

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript - Tuesday, March 21, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Tuesday, March 21, 2017

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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Naqvi) Re: Hydro Advertising

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, out of respect for the legislature, will the Premier immediately halt all the hydro vanity ads until the Speaker has ruled on the case for contempt? Will the Premier please answer?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Government House leader.

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, again this matter as you know is before you. This matter has been referred to you -- And, Speaker, so of course we await a ruling. Speaker, on this side of the government, we are focused in making sure that we bring meaningful relief to the people of Ontario, at that we reduce the hydro rates by 25%. That's what the government is doing. It's a very important policy. Obviously the opposition is only engaged in distraction because, Speaker, they have no plan. They are really confused and, given they have no plan, they are relying on procedural tactics, denying opportunity for Ontarians to have access to important information that will ensure that they know exactly the kind of steps the provincial government is taking, and that is to reduce their hydro rates by 25%.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The issue here is about ads paid for by taxpayers that are used for partisan purposes. Yesterday the Minister said the following -- I am very pleased to rise and talk about when we're going to be bringing forward the legislation this spring to enact the Liberal hydro scheme. Clearly the legislation is coming forward, and the Minister is making a mockery of this legislature and its members as he runs self-congratulatory ads paid for by taxpayers. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier stop her reelection campaigning and using taxpayer resources to do it? It's wrong and the Premier knows that.

>> Minister Naqvi: I think the member opposite is confused. I think he's still sitting in the Harper government where they run ads on the Harper action plan and he kept touting about this. Speaker, on this side of the House, this government has taken some very concrete measures in making sure that they're one of the strongest piece of legislation when it comes to government advertising, Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our government has strengthened legislation to provide a clear definition of partisan advertising requiring the government to submit a preliminary version of the ad to the auditor general for review and reinforce rules around government advertising during general elections. Speaker, under our legislation, the government ads can't include the names, the voice or image of a member of the executive council or a member of the assembly including the name of a local or party or directly criticize the recognized member party of the assembly. The member opposite of course remembers the good old Harris days where they were able to do that, Mr. Speaker. That would not be allowed in --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The Minister quotes and references the auditor general. The auditor general's powers have been stripped and she has said on the record last Friday that she wouldn't have supported it. Simply a pat on the back. So, Mr. Speaker, I will continue. The Minister of energy said they will spend under 1 million on both radio ads and social media ads but there will be more to come. So the question everyone asks, how much more? How many millions is this government going to spend of hard-earned taxpayer dollars for their own partisan purposes? So, Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier -- do you really think it's right to use taxpayer dollars to run partisan ads? It's wrong. Stop it. Everyone in Ontario --

>> Minister Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. The Ontario government has a response -- Speaker, the government has a responsibility to inform Ontarians, to make sure that we raise awareness and communicate -- It's important to communicate important vital information to

Ontarians. We know that people's hydro bills have been a serious concern for Ontarians. It is important, Speaker, that they know what the government's plan is. And, Speaker, we have a plan. We are going to be cutting the hydroelectricity rates by 25%. What Ontarians is asking as the official opposition, what is your plan? The reason the opposition, Speaker, is so worked up about it is because they have no plan. Speaker, their plan is a blank piece of paper, and that's what Ontarians are asking and they have no information on that.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Since I can't get an answer on the taxpayer-funded Liberal election ads, I'm going to ask another question, and that is I'm going to read a quote from Mark Nansis, the president of the Canadian vehicle manufacturers association. And he said -- the Ontario government appears to do nothing to address the climate of investment uncertainty related to what has been their number one request, to deal with electricity rates that can be as high as two to three times higher in Ontario than competing auto jurisdictions. These manufacturer leaders says the government has done nothing when it comes to hydro. Mr. Speaker, is this government going to risk the jobs of over 124 thousand people employed in auto manufacturing in Ontario?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Minister of energy is going to want to comment on this question in the supplementary. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to just say that the record amount of investment that we have seen in the auto industry over the last six months, Mr. Speaker, really speaks to the reality that the auto sector in Ontario is extremely important. It's extremely strong, and, Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue to support it. We are going to continue to work with the auto sector, and not just the plants, Mr. Speaker, but the supply chain, making sure that that supply chain is in place and that it's strong, making sure that we have the highly educated work force that we need to be innovating in the auto sector, Mr. Speaker. You know the whole issue around automated vehicles and artificial intelligence. That's very much the cutting edge. That's the frontier of the auto sector. That's why we're investing in those technologies, Mr. Speaker. And we are doing very well in terms of North American investment in the auto sector.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The Premier says that the government's helping the auto sector but the Canadian vehicle manufacturers association says their number one request about protecting these jobs in Ontario is being ignored, so the facts seem to be very different than what the Premier's suggesting. Let me ask another question, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal caucus Q&A that was given out to Liberal members before their hydro scheme, question 29 said -- will this rate decrease supply to current hospitals and schools?, Mr. Speaker, you know what the answer is? No. There's not going to be row leaf. Mr. Speaker, why won't this scheme keep Curling clubs and Rinks open? They can barely keep these recreational services open. Hospitals are struggling. Public institutions are struggling because of the Liberal hydro crisis. So my question to the Premier is when can we expect relief for hockey Rinks, Curling Rinks? When can we expect relief for hospitals and schools? They're struggling with these hydro increases.

