

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, March 6, 2017

From: "Herman, Alan (MCI)" <alan.herman@ontario.ca>
To: "@MCIIT-L-Comm-MCI-MO Top Issues" <mci.l.comm.mci.mo.top.issues@ontario.ca>, "@MCIIT-L-Comm-MCI Top Issues" <mci-l-comm-mcitopissues@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "@MCIIT-L-Comm-OWD-MO Top Issues" <mciit.l.comm.owd.motopissues@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "@MCIIT-L-Comm-OWD Top Issues" <mci.l.comm.owdtopissues@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "@MCIIT-L-Comm-OSS-MO Top Issues" <mci.l.comm.oss.motopissues@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "@MCI-L-OSS All Staff" <ontariosenior'ssecretariat@mcl.gov.on.ca>
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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Monday, March 6, 2017.

MIT did not receive any questions of interest.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

MSW did not receive any questions of interest.

MSA did not receive any questions of interest.

Questions today focused on electricity costs.

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

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From: Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)
Sent: March 6, 2017 12:33 PM
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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Monday, March 6, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown (Coe) (Martow) to Premier Wynne (Coteau) Re: Grandview Funding

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Families and supporters of grandview's children's centre rallied together on the weekend to fight for fair funding. Grandview has been waiting nine years. Nine years, Mr. Speaker. Nine years, children with autism have been sitting on a wait list. These children and their families deserve better. Your own Liberal caucus members have written the Premier pleading for action but the Premier's office has ignored her own caucus members. I asked about this, Mr. Speaker, on November 24th and I was told by the government they were going to look into it. Here we are, months later, and nothing has happened. So, Mr. Speaker, my question is directly to the Premier -- will the government commit to the proper funding for the new grandview centre, yes or no? The community in Durham is tired of waiting.

>> Premier Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I not Minister of children and youth services is going to want to speak to the specifics. But I just want to be very clear that in no way have I or my office ignored the commentary from quite frankly all of the members from Durham but certainly from our own caucus, Mr. Speaker. I know that this is a very worthwhile project. It's something that needs to move ahead, Mr. Speaker. It's something I not Minister of children and youth service will be happy to give an update on.

>> MPP Coe: Back to the Premier, Speaker. Thank you. The grandview situation is absolutely heartbreaking. Nine years of waiting. The land's been donated. \$8 million raised, and sadly, Speaker, 2,753 children on the wait list. Mr. Speaker, how much longer must these children and families wait?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the member for the question. As soon as the legislature went into recess this past winter, I made my way out to grandview. It's one of my priorities in regards to visits. I just want to say the centre's a remarkable place. I met with parents there. I met with staff. To listen to their concerns. Mr. Speaker, we're a government that's invested in the last several years over \$300 million into capital programs for our children treatment centres. We have a process in place and I went out there to listen. And we're taking all of those requests for capital programs. There's a process in place. And we'll be making a decision shortly in regards to where we spend those capital dollars. I would like to thank the member for his advocacy. We're paying attention on this side and will continue to work with grandview to make sure we position for success here in Ontario.

>> MPP Martow: Thank you. Back to the Premier. Families of grandview kids across Durham region have been waiting for approval of grandview's project in November 2015 the town of Ajax announced a donation of a five-acre parcel of land for the future new headquarters of grandview. They are the only children's treatment centre in Durham region, specialized programs and support to thousands of children and youth with special needs and their families. They also offer A.B.A. Therapy for children with autism. Yet over 2,700 children sit on a wait list while this government fails to act. Mr. Speaker, I toured grandview just last Friday and I can say with certainty the time to act is now. Will the Liberals announce the funding of the new grandview centre today?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again I would like to thank the member for the question. She brought up a funding for autism as a point in her question. The member knows that our autism funding is historically the largest investment in autism in the history of this province if not the entire country. So we're making inroads. We've got challenges in the system, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to mental health, when it comes to autism, when it comes to our children but we're doing everything we can to make sure we position them for success. Grandview's an exceptional place doing great work. In our child treatment centres across the province over 76,000 young people are treated each year and we're proud of that and we know we need to build more capacity in the system and that's why we keep investing into capital programs and rebuilds for our treatment centres here in Ontario.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Hunter) Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. The Premier and the Liberals have had 14 years to fix the mess that her party has helped create in our hydro system but it is only the last few weeks that she's admitted that there is a problem, Speaker, and only last week she admitted she could actually do something about it. Up until she began to fear for her political life, she told Ontarians there either was no problem or, if there was, there was nothing she could do about it. The Premier told this House and I quote -- our rates are competitive with New York, with Michigan, with Pennsylvania. Those energy prices are competitive, Mr. Speaker. I asked the Premier, what's behind the sudden conversion?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all it's not an accurate portrayal of the situation. The fact is that, for some time, a number of years, Mr. Speaker, we've been working to take costs out of the system. We renegotiated the Samsung deal, Mr. Speaker. We made a decision about not building new nuclear. We were very aware, Mr. Speaker, that we needed to find ways to get costs out of the electricity system. We made a decision around the 8% reduction on electricity bills, the provincial portion of the H.S.T. Last year, Mr. Speaker. It's in effect now. And we -- And I knew that it was not enough. That's why we brought forward an average 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker, that people will see on their buys this summer.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, hydro rates have been a crisis for families and businesses in Ontario for as long as the Premier has been saying there was no crisis. And it's not just the Premier that denied the problem, Speaker. On September 15, 2016, the Minister said, quote -- energy costs are in the middle of the path when compared to other Canadian provinces. The government has used

virtually all available public policy levers at our disposal to mitigate rate pressures for customers. When will the Premier admit how out of touch she is with Ontarians and apologize for denying over and over again that the crisis that we're facing is real?

