would be growing. It was clear to our municipal partners, including my community of Barrie, that they have heard loud and clear when they said that the funding available for ocif wasn' wt enough. The communities are very pleased that the government is taking strong action. Would the Minister please let the members of this House know what our government is doing now to make this important program even better?

>>Minster Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the member from Barrie for the follow-up question. She is absolutely correct. Both the new connecting links program and our commitment to growing the program came in response to what we are hearing from our municipal partners.

While we listened, Speaker, the parties opposite chose to ignore those voices when they voted against the new program in the 2015 budget and the additional funding in the 2016 budget. Speaker, we've now heard again from municipalities who are excited about the program and are excited about the fact that the amount of funding for connecting links continues to grow, up to \$30 million for the 20182019 years, Speaker. We've also heard concerns about what the projects are actually eligible to support. That's why this past Friday in Sault Ste. Marie I announce we'll allow for even more projects to be eligible including road widening. Sault Ste. Marie will receive \$2.3 million from this program for this year, Speaker. I'm excited to see the great work we're doing, Speaker and --

MPP Thompson to Minister Murray Re: Drive Clean Plan

>> MPP Lisa Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The Ontario

P.C. Caucus has been calling for drive clean to be scrapped for over six years. It is a program that has long outlived its usefulness and it's a burden on drivers in this province. This program has been always designed to be temporary. Mr. Speaker, it's time to take drive clean to the scrap yard. Will the Liberals finally cancel this burdensome and expensive program?

>>Minister Glen Murray: Oh, that so un-green party over there, Mr. Speaker. It's so frustrating some days. Drive clean every year keeps several hundred thousand cars that don't meet standards off the road. You know, Mr. Speaker, I was just in Québec with my Colleague David Hertel and what was I asked by car dealers and by the people in Québec? Can you convince the government of Québec to introduce drive clean? Why did they ask that, Mr. Speaker? Because Québec is at risk of becoming the feeder capital of Canada -- beater capital of Canada because it doesn't have regulations. We have no interest in having Ontario become the beater capital of Canada, which is what the opposition would like to see, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Thompson: Mr. Speaker, -- continues. This is why Ontario has lost trust in this government. I actually thought that member opposite would comment on this idea that drive clean is free, but that is simply not true. You know, they spin so often but we need to make it clear right here today that instead of the driver paying for this outdated program, now everyone pays, because the fee has simply been shifted to the taxpayer. Speaker drivers and nondrivers are now paying for this redundant program that is simply Liberal virtue singling, as we just saw. The fact is there's already a 95% pass rate here in Ontario and B.C. Has phased out this program years ago. It's time for drive clean to ride off into the sunset. Will the Liberals finally cancel the program today?

>>Minister Murray: Mr. Speaker, if we cancel the program, we would have hundreds of thousands of vehicles on the road causing problems with air quality. Mr. Speaker, what we did do --

>> Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In 2014 alone, 185,000 vehicles were retired or had to be upgraded, Mr. Speaker. People are paying for it, and it's actually being paid from two major sources. The surplus is being used to cover the costs, Mr. Speaker, and we're using -- Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the other thing, we're using new technology -- People can soon be able to report in virtually, Mr. Speaker. Which will save huge amounts of money, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

MPP DiNovo to Minister Ballard Re: Nonprofit Housing Zoning

>>MPP Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Premier. Last month over 30 community and nonprofit housing organizations from across Ontario wrote to the Minister of housing with concerns about his new inclusionary zoning regulations. They fear that the government plans to force municipalities to pay developers for each unit of affordable housing created under inclusionary zoning. They correctly point out that such a measure would prevent municipalities from passing inclusionary zoning bylaws. Will the Minister assure us that the rumours are not true and that the new inclusionary zoning regulations will encourage municipalities to pass bylaws and not discourage them?

>>Minister Chris Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for that really important question. You know, Speaker, we understand the growing concerns throughout the gtha regarding the booming housing market and the impact it's having on affordable housing in this region. We understand that many families need that peace of mind that they will be able to find an affordable house so they'll have that stability. He's why our government is focused on increasing the supply of affordable housing, Speaker. In fact this past winter the government passed the promoting affordable housing act, which sets up the enabling framework for inclusionary zoning in Ontario. We're continuing to work to put inclusionary zoning into practice in communities across Ontario, Speaker, and we're focused on partnerships. We continue to talk to municipalities in the private sector, Speaker, to finalize the regulatory framework that

will guide the implementation.

>> MPP DiNovo: Thank you, Speaker. Again back to the Premier. These housing organizations, along with the NDP, have been seeking inclusionary zoning legislation for years. I tabled the first inclusionary zoning bill back in 2009. The government resisted inclusionary zoning for years, even as affordable housing wait lists grew and provincial housing budgets shrank. But last year the government finally seemed to say yes to inclusionary zoning. It would be an enormous betrayal if the government introduced a poison pill that would make it harder for municipalities to pass inclusionary zoning bylaws. Will the Minister assure Ontarians who need affordable housing. That no such poison pill will be in his new inclusionary zoning regulations? Will he assure us?