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know I understand, I understand the intensity behind the question that's coming from the leader of the opposition because, Mr. Speaker, in fact we have a plan that is going to reduce people's electricity bills across the province. We understand that electricity bills have been a burden for people, Mr. Speaker, and we are taking action. Mr. Speaker, the leader of the opposition seems to suggest that he supports our plan, but he thinks that we should do more, Mr. Speaker, and that's fine. We're going to continue to work with municipalities. We'll continue to work with people across the province, with businesses. The Minister of energy is well aware, Mr. Speaker, that there are groups who are still -- But, Mr. Speaker, the reality is people in Ontario will see a 25% reduction. In their home electricity bills come the summer, Mr. Speaker. That's something that I hope the leader of the opposition is tactically saying he's supporting.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The Premier says that we should -- I said that we should do more. I absolutely agree. We need to do more by not paying the Hydro One C.E.O. \$4

million a year. We need to do more by stop signing these ridiculous green energy contracts. 1,100 more when we don't need it. Pennsylvania, Ohio and New York. This government's continuing to charge Ontarians to give energy away. Water tower. I want it to stop. Absolutely we have to do more. Our small businesses can't afford it. Our seniors can't afford t.this isn't enough. This is a band-aid on a wound this government created. They're borrowing money to pay for their own mistakes and Ontarians have had enough of it. So my question is, my question to the Premier is when can we have real relief? When can we see these contracts stop being signed? When can we see relief –

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of energy.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise and talk about our plan that is going to help every family, every small business and every farm in this province, Mr. Speaker. And while they stand up and yell and shake their fists, Mr. Speaker, they actually have no plan, absolutely no plan, Mr. Speaker. So I know it's a very touchy subject for them, Mr. Speaker, but they have no plan. The member even stood up to the media and laughed when asked where was his plan? He said in the policy department, Mr. Speaker. Our -- Mr. Speaker our plan bringing forward. 25% -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ur plan will deliver results for Ontario families, businesses and farms. They don't have one. We have one, Mr. Speaker, and it's working.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) (Hoskins) Re: Hospitals and Hydro Rates

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you so much, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Hospitals all across Ontario have been facing huge hydro bill increases on top of Liberal budget freezes and cuts. Last week it was revealed that the two area hospital -- sioux area hospital in Sault Ste. Marie saw nearly a million-dollar increase to its hydro bill in just four short years. Since she won't release her plan, can the Premier tell sioux residents who are now facing cuts to frontline health care if her \$40 billion borrowing scheme will help the sioux area hospital?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of energy.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the member from -- the leader from the third party is talking about the sioux area hospital so let's be clear about what the sioux area hospital had to do after their media announcement. The sioux area hospital said that they have not made decisions directly tied to increases in electricity rates and that increases have not resulted in layoffs, Mr. Speaker. And let's also talk about hospitals. They're also eligible, Mr. Speaker, for a range of programs like the save on energy audit and retrofit initiatives to help lower their bills by becoming more energy efficient. For example Sudbury health sciences north got more than \$275,000 for health and energy efficiency upgrades and now they're saving over \$500,000 each year in energy costs, Mr. Speaker. On top of that their fair hydro plan will also help hospitals see a modest reduction between 2 and 4% as well, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: It's not just northern hospital tas are suffering. Right here in Toronto, access to information documents show that the mount sinai health system saw a 45% increase in hydro bills between 2010 and 2015. That's nearly \$1.5 million, Speaker, that is not going to support frontline health care. If she review -- refuses to release the details of her phantom plan, Speaker, can the Premier at least tell mount sinai health system if she plans to help them out with some relief?

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did help sinai health care system out last year by giving them an additional \$7 million -- 2.1% increase in their operating budget, Mr. Speaker. And I think, you know, it bears repeating. I know that my Colleague, the Minister of energy, quoted from the C.E.O. Of the sioux hospital. But I think it's really important that we revisit that because the leader of the third party has a tendency, Mr. Speaker, to visit hospitals without having those important conversations first with the board, with the C.E.O., and the hospital, after her visit to Sault Ste. Marie, the hospital was forced to go out publicly on the record and say that, while --

Electricity costs have risen over the past five years, those increases have not resulted in any layoffs at that hospital, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: If the Premier won't tell the sioux area hospital or the mount sinai health system if they're going to see some relief under the phantom plan, perhaps she could enlighten the university health network, which has seen its hydro bills go up by over \$6 million in six years. Or how about Toronto east general hospital, Speaker, which saw a 67% increase in six years, Speaker. The Premier needs to show Ontarians that she is serious about real relief and not just buying some support for the Liberal party ahead of the next election. Will she release the details of her plan, Speaker ?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to inform the legislature and the public that last year we provided an increase to university health network, their operating budget of \$9.5 million, Mr. Speaker, and -- and I need to go back to Sault Ste. Marie, Mr. Speaker, because it's a tremendous hospital providing excellent care to the individuals that rely on it. And so the two hospitals, the second part of their public declaration -- and no, we did not ask them to do this. They felt compelled because of the misinformation that has been provided. The sioux hospital said that, quote, it has not made decisions directly tied to the increase in electricity rates, and that there are no planned layoffs of front line staff at sioux hospital, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: Hospitals and Hydro Rates