>> Premier Wynne: Speaker, it seems to me that a policy, a plan that has been brought forward, that is actually going to reduce people's electricity bills in a number of ways. First of all an across-the-board average 25% cut for residents who pay bills, Mr. Speaker. They're going to see on average a 25% cut. People who pay exorbitant distribution rates, Mr. Speaker, in rural and remote communities, they're going to see another 10 or 15% reduction, Mr. Speaker. People who are living on low incomes, they're going to see an enhanced benefit so they will see further cuts. Mr. Speaker, that's a practical plan that I think demonstrates that we have understood. We've listened. We've understood. We've brought forward a practical plan. As opposed to, Mr. Speaker, a plan that does not respond because it would not work, which is what the NDP has brought forward. We brought forward a plan that actually is practical and it's going to reduce people's electricity bills.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker she may forget this but the other part of the Premier's story was that the Liberal government had no control over hydro prices, that it was all in the hands of the Ontario energy board. On September 29 2016, the Minister of energy said, quote -- the O.E.B. is a quasi-judicial organization that's not part of the government. They set the rates. Clearly the Premier does think she has control over rates, because just last week she finally decided that the political cost to her and her party of ignoring this crisis that she has created for Ontario families was just too much and she came up with a band-aid fix. What changed -- what changed, Speaker?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, for many months, many months, Mr. Speaker, we have been working on finding a solution to help people with their electricity bills. Whether the leader of the third party accepts that or not, Mr. Speaker, it's entirely beside the point. The point is that there are people in this province who are paying too much for their electricity, Mr. Speaker. They can't afford to look after themselves, their families. There are people in this province who are paying too high distribution costs, Mr. Speaker, and there are people living on low income who are not getting enough support. We are tackling all of those challenges, Mr. Speaker. The relief will be in place in the summer. It will stay in place, Mr. Speaker, and you know, Mr. Speaker, the reality is. That I am most interested in those people in their concerns and their families, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. I was reading the "Globe and Mail" editorial, and it -- I'm going to share with you what that editorial said. According to the Premier's energy plan, she isn't in a 15% electricity mess. System costs created by a decade of poor choices and mismanagement of the province's power system. She's simply rigging consumers' bills during an election year. So, Mr. Speaker, my question for the Premier, this isn't about fixing the structural challenges. Is it just about what we all know it is, your own political survival?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What our fair hydro plan is about is taking a burden off people's electricity bills all around the province, Mr. Speaker. It's about making sure that people see on average a 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker. People who are having trouble paying their rent, who are having trouble looking after their families, Mr. Speaker, making sure that they -- That they need soon, Mr. Speaker, that they have it that it's practical, Mr. Speaker, and that it's adequate. That's what our fair hydro plan is about, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier and again from this "Globe and Mail" editorial, they said this scheme is nothing more than I quote a Liberal Premier has stepped -- Mr. Speaker, obviously this is a sensitive topic for the Liberal government. The "Globe and Mail" editorial said a Liberal Premier has found yet another way to make Ontario pay more for electricity but this one is selling it as an act of being a thoughtful government coming to the aid of families. And that is exactly why I have written the financial accountability officer asking for open and transparent and honest accounting of what this is going to cost Ontario and if the government numbers are actually

accurate. Mr. Speaker, the truth will come out eventually. Just how much debt is going to be saddled on the generation of our –

>> Premier Wynne: I'm glad to say the office of the financial accountability officer was briefed last week, Mr. Speaker. So we're very happy to have the F.A.O. Get the information that he needs about the breach and we will continue to work with him. In fact as the leader of the opposition knows we actually expanded the purview of the financial accountability officer so that he could get all of the information that he wanted. So we're happy to do that. Mr. Speaker, this plan is about giving people relief on their electricity bills. It's about spreading out costs over a longer period of time, Mr. Speaker, costs that have been incurred through investments in a system that was degraded, Mr. Speaker, that had to be upgraded, that was, you know, susceptible to Brownouts and blackouts when we came into office under the previous Premier, Mr. Speaker. We've made the investment. We have a clean reliable electricity grid.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The "Globe and mail" placed the blame where it belongs. I quote from the "Globe and mail" -- the blame for this falls squarely on consecutive Liberal governments of former Premier Dalton McGuinty and his successor of the Premier of Ontario today in power since 2003. Their mismanagement of Ontario's power system has LED today. That's their mismanagement and now the Liberal government to pay for their mistakes, for their mismanagement, it's going to cost \$25 billion of additional interest costs. But, Mr. Speaker, we've seen the Liberal math before and how it doesn't add up and how it seems to be something different afterwards. Just look at the gas plants. It was supposed to cost a cup of coffee, and then it was \$40 million and then costs skyrocketed. Their numbers historically. Do not add up. My question, Mr. Speaker, given the fact their math hasn't added up before, can we have the guarantee of the Premier they will not block any information, be shared with the financial accountability officer?