>>Minister Ballard: Well, thank you for that follow-up, Mr. Speaker. What I will assure the member -- and I really -- really I'm a bit stymied because I think the member opposite should be absolutely ecstatic given that the third party has pushed for inclusionary zoning legislation for many, many years. It's here, Mr. Speaker. We need to get it right. What we need to do, Mr. Speaker, is to make sure that everyone involved in putting affordable housing in place has a seat at the table and we get the formula right. That's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker. We're taking the amount of time that it takes to get this right so that municipalities and builders and affordable housing providers are comfortable with this new legislation.

MPP Fraser to Minister Matthews Re: Ontario Colleges

>> MPP John Fraser: Thank you very much, speaker. Speaker, my question is for the minister of advanced education and skills development. This past fall the member for brampton west introduced a private member's motion to declare this week Ontario official colleges week. This was not only celebration of the accomplishment of colleges but recognition of an important milestone. 50 years ago then minister for education bill Davis pioneered Ontario's system of colleges and applied arts and technology. Speaker, we know colleges are leaders when it comes to partnerships with business and industry and that they are parts of the economic fabric of communities across the province. I know this is true of algonquin college, in my riding of ottawa south. My question for the minister is what is our government doing to mark the milestone of 50 years of Ontario's college system?

>>Minister Deborah Matthews: Thank you, speaker, and thank you to the member from ottawa centre for this really important question. Speaker, early this morning I was at George brown college and delighted to announce. [Applause] We'll be honouring this historic 50th anniversary milestone by make ago onetime capital investment of \$50 million for our colleges. Speaker, this will -- investment will support colleges in undertaking initiatives that enhance student learning, such as the purchase of specialized software for teaching, new lab and shop equipment and technology to modernize existing classrooms in labs and other projects as well. Speaker, from the very beginning, colleges were designed to give recent high school graduates an alternative to university and facility taste -- at a time retraining to those who were looking to take on new challenges. Readily from one job to another. With our rapidly changing economy, speaker, this flexibility, this nimbleness is a really important part of our college --

>>MPP Fraser: Speaker, thank you to the minister for her answer. Over the 50 years since their inception, more than 2 million students have graduated from Ontario's colleges. Ontario's colleges have incredible capacity and scope. They are key drivers in all different sectors of our economy. Former premier bill Davis had a vision of a college system that would fill the need for skilled graduates who are ready to take on the complex challenges our province would face. Speaker, can the minister tell us more about how that vision has been achieved and how colleges have grown and changed since the system was established more than half a century ago?

>>Minister Matthews: Speaker, we are so grateful for the foresight of premier Davis. In fact he plans to be here this afternoon to help us celebrate. We have come a long way in 50 years, speaker. Today Ontario's 24 colleges offer hundreds of programs in areas including robotics and advanced automation. Commercial bee keeping, brewmaster, dental hygienist and doula studies, speaker. In fact there are more than 900 college programs offered in our colleges. Their breadth and variety touch on almost every area of our day-to-day lives. They've been vital partners to our government in providing opportunities for underrepresented groups in giving them a high quality and meaningful education. Their commitment to expanding access has been enormously valuable as we transform osap to be more generous, more transparent and more Progressive. I extend my heartfelt congratulations to our colleges. We know the next 50 will bring even more exciting opportunities in Ontario.

MPP Walker to Minister Hunter Re: School Closures

>> MPP Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the education Minister. Ontarians want you to stop blaming everybody else for the massive school closures and process under your watch. The chair of the blue water district school board has called on you to be honest and come clean on who's really to blame for school closures. That would be you, Minister. Will you take responsibility and save our schools and our communities for the more to come? You can fix the funding formula your government promised in the previous two elections.

>>Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. You know, Speaker, ensuring that Ontario's students have the best education possible. It's the priority of this government is the priority of this government. For members on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've actually spoke to the chair of the blue water District School Board and we have talked in common cause of what is in the best interests of the local school boards and ensure that that -- ensuring that when school boards do have to make very difficult decisions that they are well supported in that. Owe ensuring they get meaningful impact from all sides of the community is critical. But, Mr. Speaker, having an arbitrary moratorium, even the chair of the school board says that that is a bad idea, that that is not going to solve anything because there are times when school boards do need to make those decisions, when a change is required. And if there are innovative solutions that can be found, that is exactly what we expect the school boards to be doing.

Together with local municipalities and with communities to provide the best education possible for all of Ontario's students.

>> MPP Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the -- if he's so in touch with you, why did he write this article in the local paper and ask for you to be honest and to come clean? Partnership and money to fill the gaps left by your broken school funding formula. In Markham, a single community school. Chamman's ice cream committed millions of dollars, as have dealt the company and municipality of Grey Highlands. A single school community local council's also offering money along with Bruce Power. This in partnership and collaboration. Minister, will you be a promise breaker or a collaborator?

>>Minister Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I am so delighted to talk to how we are collaborating with our school boards -- Mr. Speaker, how we're collaborating with Ontario's 72 school boards right across this province to ensure that we provide students with the best education possible, including in the member's own riding where, Mr. Speaker, since -- Where in fact in 2003 we've opened ten new schools in the member's own riding. That is an example --