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: This is also for the Premier, Speaker. I have to say it's sad that hospitals that get a little bit of money after years of freezes are having to use that to fill a hole in their budget that the Liberal hydro plan has left them with, Speaker. That's a real sad situation. When it should be going to frontline care. The Premier turn her back on Sault Ste. Marie from Toronto. Perhaps that's not enough. At London health sciences, which is made up of several sites, access to information documents revealed that hydro consumption dropped by 13% over the same six-year period. The hydro bills went up by 29%. Does the Premier not understand how this would worry Londoners who depend on good quality care at their hospital?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we could go on all day, because I'm happy to report that for London health sciences centre. We increased their operating budget last year by over \$17 million, Mr. Speaker. And I think it's important to -- so you've got your list. I've got my list and I'm happy to continue to report, Mr. Speaker, that the investments at that we've made -- That they voted against in the last budget, our annual increase to hospital budgets was close to 3%. It includes all of the hospitals that the member opposite that the leader of the third party is referencing and I have to say, Mr. Speaker, the three years almost that I've been Minister of health. I have not had a single hospital board or C.E.O. Come to me and say that the component of their budget, that roughly 1% that goes towards electricity, has been a burden to them.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, Windsor Regional Hospital's campus saw a 49% increase in their hydro bills in the five years between 2011 and 2016. What does the Premier have to say to the people in Windsor, Speaker, who know that not only is she lining the pockets of her banker friend with her \$40 billion phantom plan but she's also offering hospitals in Windsor nothing at all to deal with the problems that they've created in the electricity system.

>> Minister Hoskins: I think I should have provided this list in advance to the member opposite, because she should be a little bit more careful in the hospitals that she chooses. Again, Mr. Speaker, Windsor Regional Hospital, I'm happy to report that they received more than a 3% increase to their budget. And again \$9.9 million more to that hospital for operation last year. We continue to make these important investments, investments that routinely and regularly and consistently that party has voted against. When we added \$345 million to the operating budgets of hospitals in the budget last year, they voted against those investments. When we added an additional \$140 million last fall

to support those hospitals, those are important. They're critical investments. That we take very seriously to ensure that our hospitals are able to manage. They are able to provide the highest quality of care that they do, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I don't know what planet this Minister 's on. He's got hallway medicine happening in every hospital virtually across this province. Four years of frozen funding. 1% increase in the last budget. They have not only made a mess of our electricity system, Speaker. Th have made a mess of our hospital system and every patient in Ontario that deals with hallway medicine experiences that each and every day in the province of Ontario. But look -- I'm going to talk about my own hometown hospitals. In Hamilton, St. Joe's electricity costs doubled from 3.98 million to 8.15 million, an increase of 105% between 2010 and 2016. 105%. Maybe the Premier can tell us that she won't release -- Details of her phantom plan. Will that plan actually deal with this rising hydro costs, the soaring electricity bills in our hospitals across the province?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad -- I think this is the last supplementary, because I'm embarrassed to report -- while I'm embarrassed for the leader of the third party because I think it's appropriate that this be the last supplementary on this for now. I'm happy to listen to the facts, Mr. Speaker. So Hamilton health sciences corporation, I'm pleased to report to the legislature that last year we provided an increase of 3.6% to that corporation. 29.4 million more dollars to their operating budget than the previous year, Mr. Speaker.

MPP MacLeod to Minister Thibeault Re: Greenhouse Growers

>> MPP Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. Last week I visited suntech greenhouses with owner BOB Mitchell. BOB is a good man. He is a proud farmer and he is known in Ottawa for his little miracles in man any tech. But between the Liberal green energy tax, the H.S.T. -- The H.S.T. New carbon tax, the Liberal green energy tax and all the waste in energy from cancelled gas plants to power lines to nowhere mean that BOB's cucumbers and his tomatoes are 30% more expensive than his Mexican counterparts. He couldn't even run his lights this past winter to grow his beef steak tomatoes. Liberal energy policy is doing its best to put BOB out of business and what does he hear from the Liberal government? He hears from the P.A. Of the Minister of energy who says it's humidity not energy prices that are forcing greenhouses down south. BOB and every other greenhouse grower in Ontario deserves an answer from this government. Will they phase in the burden of cap and trade and will they inform that these farmers have abilities Profit?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of energy.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank the member for that question because the greenhouse growers throughout the province are an important part of our economy, Mr. Speaker. I not Minister of agriculture does great work with them as well. We met with them several times, Mr. Speaker, to talk about what are the programs that are out there, Mr. Speaker, that actually help our greenhouse growers? And, Mr. Speaker, the greenhouse growers were thrilled, Mr. Speaker. They were thrilled with the fact that we actually introduced the I.C.I. Program and dropped it from 3 mega Watts, Mr. Speaker, to 1 mega watt, Mr. Speaker, because many of those greenhouse growers can actually apply and qualify for the I.P.I. Program, Mr. Speaker, which will allow them, allow the greenhouse growers and any other business that is part of the I.P.I. Program drop their bills by up to one third, Mr. Speaker. And that is significant. For many of these greenhouse growers right across the province. And many of those companies as well that can benefit from the I.C.I. Program. Now what, Mr. Speaker ? The Ontario fair hydro plan dropped that even further from 1 mega watt to 500 kilowatts so more businesses can apply.