>> Premier Wynne: Speaker, we've already provided the technical briefing -- Of the F.A.O.. We are happy for the financial accountability officer to have the information that is available to his office already. It's already there, Mr. Speaker. So we'll continue to work with him. But, Mr. Speaker, underlying the question of the leader of the opposition is an assumption that, had they had the opportunity, they would -- They would not have upgraded the system, would not have cleaned the electricity grid, Mr. Speaker. We've taken the responsible path. We know that the costs people are being asked to pay -- Over a longer period of time. 25% reduction on average, Mr. Speaker. That's what we're moving forward with.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. My next question is also for the Premier. What part of the Premier's story that she still clings to is that selling Hydro One is a good idea, once again ignoring the wishes of the vast majority of Ontarians. By returning Hydro One to public hands, we bring in \$7 billion. We bring in \$7 billion over the next 30 years that we can invest in Ontario. Instead of investing in Ontario families and businesses, the Liberal plan gives away an additional 25 to \$40 billion over that same period to bankers, Speaker. When will this Premier wake up and realize that continuing with her wrong-headed sell-off of Hydro One is not just unpopular. Vastly unpopular, Speaker. It is absolutely the wrong thing to do for Ontario.

>> Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, just again we put the facts on the table. The proposal that the leader of the third party has brought forwards is -- as parliament of her plan that stop the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, and buy back Hydro One, none of which would take one cent off one electricity bill in this province, Mr. Speaker. Not a penny. So what we brought forward is a plan that will reduce people's electricity bills, Mr. Speaker, will spread the costs over a 30-year period for an asset and for assets that are going to be used by people for that period, Mr. Speaker. It's only right, only fair that people in this generation would pay part of the costs but people who are going to be using that asset down the road, that they would pay part of the freight for that, Mr. Speaker. That's what we're doing. We're bringing forward relief for people immediately, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Liberal plan will cost the people of Ontario more in the long run. That is absolutely the case. And it doesn't solve any, not a single one of the underriding problems in our current electricity system. Nor does it stop the sell-off of Hydro One. For years the Premier didn't listen to Ontarians when they were struggling with hydro bills that were far too high and that they could no longer afford. The Premier has not learned from that lesson, Speaker. Why isn't she listening to Ontarians who are telling they are that -- her that the right thing to do is stop putting her political career ahead of the people of this province and put an end once and for all to her wrong-headed decision to sell off Hydro One.

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, it's actually hard to know where to begin. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that underlying the -- The question from the leader of the third party is an assumption that there was no need to rebuild the electricity system in Ontario, Mr. Speaker. We don't need a clean electricity grid. We don't need to build all those thousands of kilometres of line, Mr. Speaker, we don't need clean renewable capacity. We don't need -- underlying her question about Hydro One is we don't need to build transit all of which, Mr. Speaker, I think are really surprising assertions coming from the NDP. And on top of that, Mr. Speaker, the proposal that she has put forward to reduce electricity costs --
The proposals she's brought forward. Would not take money off people's electricity bills. A practical plan that will reduce people's electricity bill and that's the right thing to do, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, what we don't need is to sell off a vital public asset that generates revenue for the people of Ontario. That's what we don't need. People need more, Speaker, than a desperate attempt to hold on to political power. People need that so much, need so much more than that, Speaker. People need more than a plan that kicks the problems in our hydro system down to our grandkids, Speaker. We need a plan that prioritizes Ontario families and businesses because all Ontarians see that the Liberal plan is an extra \$40 billion going into the pockets of this Premier's bankers' friends. When will this Premier show Ontarians that she is about more than saving her own political skin. Admit that she was wrong and stop the sell-off of Hydro One.

>> Premier Wynne: Speaker, you know, I've been asked a lot about this question of grandchildren and how would we explain to our grandchildren? I have three grandchildren and I'm quite comfortable, Mr. Speaker, talking to Olivia and Claire and Hugh about the reality that their mum and dad need some support in order to be able to, you know, allow them to take skating lessons or swimming lessons, Mr. Speaker. Allowing them to do the things that they want to do for their family now, and that will mean that Libby and -- when they're using those same assets, they'll be helping to pay for -- Libby and claren do will be helping to pay for those assets. Mr. Speaker, for months the leader of the third party has been looking for solutions to actually help people in their daily lives. We're bringing that forward, Mr. Speaker. I would have thought she might have been supportive.

MPP Fedeli to Minister Duguid Re: OPG in North Bay

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Rumours have surfaced regarding the employment status of the 70 men and women at the O.P.G. Facility in North Bay. In fact these now appear to be more than rumours. O.P.G. Has refused to answer any questions from the municipality. O.P.G. And North Bay have had more than a 100-year relationship. They have a responsibility to be open and transparent with the communities they've had partnerships with, especially those for more than a century. If O.P.G. Is indeed transferring dozens of employees out of North Bay, why are they doing it by stealth? Speaker, I ask the Premier, does she agree this is an outrageous failure by a publicly owned corporation to live up to the standards of accountability that is expected here in Ontario?

>> Minister Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to respond on behalf of the Minister of energy. And you know it's -- I find it kind of passing strange the member opposite who's always on his feet talking about efficiencies in government and doing the right thing and allowing our crown corporations to do what they need to do, to be able to keep their budgets in order, is now standing

up because something happens to be happening in his riding that now is something that they shouldn't be doing. My understanding, Mr. Speaker, is that there are no jobs being lost in this move but that the senior vice-president who's in North Bay today speaking in person to the employees that are affected. I know that this is a decision O.P.G. Takes seriously. It has more than 9,000 employees in every corner of this province, Mr. Speaker. They're a big corporation. But the role of our government, the role of any government is not to interfere with these human resource issues.

>> MPP Fedeli: For weeks O.P.G. Told the media, quote -- we don't respond to rumours and for weeks the city of North Bay's requests have gone unanswered. Their failure to respond has caused great concern in North Bay. Their silence is a betrayal by O.P.G. To behave as good corporate citizens and their refusal to be honest tells us to no longer trust what O.P.G. Says. If O.P.G. Is willing to turn its back on the city it's been in for 100 years and ignore the pleas of the municipalities, what else will they ignore? Speaker, I ask the Premier, if O.P.G., won't be open about their plans in North Bay, how can they be trusted to be accountable for what they say about any of their projects?

>> Minister Duguid: It's all about accountability. It's about giving sound corporations to manage what they're doing in the best possible way. The member's on his feet all the time talking about cutting costs, cutting salaries and all of that stuff. The minute something happens in his riding, Mr. Speaker, he wants us to go the opposite direction. Mr. Speaker, the senior vice-president who's in North Bay today. It is a sensitive issue, Mr. Speaker. And it's a decision the O.P.G. Takes very seriously. They'll be working very closely with the labour union representatives as they have been all along and they'll work hard to balance providing thousands of good jobs in Ontario while delivering low cost energy that's what we're trying to deliver here in Ontario so you can't have it both ways, Mr. Speaker. You can't have it both ways.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Duguid Re: Toronto Hydro

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. A question to the Premier. Over the weekend there was a credible report that Hydro One is negotiating to purchase Toronto hydro. There were denials but we've heard many denials before. Just like before the last election when the Premier denied that she was telling Hydro One. This sort of deal-making is happening because this government is giving out tax breaks to utilities that are sold to the private sector. Why is the Premier subsidizing the privatization of public utilities like Toronto hydro.

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, as the mayor said on the weekend, there's no discussions going on between our government and the city of Toronto on this matter. I don't know where the rumours came from but you're asking me to respond to rumours that we have no idea what the source of those rumours are from. I think, Mr. Speaker, the question that Ontarians want to ask is are we getting value for the investments that we're making in our energy system? Are we getting value from the tough decisions that this government's made in terms of the Hydro One issue. Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is the NDP Now have a plan that they want to buy back for \$4 billion. Hydro One -- Where are they going to get the money to pay for the interest -- Mr. Speaker, -- One sentence. That was it. Where are they going to get the money to pay for the public transit we're building in Toronto and across the province --

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. I remember Ed Clark's words from October 2015 when he said Hydro One transmission should stay in public hands. The Liberal government announced six months later they were selling off Hydro One. The Premier has given the public good reason to be cynical and sceptical when it comes to privatization in Ontario's electricity system. Will the Premier stop subsidizing the sale of public utilities to private investors?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, that question's more about archaic outdated political philosophy than it is about running an efficient hydro system. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, the issue that he's referring to and I'll say it again, there are no discussions going on between the province and the city of Toronto about Toronto hydro. So let's be very, very clear about that. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we have to find ways to build public transit across this province. We have to find

ways to build more roads and bridges across this province. The NDP Want to go back to the days where we had a huge deficit in infrastructure. We're not going to do that, Mr. Speaker. We've made tough decisions on this side of the House because we know how important it is to the people of Toronto, the people of Ontario to build transit, to build roads. To build bridges, to build this province up and to make this economy up, Mr. Speaker. That's what we've been mandating ourselves to do and that's what we're going to do.

MPP Vernile to Minister Duguid Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>>MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of economic development and growth. Last week the government took a momentous step forward in ensuring that clean reliable energy is affordable for everyone in Ontario. That announcement, the fair hydro plan, is a 25% reduction on average for all House holds in Ontario. No loopholes, no exceptions, just significant relief for this very important House hold cost. I know this announcement will go a long way in helping families from my riding of Kitchener Centre and right across the province of Ontario. Of course homeowners are not the only ones in the province who are paying electricity bills. Business owners have also said that they face challenges with their monthly electricity costs. Speaker, would the Minister please share with this House in what ways the government's fair hydro plan is going to help businesses in the province of Ontario?