>> MPP MacLeod: That's simply not true. That's counter to everything that BOB Mitchell told me. I met with Dwight foster. He owns the largest green elevator operation in eastern Ontario. Fernando Medeiros of Carleton mushrooms. What you're telling me today is simply not true. Like suntech all of them produce quality food. They employ dozens if not hundreds of people. But the Liberal energy policies of this government over the past decade are continuing to hurt them. The Liberal p.a.'s energy was clearly told by Jim da Mina president and C.E.O. Of red sun farms last week humidity,

that's not a deal breaker. The cost of energy is a deal breaker. Will the Premier. Stop handing out lofty flyers, self congratulating yourself and actually do something for grain growers of this province and –

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know they don't like to hear the fact that the I.C.I. Program actually lowers bills by a third but that is true, Mr. Speaker. And there are thousands of businesses that are actually taking this government up and doing just that. But, Mr. Speaker, the opposition is overlooking some -- Make their future right here in Ontario, Mr. Speaker. I'm particularly pleased with the recent announcement that green health produce planned to invest up to 100 million Mr. Speaker -- \$100 million to develop a 100-acre greenhouse in Chatham-kent. Up to 300 jobs in this province, Mr. Speaker. That is just one example of many, Mr. Speaker. We're continuing. Through the Minister of economic development and growth, through the great work of the Minister of agriculture and through the great work. Of this Premier to make sure that we continue to build this province up and make it the most competitive in North America.

MPP Gelinias to Minister Hoskins Re: Private Health Clinics

>> MPP France Gelinias: Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier.

[End of Translation] Clinics have been operating under this government's nose for years. Speaker, when wealthy people can pay thousands of dollars to jump the queue, everyone else waits longer for their care. It hurts seniors. It hurts patients. It hurts families and it violates the principle of the Canada health act. The health Minister said that he has been monitoring these private clinics. He says he's been watching them very closely, and I thank him for that. I think it's important work. Will the Premier release the records of these investigation of private clinics or will she keep them secret?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to have this question again today, and I'm happy to reiterate on behalf of this government our absolute commitment to medicare, to universal health care, to the Canada health act and the work that we do, that I do on a daily basis to ensure that the principles behind those important acts and pieces of legislation, that they are upheld in this province. As I mentioned yesterday, it was our government -- it was not a previous government -- it was our government in 2004 that first and substantially emphatically put in place measures to ensure that those principles were upheld, introducing legislation in 2004 that made it illegal for any person or entity to charge or accept any benefit -- Service in addition to the amount that is paid by ohip and I'm happy to go into more details in the supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Gelinias: We all remember that the question is will you release the records? Speaker, we know that cutting wait times for every family, every senior and every patient. But instead the Liberal government is telling people to pay up or wait longer. Today we have private clinics charging thousands of dollars to allow people to jump the queue. We have for-profit companies charging up to \$100 for telemedicine appointments. We have people in pain who feel that they have no choice but to pay up, because they cannot suffer the wait time any longer for the care that they need. The Premier can do the right thing for all those people. The right thing for public health care. She can release those records of the monitoring of private clinics in Ontario. Premier, will you do the right thing?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, Ontario has the -- and I'm referencing these because they were referenced by the member opposite yesterday, her concern about wait times and again today. Ontario has the shortest wait time in the country for a cat scan. Ontario has the shortest wait time in the country for an ultrasound. Ontario has the shortest wait time in the country for an M.R.I. Ontario's wait time for a pet scan is in the order of four to five days, working days, Mr. Speaker, and that time is actually going to likely get even quicker for the residents of Sudbury once in a year's time they have a fully operational pet scanner at their local hospital, Mr. Speaker. But it is important that we monitor and ensure that those principles I described earlier are upheld, and in 2004 we also

made it illegal for any person to pay, charge or receive payments to receive special or expedited access to the medicare system, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Rinaldi to Minister Hunter Re: Education Investments

>> MPP Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question's to the Minister of education. Minister, we know the importance of ensuring students receive the best possible education. We are illustrating that this is a top priority by making important investments in our education system. Our students consistently rank among the best in national, international student achievement results. 71% of elementary students are meeting or exceeding the provincial standard in reading, writing and math. Up by 17 percentage points since 2003. Minister, we all know how committed our government is to helping our kids become lifelong learners because the claim of the opposition. Like for example like building new schools in my riding from port hope, cobourg, Brighton and Brighton. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can you tell us more about the investments in our schools and how -- Our students?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to say thank you to the member from Northumberland-quinte west for this question. The member has been a terrific advocate for his community. I've the pleasure of speaking with him on a number of occasions on educational issues. Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we know and understand the importance of a high-quality well-rounded education for Ontario students. And this is why since 2003 we've increased education funding to \$22.9 billion, an increase of 59%. We've also increased per-pupil funding by more than \$4,500, to \$11,709, an increase of 63%, despite declining enrollment. After inheriting an education system in disrepair, Ontario -- Is now an international leader in education because of our investments, Mr. Speaker, we also have more student -- Today than at any other --