>> Minister Duguid: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring electricity is affordable for business is a very important part of maintaining Ontario's strong economy. Last year, the Ontario chamber of commerce launched a campaign called small business too big to ignore. It highlighted the importance of small business to Ontario's economy and some of the challenges they face. Electricity prices were one of those challenges. I'm pleased to share that the fair hydro plan for Ontario is designed to help on exactly this issue. The 25% reduction applies not only to every House hold in this province but the tens of thousands of small businesses as well. Everyone who pays time of use prices will see this benefit regardless of whether they're a home, a farm or a small business. There is no doubt that 25% is a significant savings. Will go a long way to ensuring that the cost of doing business in this important sector, Mr. Speaker, is still very competitive in Ontario.

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to thank the Minister for his answer. These reductions in energy bills are getting very positive reaction from Ontarians. All residential electricity customers, farms and small businesses are going to be seeing an average of 25% off their bills. This is the largest electricity price cut in Ontario's history. Low-income customers and those living in rural areas with the highest delivery charges are going to see even further reductions. Now in my riding of Kitchener Centre this past weekend, constituents that I ran into at public events and even at the grocery store came up to me to tell me that they welcome the actions that our government is taking. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister how these initiatives are going to impact the economy here in the province of Ontario.

>> Minister Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has a sensible plan to lower electricity rates for House holds and businesses. All businesses will see a 2 to 4% reduction in their energy costs. Many small businesses will see a 25% reduction. Those medium size manufacturing and food processing companies will now qualify for the industrial conservation initiative and that could save them up to about a third of their energy bill. Important to point out, Mr. Speaker, the reason why we are able to afford to do this is that the Ontario economy is doing very well. We're leading the country in job creation. We're leading the entire g-7 in growth. We've now created 700 net new jobs since the recession. Our unemployment rate is at an 8-year low. This economic growth has enabled us to make these important investments to lower energy bills. Speaker, we now have an energy system in the province that is not only clean and reliable but also affordable.

MPP Hillier to Minister Duguid Re: Generator Closures

>> MPP Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Premier, a few weeks ago northland powers Kingston generating station was forced to close its doors along with 18 jobs. For 20 years northland was under contract to the ieso and their contract ended on January 1st. They offered a new contract to sell their power at a very low rate of 5.9 cents per kilowatt hour for another five years. But this -- kilowatt hour. But this government would not purchase this clean cheap power and they won't allow northland to sell directly to other consumers. Just down the road in bath they're building a new generating station that's been contracted to sell power at 20 cents per kilowatt hour. Just across the water on amherst island they're building wind turbine that is they're contracted at over 20 cents per kilowatt hour. Speaker, why does the Premier insist on closing down low-cost generating stations and make Ontario buy the most electric -- expensive long term --

>> Minister Duguid: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Ironically the particular contract the member's talking about was signed during the Conservative government. You know what, Mr. Speaker? It's meant generators did run around the clock creating excess greenhouse gas emissions and operating at uncompetitive prices. Under the updated contract, these facilities will only choose to produce power when they can compete with other forms of generation in Ontario's electricity market. The replacement contracts will result in ratepayer savings, savings of up to \$53 million. Mr. Speaker, they laugh at savings but, Mr. Speaker, that's how we're able to continue to drive down energy rates in this province. So we're going to keep working at bringing savings to the energy system even if the --

>> MPP Hillier: Again to the Premier. I will say, Speaker, that that response was nothing but poppycock from the Minister. This Premier has stated she has made mistakes and that's clearly an understatement. But this latest screw-up demonstrates that the Premier continues to make the same mistakes and has not learned any lessons. The Premier continues to build expensive unneeded generating stations while she closes down low-cost economizing generating stations. The Premier throws people out of work while increasing the cost of electricity and adds billions to our debt. Speaker, Ontario's becoming an energy waste land under this government. Mothballed generating stations, energy poverty. 600,000 consumers who can't pay their monthly bills and the Premier's solution is to turn Ontario into a subprime debtor with multiple subprime loan mortgages. Speaker, will the Premier commit to ending these generating plants not only in bath and amherst island but everywhere in this province?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, it's funny. There was a time when the P.C.S used to talk about trying to cut energy costs. Today they're actually question after question about ways to increase costs within the energy system. We're not going to apologize, Mr. Speaker, for finding savings in our energy system. That's how we're able to lower energy rates to the people of this province. A 25% cut in energy rates for every House hold in this province. Because, Mr. Speaker, we're doing what we need to do to make our energy system as efficient as we possibly can. Mr. Speaker, there's still a lot of work to do. We're in the process of replacing 80% of the infrastructure in an energy system well on the way to doing it, which has to spend about \$50 billion, Mr. Speaker, for the last ten years to do that.

MPP DiNovo to Minister Del Duca Re: Fare Integration

>> MPP DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. A few weeks ago metrolinx provided an update to a fair integration process. Metrolinx is now looking at basing transit fares in the G.T.A. On fare by distance like a private taxi company. It's becoming clear that the government's fare integration process is not about transit service, ridership or the public good. This is about imposing more costs onto ride zlr's Minister of housing. Essentially TTC Riders living in places like Scarborough, north York and Etobicoke. Instead of imposing more costs onto riders, will the Premier restore provincial funding for municipal transit operations as the city of Toronto -- Has proposed.

>> Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the member for the question. I think that member knows in fact what metrolinx has done is put forward four separate concepts or ideas for the fare integration discussion. I should note, Speaker, that in 2014 the mandate letter that I

received from the Premier stipulated that moving forward with delivering on fare integration is a critical part of the ministry of transportation's mandate. Of course, Speaker, that member -- I think all members from the greater Toronto and Hamilton area would know, Speaker, that in fact providing that notion of integrating the fare system, which is with respect to the table being set by the presto fare card fully deployed right across the greater Toronto Hamilton area, that we are moving toward that fare integration concept. To the member's question that is simply one of four concepts that is being consulted upon. We look forward -- metrolinx looks forward to getting back with respect to the feedback and we'll have an update in coming months.

>> MPP DiNovo: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. This question is again back to the Premier. Because metrolinx's fare integration process keeps getting more complicated and more convoluted. The Minister will know that. Taxi-style transit fares are about helping the government cut costs by imposing those costs onto the riders who rely on transit most. Riders don't want calculated fares where they need a calculator, ruler and a map to figure out how much it's going to cost to get to work. They want a simple and affordable fare that lets them travel across the region. Will the Premier guarantee to put riders and the public interest first and restore funding for municipal transit operations as the NDP Has proposed? Or not? Yes or no?

>> Minister Del Duca: Speaker, thanks very much. I thank the member for the follow-up. I mean I can say very clearly in this House that making sure we take into account the affordability and accessibility concerns of transit users across the region is very, vry much top of mind for metrolinx and for our team at M.T.O. And we'll continue to keep that top of mind. Speaker, really and truly that member should know the Premier announced that over the next four years our government will be doubling the gas tax money to the city of Toronto that all 905 communities and frankly, Speaker, nearly 100 communities across the province of Toronto that have transit systems will be receiving t.by 2021 the city of Toronto will be receiving approximately \$340 million from this government to support the expansion of transit, Speaker. Interestingly the leader of the NDP's plan to provide transit funding support for Toronto. Does nothing for the 98 other communities across the province like Ottawa, like Waterloo, like Vaughan, Speaker, that have transit systems and need our help as well.

MPP DesRoseiers (Fraser) to Minister Mauro Re: Ottawa Technology Investment

>> MPP DesRosiers: Voice of Translator: Speaker, my question is for municipal affairs Jim Watson Ottawa mayor is in queen's park with a delegation of technology companies in Ottawa.

[End of Translation] The mayor and also former Minister of affairs and housing, today speaking with the Premier about local priorities in Ottawa. I know that this is part of an ongoing conversation that our government has with municipalities, including the A.M.O., roundtable and several annual conferences like Roma and ogra, to which I had the occasion to participate. Local governments play an important role in our communities, in our day-to-day lives and I want to salute all the workers around the province who make our communities work better for us. And particularly the workers of Ottawa- Vanier. Account Minister of municipal affairs elaborate on how as a province we support local priorities and municipal zhofts.

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, thank you very much. I want to thank the member very much for the question and I not Minister of economic development and growth is going to want to weigh in on the second half of this. I do want to give a shout out to the mayor of Ottawa, Jim Wal 6 Watson who, Speaker, previously was here in this capacity, my capacity that I now have as the Minister of municipal affairs. Jim was responsible in a large part for the upload agreement that is now in effect in the province of Ontario that resulted in the province taking significant financial pressure off of the backs of municipalities. Speaker, I think it bears repeating when we talk about uploads in our ministry and from our government that people -- at the residential tax base property level really understands what this has meant for them over the course of the next 10 or 12 years. We now transfer \$4 billion in total financial assistance to all 144 municipalities in the province of Ontario in some way, shape or form. That, Speaker. Is up to \$1.1 billion in 2003. Fully \$3 billion more is now

being transferred to municipalities. To provide relief for them at the municipal property tax level.

>> MPP Fraser: I'd like to thank the Minister for his answer. I was as well pleased to join with my Colleagues this morning as we met with a large delegation of community leaders from Ottawa LED by mayor Watson and sir Terry Mathews. So this morning we learned about the groundbreaking work that's being done in five key networks in autonomous cars in our community. We learned or some of us already knew that Ottawa is home to the largest technology park in all of Canada. Some 30,000 employees, 500 companies. So we also learned, very interestingly, about the collaborative effort of companies working together to make sure they could stimulate innovation and compete in the world as a region. So, Speaker, I know the delegation has met with many Ministers today so I'd just like to ask the Minister if he could speak to our commitment to investing in Ottawa's technology sector. Thank you, Speaker.

>> Minister Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for Ottawa South for that question. I think he had trouble containing his encrews -- thewes yachl and I don't blame him. When I hear from my Colleague next to me the Minister of infrastructure and they tell us about the exciting things happening in Ottawa, I think we can declare today Ottawa, there's a renaissance going on in Ottawa's tech community that we haven't seen since the high days of nortel. And it's so so exciting, Mr. Speaker. I'm looking forward to meeting with mayor Watson as well and his very impressive delegation. But I can tell you that Ottawa's fast becoming a leading global innovation hub for exciting disruptive technologies like 5 G and new generation networks, as well as connected autonomous cars. And they already are a global leader, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to cyber security. Companies like q&x are knocking the socks off other cars. That region is alive and experiencing a renaissance.