>> MPP Rinaldi: Thank you, Minister. We are extremely proud to hear how our investments are helping students achieve their best in the classroom. I know the importance of supporting school boards in ensuring that funding goes to programs and services that directly benefit students. Over the past several years, I know that there's a lot of claims about our investment and commitment to our schools. Can the Minister please provide the House with examples how our investment in healthy -- are helping schools across Ontario?

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I want to say thanks again to the member from Northumberland-quinte west for his question. I'm happy to provide examples of how we are continuing to support our education system, and this includes the nearly 810 new schools and more than 780 additions and renovations. Mr. Speaker, I was -- last week as the member from Hamilton east- Stoney Creek stood in this House and made accusations with no evidence. This creates more division in our communities, not solutions. Although the member from Hamilton east- Stoney Creek corrected his record while blaming his leader's office, I would like to remind the House that in Hamilton east- Stoney Creek we've invested in eight new and improved schools. And here's the proof. \$8.9 million to build a new saint Gabriel catholic elementary school, 11.6 million to build. 14 million to build a new summit park school. \$925,000 to build an addition to cardinal Newman.

MPP Wilson (Walker) to Minister Hoskins Re: Rural Hospitals

>> MPP Jim Wilson: My question's for Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Speaker, last week the member for Bruce- Grey- Owen Sound and I toured meaford hospital where the community is very concerned about the possible loss of surgical services with the closure of their single operating room. The Minister 's failure to properly fund rural hospitals is forcing the closure of operating rooms not only in meaford but also in markdale and southampton. If the government removes surgery at meaford hospital, the facility could become nothing more than ambulatory care centre or worse, Mr. Speaker, it could close. Speaker, what is the Minister going to do to prevent the removal of surgical services at meaford hospital and other rural hospitals like it?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question and my staff and the ministry are working with meaford as well as the larger corporations to look specifically at this issue. I have to say I appreciate it. I saw the newspaper article of the visit that the opposition members made, and it alerted me further to some of the discussion that was going on. Of course no decisions have been made. Nothing has been approved by the lhin. This hasn't been mandated by the lhin nor has it been mandated by the ministry. It has to be approved by the ministry and by the lhin. So we're always looking at ways that we can accommodate local realities and the challenges that might be faced by particularly small community hospitals like the community hospital that I was born into, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate deeply just how important -- Hospitals like meaford are to the community for a whole variety of reasons. We're working closely to see what we can do in this case.

>> MPP Bill Walker: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Health services is held up as a model of amalgamated community hospitals and yet, despite its best efforts is struggling to deliver patient care because of your waste and mismanagement. The closure of surgical flights in any rural community means people will be forced to travel out of town to get care. I trust I don't have to remind you transportation is almost nonexistent in rural Ontario. How are all those constituents, especially low-income families and seniors supposed to get there and back home? Minister your government's callous waste and mismanagement is going to potentially harm people of meaford and area. Will you commit today to fixing the funding formula so hospitals like meaford can continue to provide care close to home into the future and save all the angst in the community?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm working hard and the ministry of health is working hard with our small towns, with local community hospitals to help them address the unique challenges that they might be facing. The member opposite only needs to talk to his Colleague a couple of chairs beside him to understand fully what we were able to do in leamington where that hospital was considering closing its obstetric ward, Mr. Speaker. We were able to get involved and reverse that decision and I would hazard a guess their obstetrics ward and the midwife that's been brought into that, it's probably a stronger service than that hospital and that community has seen in a long, long time. Or in quinte health care and the hospital in Brockville, Mr. Speaker, where we have worked hard to -- not Brockville, Trenton. And the member has reminded me of his hard work. To be able to ensure that services remain. Lastly I'll just ask the member opposite, I hope he'll join me when shortly we do have the groundbreaking for his brand-new hospital in Markham, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Armstrong to Minister Hoskins Re: Long-Term Care Home Spaces

>> MPP Teresa Armstrong: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Last week, I had a town hall on long-term care in my riding. One of my constituents told me she was forced to take her father out of the hospital, and he'd been living in a hospital bed in her living room. Minister, she has missed so much work. She isn't sure she has a job to go back to and she is currently unable to pay her mortgage and her hydro bills because her father needs daily care. Minister, you have failed my constituents, and I want to know exactly what are you doing for the 26,500 seniors and their families who are languishing on waiting lists waiting for a long-term care bed?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this question as well. I know I'm not familiar with this specific case. I'm happy to discuss it. However with the member opposite, should she wish that. But, Mr. Speaker, our investments in the long-term care and not just long-term care, because it's important that we look at this holistically. Hospital investments for those that require that. Home care investments as well. We've increased the home care budget year after year. I think we're in the fourth year now of a 5% increase in that budget but we've built since coming into office 10,000 new long-term care beds, Mr. Speaker. We redeveloped already or are in the process of redeveloping 13,000, well on our way to our commitment of 30,000 beds redeveloped by 2025, Mr. Speaker. But there are challenges, and often when you -- Down to the individual case, when we are made aware, sometimes we have the ability working with all our stakeholders and partners, to make a difference.