MPP Yakabuski to Minister Hoskins Re: Nursing Home Redevelopment

>> MPP Yakabuski: The grove is a 60-bed nursing home in arnprior servicing approximately 30,000 residents. Its licences expire in 2025. It must redevelop but it is not feasible with only 60 beds, 60 bed licences. Without additional licences the grove will close leaving an area with already half the provincial average of beds per 1,000 with no beds at all. On top of that from may 2015 to may 2016, the grove saw a 20% increase in its wait list. The problem is getting worse, not better. Speaker, the situation is becoming critical. The good news is that arnprior regional health has a redevelopment plan to address this chronic shortage. What they are asking for is for the Minister to personally meet with them to discuss their redevelopment plan. Will the Minister agree to take the meeting?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member opposite. We've actually spoken a number of times about this issue with regards to grove arnprior and district nursing home affectionately non as the grove. He's been a strong advocate the process that they are undertaking, Mr. Speaker. It's important to recognize this is part of a larger redevelopment of 30,000 long-term care beds across the province. To bring more than 300 homes up to code so the design standards are appropriate for this day and age. But with regards to grove, I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that my office has been deeply involved. Not just the ministry. Both in capital as well as in the long-term care division but my office specifically has held -- Two meetings, had a number of phone calls with the president and C.E.O. Of grove. We believe we're working collaboratively. We want that collaboration to continue, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister. I have well over 1,000 individually signed postcards calling on the Minister to act. I will send these down with the page. Minister, the community sees this as the highest priority project. To be fair your ministry has been working with arnprior regional health but no acceptable Houck has been achieved. With an aging population, longer life expectancies and an explosion in rates of dementia and Alzheimer's, the Minister knows that the status quo will not do. A solution must be found. For the good of our seniors and the people of arnprior, we need the Minister to step up. Once again and I hope you'll answer the question directly, Minister. Will you commit. Personally meeting with the arnprior regional health and community leaders to discuss this most important redevelopment plan? Please meet with the

people.

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I was looking for something that would help to make it easier so I don't have to look down. I appreciate receiving from any member, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate receiving postcards and petitions and information that allows me to understand the level of community support. There's no doubt when it comes to the growth grove that this is such a well respected and loved home for so many of the seniors in that part of our province, Mr. Speaker, who as I mentioned we are -- and I believe that Eric Hannah, who's the president and C.E.O. Of arnprior regional health, I believe he would agree with me in saying we are working very closely, extremely collaboratively as well, my office is directly involved through meetings and phone calls the ministry through two divisions within the ministry as well. Of course if it's necessary to have additional meetings. With myself in order to reach the accommodation I think that we all share in terms of this redevelopment I'm prepared to do that, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Minister Duguid Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Premier. On Saturday I met with mayor Ted Hicks with Deborah. Telling me he has to close his community arena due to hydro bills so out of control that they now account for 40% of his operating costs. The next generation will lose out if the Debra rink collapses under the weight of the Liberal government's out of control hydro bills. Why won't the Premier prioritize places like Deborah arena and the families that use it instead of coming up with a plan that puts \$40 billion in the pockets of a few of her well-connected banker friends?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, last week we put out a plan that's going to save every House hold in this province 25% off their energy bills. As well as small businesses. As well as farms, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud of that plan. Also about a week ago the NDP Came out with something they called a plan that people dissed at something that wasn't even close to sensible plan at all. In fact, Mr. Speaker, their plan relied on only federal generosity and future expert panels with nothing concrete at all as to how they would actually reduce energy costs, with nothing concrete at all, Mr. Speaker, as to how they would bring down energy prices. So, Mr. Speaker, our plan has substance. Our plan is bold. Our plan reduces energy rates. By 25% across this province, and we're very, very proud of that plan, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: I don't think I've ever heard anything more ridiculous in this House, Speaker. It isn't just the mayor of Deborah, Speaker, who's word for his community hub. I've met with leaders from echo bay, Bruce mine, Hilton beach, St. Joseph and batch wana first nation and all of them told me how family and community spaces in their towns are struggling to keep up with astro nom,ly high hydro bills. Why doesn't this Premier -- astronomically high. These leaders need more from her than a plan that puts \$40 billion into the pockets of bankers on bay street and ignores real long-term solution that is could help people now and make sure that the next generation isn't thrown right back into this mess?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, when you look at our record of supporting our municipalities, it was unprecedented, Mr. Speaker. When you look at the infrastructure investments that we've made with our municipalities in some of those areas the member's talking about, unprecedented, Mr. Speaker. We're investing \$160 billion in infrastructure over the next 12 years. That's a significant impact on our municipalities, and all the services that they provide, Mr. Speaker. We've uploaded billions of dollars from the municipal fax rolls, Mr. Speaker, to help our municipalities thrive and benefit, Mr. Speaker. So when the member says that we're not helping municipalities, she is dead wrong, Mr. Speaker. We're there for municipalities. We've -- we'll always be there for municipalities and continue to be in the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Del Duca Re: Barrie Transit Investment

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of transportation. 2016 was an exciting year for transit in Barrie. In August I welcomed the Premier and the Prime Minister to my community to announce the new public transportation infrastructure fund. This joint funding from our government and the federal government is helping Barrie expand its bus fleet and provide better service in our community. In December the Minister of transportation joined me for another exciting announcement. New weekend and holiday go service to Barrie. But, Speaker, I know that there's more that we can do to make sure Barrie's transit network is meeting the needs of our community for today and for tomorrow. Will the Minister please provide an update on what else the government is doing to support transit in my community of Barrie?

>> Minister Del Duca: Thank you very much, Speaker. Of course I want to begin by saying to this House, to everybody watching at home, that the member from Barrie did such -- is such an extraordinary champion for her community, Speaker. She has literally held my feet to the fire, Speaker, to make sure that not just this year but for the next ten years and beyond, Speaker, we continue to make critical investments into transit. I applaud that member for being an outstanding champion. She's 100% right. Whether we're talking about extending weekend and holiday service year-round on the bear -- on the Barrie go line, whether we're talking about critical highway infrastructure projects around the widening of highway 400, Speaker. Or, Speaker, what I referenced just a few minutes ago in this House, the fact that over the next four years because of Premier Wynne's leadership, we are going to be doubling the gas tax money specifically for Barrie, Speaker. That means that by 2021/2022, Speaker, Barrie can expect to receive approximately \$4 million, Speaker. \$4 million, buying more buses, providing more service for more families in more neighbourhoods, Speaker, thooention our Premier and the member from Barrie for championing in her community.

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for that answer. When I talk to members of my community, one thing that always comes across loud and clear is that they're looking for improved transit options. I recently heard from a community member who's a single parent without a car. Each and every day they depend on Barrie transit to move between work, their child's school and the grocery store and eventually back home. That's stressful even if you do have a car. But I know this story isn't unique and that any improvements that makes these daily tasks easier for members in my community is a worthwhile investment. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister please explain how the new gas tax funding will improve transit in Barrie and other communities across this province?

>> Thanks very much, Speaker. Again I thank the member for her follow-up question. Speaker, I think everybody here knows what our government Collects gas tax moneys from across the province, we currently allocate 2t cent ns of what we Collect. Over the next four years, Speaker, that 2 cents will move up to 4 cents incrementally, Speaker. Here's the best news for people in Barrie and right across Ontario. That additional 4 cents of the gas tax we're allocating to Barrie and the 98 other communities that have transit systems will not place any additional burden on people in this province, Speaker. We are not increasing the gas tax. We are simply showing the leadership to support transit by allocating more of the money we already Collect, Speaker. In Barrie again that means more buses potentially, providing more transit service to more families in more neighbourhoods which is exceedingly exciting for that member for her community, for her mayor, Speaker, and for so many others? I would certainly hope members in both the Conservative caucus and NDP Caucus would understand this is expanding transit to every corner of Ontario.

MPP N. Miller to Minister Mauro Re: Noront Mine

>> MPP N. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. The current government has been in power since the ring of fire was first discovered. At various points in the past five years, this government has been quick to try to take credit but to date we are still waiting for a mine to open in the region. Noront is ready to get a nickel mine up and running with an eye to future expansion. The Ontario chamber of commerce estimates that 5,500 jobs will be created if the project is brought into

production. Speaker, I've asked this question repeatedly over the past three years. Will this government finally take a leadership role that will make the ring of fire a reality in Ontario?

>> Minister Mauro: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the question, and I understand why the member would ask it today. The pdac conference is currently on here in Toronto and I want to give a big shout-out before I respond to the member. We had a great Ontario reception last night down at steam whistle. A great event. I would say and the reason, Speaker, is when I was there I had an opportunity to speak with noront. While I would not necessarily characterize their position right now, what would be the language best to describe it? I would say they're optimistic, Speaker. I had at least 15 minutes with the principal from noront last night. There's more I can add in the supplementary, Speaker. But they do see a path forward. I had a great opportunity to spend sometime talking to the principal from noront last night. We're very happy with where this is at right now. We understand there's more work to be done, Speaker. We're committed to it. They know we've got \$1 billion on the table and I look forward to working on this file in the weeks and months ahead.

>> MPP N.Miller: Again to the Premier. Speaker, the Minister continues to insist progress is being made. Unfortunately we are still waiting for evidence of those claims. When is someone over there going to make some decisions to move things forward? Known deposits in the region could sustain producing mines in the region for over 100 years. In the mandate letter to the Minister from this past September road work upgrade existing infrastructure and connecting the ring of fire is to commence. Speaker, does the Premier plan to meet this important target or simply continue to make promises until after the 2018 election?

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, yes in fact progress is being made. Now if the member opposite and the party opposite want to speak about progress in mining in the province of Ontario, in the context of only one project, then that will be what they can do. What we can do on this side of the House, Speaker, is talk about the fact that currently right now in Ontario there are three other mines under construction in the province but they want to spend their time focusing on one. There's one not too far from my home community of Thunder Bay called the new gold project. Speaker, right now under construction, 600 people working on a construction site. When that mine is open for the next 10, 20, 30 years of its life there's going to be 450 people working in that mine. And that is not the only mine that is under construction right now in the province of Ontario. Mineral exploration activity in the province of Ontario is climbing after two down years. Global demand is coming back up. The price is coming back up. Exploration activity in Ontario is going up. There's good news on the front but they just want to focus on one particular projects.