>> MPP Armstrong: Minister, the growing demand for long-term care beds has not just come up out of the blue. Experts have warned this government for more than ten decades. Now there are 26,500

seniors and their families caught up in cycles of stress, poverty and loss of dignity. The same experts have also told you that the wait list will double in six years to 50,000 people. Minister, you have failed to act. Will you commit to ensuring that every senior has access to a long-term care bed when they need it?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So among the more than 10,000 long-term care beds that we've added since coming into office, Mr. Speaker, include 192 new beds at the Homewood corporation in London, 160 new bed at people care in London, Mr. Speaker. 192 new beds at Henley place ted in London millimetre. 32 beds at chateau gardens in London. Also well on our way to redeveloping many, many beds in London as well, in excess of 500 easily. Shadow gardens, extendicare, versacare, mcgormick, kensington village, all located in the London region, Mr. Speaker. Probably in London itself. Certainly we are making significant investments. Including in the member's own riding and city, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Coteau Re: Anti-Racism Strategy

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand in this House to recognize that today is international day for the elimination of racial discrimination. Responsible for anti-racism. Speaker, approximately one year ago, the anti-racism directorate was established. The Minister was appointed by our Premier with a mandate to address racism in all its forms, with a Fus on systemic racism. Speaker, regrettably systemic racism is still very deeply entrenched in our day-to-day lives. We have seen it in many of our communities such as the vandalism in the mosque in Kingston and the Islands a couple of years ago. Racism continues to negatively impact people in our province every single day. This is unacceptable and must bee addressed. It is important that our government acknowledge systemic racism and take action -- Equitable outcomes for all. Minister, can you please outline the steps our government has taken to combat systemic racism in Ontario?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question and especially on this important day. Mr. Speaker, systemic racism is real and it creates unfair outcomes for people here in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to travel across this great province and I spoke to many people. I spoke to them about the painful realities of racism. And I want to take a moment to thank the people that came out, because I know those conversations were tough and they were very painful, and it wasn't an easy thing for people to do. Many of these conversations were frustrating and they were difficult. But, Mr. Speaker, we listened to people's stories. We listened to ideas and we've taken those ideas and we've brought a strategy forward that I think we all could be proud of. Mr. Speaker, on March 7 our government introduce add better way forward a three-year strategic plan to fight racism here in the province of Ontario. And to really build an anti-racism approach to the way the government does things. I'm very proud to be here today to talk about that strategy.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that response and your work in our communities. I'm proud to see that our government has put forward a plan to address systemic racism. This is much needed, and I know that there will be many con stch went in my riding of Kingston and the Islands who appreciate and support this work. Speaker, we know that communities face deep histories and legacies of marginalization that continue to shape outcomes today. Research shows that some populations, particularly indigenous people, face systemic racism and disproportionately worse socioeconomic outcomes compared to others. We know for example that black and indigenous people are overrepresented in the child welfare and justice system. Minister, can you tell us how this plan will -- Racism in our public institutions?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the Minister of education and the Attorney General, the Minister of community safety and correctional services, the Minister responsible for indigenous relations and reconciliation and many other Minister s and members on this side of the House for being there and to help to build this plan. We're taking a whole of government approach to build a plan that will fight racial disparities here in the province of Ontario. And the anti-racism directorate will partner with ministries to pilot and Collect this

aggregated data in child welfare, justice and in education. So, Mr. Speaker, we have a three-year plan and that strategic plan includes and attempts to reduce disparities and disproportionalities affecting individuals and racialized people in government policies, programs and services. It also looks to ensure sustainability and accountability. Increased education in public awareness and work collectively with communities to eliminate systemic racism.

MPP Clark to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Steve Clark: Speaker, for 47 years, Swan's variety was a landmark in the village of Athens. Swan's survived a major fire and lasted through the terms of eight Premiers, but not the ninth. On Friday, a heartbroken owner Karen Swann turned out the lights for the last time. It wasn't a lack of customers that spelled the end for Swann's. It was the crippling cost of hydro, culminating in last month's outrageous \$7,000 bill. The Premier diminishes the hydro crisis and energy poverty she created by calling it a mistake. Speaker, what does the Premier have to say to Karen Swann who just paid for this mistake with her family business?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I don't know the circumstances around this business. What I do know is that there are small businesses all over the province, Mr. Speaker, who are going to see a 25% reduction this summer, Mr. Speaker. Because we know that it's not just individuals or families in their homes who have been carrying a burden, Mr. Speaker. As we have said have been asked to pay for upgrades to a system that had been neglected -- Have been asked to pay for improvement in the system, Mr. Speaker, that will last for many, many years, which is why we're spreading the cost of those over a longer period of time, Mr. Speaker. Again I don't know the specific circumstances around this business, but we understand. Very clearly that businesses, small businesses, mom and pop businesses. In towns around the province --

>> MPP Clark: Back to the Premier. For years the Premier ignored our warning that unaffordable hydro rates were destroying our communities. Now, when her political future is at stake, she suddenly claims to care. They shamelessly spend taxpayer dollars on ads designed to portray themselves as heroes in a disaster they created. But if she stops patting herself on the back and looks around, she'll see that no one's buying it. Ontarians will never forget this Premier did nothing as hydro rates soared, business closed and families were forced from their homes. Speaker, will the Premier admit that it was her failed leadership on the hydro crisis that cost Karen Swann everything she had?

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of energy.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I not Honourable member used the word disaster, and that was the electricity grid that they left for us, Mr. Speaker. They left the province and the electricity grid in a disaster, Mr. Speaker. We had rolling Brownouts on a regular basis. A blackout, Mr. Speaker. So we acted. This government, this party acted to make sure that we rebuilt the system, Mr. Speaker, rebuilt generation, rebuilt transmission, rebuilt distribution, Mr. Speaker. That was needed to ensure that all businesses in this province, that all families in this province were able to keep the lights on, Mr. Speaker. And now, now, Mr. Speaker, we're making -- making sure that we're reducing those bills by 25%, Mr. Speaker, for small businesses, for farms. and for families right across the province. And let's not forget 40 to 50% reduction for those folks and Hydro One customers.

MPP Bisson to Minister Mauro Re: Northern Telecom

>> MPP Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Premier. Premier, I have a situation that proves that privatization is a disaster. Your government, when privatized the delivery of internet services and long distance in northeastern Ontario when you privatized Ontario. Now what happens, I get phone calls from constituents like Bill Aitchison in Timmins who ended up

losing his Ontario service that had very high speed internet up and down so that he could do what he had to do. He was forced to go to the private sector with bell to purchase internet service. The costs went up by 50%, and his service went down with lower bandwidth. Will you finally admit that privatization of public services is a bad thing?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of northern development and mines.

>> Minister Bill Mauro: Thank you very much. I want to thank the member for the question. What I know about the file is simply this, Speaker. In October 2014, the province and the board completed the sale of Ontario to bell aliant, which is now bell Canada. The reality is that, over the past decade, Ontario was not able to generate sufficient revenues to cover its operating and capital expenses, Speaker. The government had external financial experts look at ontc's books and evaluate the costs of keeping Ontario in public hands. They found that keeping Ontario was going to cost about 148 million in the long term and that by selling it we could actually save, Speaker, \$96 million. The cost to the ontc have continued to own Ontario was greater than the short-term cost associated with the sale, Speaker. I look forward to providing more information in the supplementary.

>> MPP Bisson: Minister, hogwash. Ontario was set up for the reason that there isn't a large enough market for the private sector to deliver the service needed. So that's why the Ontario government stepped in with sun Tera so that people in places like Timmins and irk wa falls and other communities are able to get the internet. Instead you decide today leave them to the avails of the market which the market is not large enough and now we're forced to pay more to get less service. So will you finally admit privatizing Ontario was a mistake?

>> Minister Mauro: There's been tremendous changes in the telecom industry and it no longer made sense for ontc to run a telecom company whose services are being provided more efficiently by private sector companies. The sale of Ontario is part of the government's strategic path forward. We've committed \$15 million investment that will be matched dollar for dollar by bell and result in a \$30 million update to tower and system upgrades. There were short-term costs associated with the sale of ontara, the costs of continued ownership -- Thank you, Speaker. While there were short-term costs associated with the sale, the costs of continued ownership outweighed the short-term costs of the sale. Proceeds from the sale include 6 million in cash. Estimated 9 million in long-term revenue to the ontc through a fibre licence agreement with bell.

MPP Vernile to Minister Matthews Re: Canadian Musical Theatre Project

>> MPP Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of advanced education and skills development. We've been seeing phenomenal news of "Come from away" a musical that made its debut on Broadway this month after being showcased here in Toronto. The musical tells a story of Canadians helping stranded American travellers in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Speaker, the show actually got its start here in Ontario with a collaboration of Sheridan College. Speaker, cot Minister please tell us more about this musical and how Sheridan was involved in bringing it to Broadway?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Glad to have this question and opportunity to highlight extraordinary success from one of our Colleges, Speaker. Last week I was delighted to be in New York City to see "Come from away" on Broadway, Speaker. As the member said, it's how the people of gander, Newfoundland came together to support people from all over the world as they landed there after 9/11. It's received fantastic critical acclaim. A-listers are going to see it. Maybe none more famous, Speaker, than our very own Minister of labour, Kevin Flynn, attending as well, Speaker. It is heartwarming. It is compelling. It's a show set in Canada written by Canadians. Irene sankov and David Hine. It was born and brought to life right here in Ontario. Canadian musical theatre project, Speaker. I'm delighted to talk more in my supplementary.

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. And I'd like to thank the Minister for her answer and I think we're all quite envious of our labour Minister for taking in the show. I want to ask him all about it.

We should note that Sheridan works with the Canadian musical theatre project as a kind of musical theatre incubator. Canadian and international writers and composers can bring their new musicals to life through workshops and stage greetings, working with a cast of students. Speaker, could Minister please tell us more on how students are involved in the creation of musicals like "Come from away"?

>> Minister Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. Since 2011, the Canadian musical theatre project has worked -- workshopped 12 musicals this way. Led by Michael Rubinoff, students are involved from the very beginning helping shape these pieces of art through each new stage of development. And this is exactly the kind of hands-on experiential learning we want all students to have whether they're in engineering, whether they're in early childhood education or performance arts. Colleges have been leaders in integrating this type of high-impact opportunity for students right into their learning. Next week -- or next month we'll be celebrating Colleges week, a celebration of the 50th anniversary of Ontario's public College system. And there is a lot to celebrate. "Come from away" is just one example, Speaker, where Colleges are making our lives here better in Ontario and also bringing us pride on the world stage.

MPP McNaughton to Minister Thibeault (Ballard) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question this morning is to the Premier. Last week I held my second rural and small-town poverty and jobs roundtable. One of the major topics at this meeting was the soaring hydro costs and how devastating they've been to people in small towns. Speaker, I don't need to tell the Premier of Ontario that electricity rates have more than doubled in recent years driving people into energy poverty. Yet no action was taken until her popularity in the polls plummeted. Her first step was to use taxpayers' money to create congratulatory ads. Speaker, will the Premier explain why it's more important to put out a series of partisan political ads than it is to actually fix the hydro crisis that her government has created?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of energy.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise and talk about the Ontario fair hydro plan, which actually addresses the specific issues concerned by many families that live in the rural or northern parts of our province, Mr. Speaker. Because of that, Mr. Speaker, we acted. And so the rrrp is going to be increased, Mr. Speaker, significantly for many of those customers -- our two customers are one customer, Mr. Speaker. They're actually going to see not just 25%, Mr. Speaker, like every other family and small business and farm in the province. They're actually going to see between 40 and 50% reductions, Mr. Speaker, for those folks that are in rural and in northern parts of the province. And so, Mr. Speaker, we're going to make sure that the rrrp is enhanced. We're making sure distribution rates are fair for those folks that are in those parts of our province, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to bring forward other programs like the affordability fund that will also help those folks in that part of the province, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

>> MPP McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. One of the many attendees at my recent roundtable was pastor Brian Horvin of the first Baptist church in Wallaceburg. Pastor stated Ontario's soaring electricity prices are emptying the charitable coffers of churches being tapped by parishioners unable to pay their power bills or afford grocery bills. Another story of heat or eat here in Liberal Ontario. Speaker, does the Premier think it's fair for people to rely on churches to cover basic necessities like heat, hydro and grocery bills in their communities? Or does she simply not care about the people living in small towns in rural Ontario who are stuck paying their bills?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. I'm delighted to be able to follow up on discussion around poverty in Ontario. I think it shows the leadership of this government in establishing a ministry that focuses on Ontario's poverty reduction strategies. I want to let you know that yesterday we tabled with the legislature our poverty reduction strategy report, Mr. Speaker, that announces we've had a 20% reduction in child poverty in this province. I think that shows leadership right across, right across. Mr. Speaker, there's so much more that this province is doing

when it comes to poverty reduction in general. Whether it be things like the free tuition for students, for the --Income pilot that we're offering. The energy costs with some of the strategies that we're undertaking. -By and large, Mr. Speaker, we're focused on --

MPP Gates to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. A local business Forrester city casting from fort Erie, contacted our office regarding their recent hydro bill. It was \$12,000. Yes, \$12,000. This local business actually only used around \$1,000 in electricity. But between global adjustment charges, delivery charges and H.S.T., the bill is \$12,000. While I appreciate that there is an 8% discount to help business in Ontario, unfortunately this business does not qualify for that reduction. Becausef their kilowatts per-hour usage, they don't qualify. Mr. Speaker, I believe this is unfair. The Liberal government should be concerned businesses in niagara and across Ontario are going to have to close because of these policies. So I ask the Premier, will you commit to taking immediate action to help small and medium sized businesses in Ontario with their crushing hydro bills by stopping the sale of Hydro One and taking real action to lower hydro bills?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very important to note that the I.C.I. Program, Mr. Speaker, actually helps all businesses within, you know, under a mega watt of hour usage, Mr. Speaker, with reducing their bills by up to a third. And I don't know the specifics of that individual business and I'd be more than happy to talk with the Honourable member about that, to find out what programs they do qualify for, Mr. Speaker. Because there are many, many programs that are out there, Mr. Speaker. I was at a great company in Brant, Mr. Speaker, called haematite. We were there giving them an award. They saved \$200,000, Mr. Speaker, by changing their lights, Mr. Speaker. But you know what? They were unaware of the I.C.I. Program so we're working with them to actually help them save a third on their bills, Mr. Speaker. And the way we dropped this, Mr. Speaker, the way we reduced this from one mega watt to kill awatt, thousands of more businesses and medium size enterprises will qualify for the I.C.I.. That's great for business in this province, Mr. Speaker.