

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript - Tuesday, October 25, 2016

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Tuesday, October 25, 2016

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown (Yakabuski, Smith) to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Energy Management

>> Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier, the Liberals can't seem to get anything right when it comes to energy file. The wait never seems to end. 12 million dollars wasted on consultants and advertisements. 28 million dollars losing a lawsuit for a project that hasn't even been built. The newest scandal? An 81 million dollar accounting error by the independent electricity system operator. Just like that, the ieso deficit grew by 81 million dollars. Mr. Speaker, are the Ontario rate payers on the hook yet again? How does this keep on happening, Mr. Speaker ?

>> Premier Wynne: The member opposite should know there are no additional impacts to rate payers. This issue goes back to 2010. The 70 million dollars in savings remains a net savings to Ontario ratepayers. The issue goes back to 2010. There are no additional impacts on ratepayers.

>> MPP Yakabuski: Not quite the answer I got from the Deputy Minister this morning. The Liberals have tried to hide this 81 million dollar mistake. The public accounts say they have applied to the Ontario energy board to raise rates to correct the Liberal accounting error. I hardly think it's ethical for the Liberals to hide hydro bills to make up for their mistake. Speaker, has the 81 million dollar been approved and how much more can a family expect to pay to make up for this Liberal accounting error?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable member for his question. As we said in committee, we need to be very clear there's no new additional impact to ratepayers. Accounting experts determined over which period the payments would need to be taken. All government agencies use these standards. Last week in the House we passed legislation to save 5 million Ontarians 8% on their electricity bill. This week the opposition is talking about accounting practices for pension payments dating back to 2010 that have previously been disclosed for several years worth of public accounts. We announced regulations to save businesses one-third of their energy costs. This week the opposition talking about accounting practices and disclosures from years ago. We'll continue to stay focussed on the issues.

>> MPP Smith: This is another 81 million dollar Liberal scandal the government is trying to sweep under the carpet. It's been revealed this government wasted 12 million dollars on consultants and advertisements, another 28 million dollars on the Wynne stream lawsuit and an accounting error. I'll trust the auditor general's accounting before I trust this government's accounting. This means the Liberals wasted with all the three scandals 121 million dollars with the stroke of a pen. We know this is a former federal NDP but congratulations with these scandals. Mr. Speaker, how much will families be expected to pay to make up for this latest 121 million dollars worth of Liberal scandal and mismanagement?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Honourable member likes to focus on my past. This government focusses on Ontarians future. (Applause) For those on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we know that back in 2010 there was accounting practices that have changed in accordance with expert guidelines. All government practices have changed in relation to that. They went from gap to the We focus on a clean reliable system. When we're talking about the details of this accounting change, Mr. Speaker, the opposition obviously has no plan when it comes to energy. They can't see the forest for the trees. The only thing they can see are the big coal piles they'd like to bring back to Ontario. We have now invested in a clean --

MPP Jones (Wilson, Clark) to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Affordability

>> MPP Jones: Repeating a myth doesn't make it accurate. It was closed by an Ontario PC party. Sharing the effects of hydro bills and what it's doing to their businesses. One business owner hopes to retain what little manufacturing remains in Ontario. They should be very concerned. Soaring hydro rates have an impact. I agree. This government has destroyed our province's once proud manufacturing sector and it's deterring new businesses from creating jobs. Will the Premier make energy affordable for businesses?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and answer the question especially when it comes to the success stories. The government has invested in helping small businesses across the province. The ici program is something we should all be proud of. Over 300 businesses currently participate in that. 800 megawatts of savings that save businesses and families money. I talked about a few examples last week. Let me bring up another one. The chess wood arena upgraded their control system and lighting. Retrofit delivered saves and improved ice and skating conditions. The programs help conserve energy. We have many more examples. 6 autopart manufacturers in Guelph. A textile plant. All of these places are benefiting from the programs we have in place to help small businesses.

>> MPP Wilson: Supplementary is for the Premier. Not long ago I received a letter from Mr. Brian Taylor who said electricity rates are scandalous. He's a senior on a fixed income and says his hydro bill has increased by 35% in the last 2 years. He finds Ontario's skyrocketing electricity rates completely unacceptable. He would like the Premier to visit him and explain why his government and created such a mess. Will the Premier agree to visit Mr. Tory and offer him an explanation.

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable member for his question. The important thing for this government to do is continue to move forward with our programs and our plan on energy and how we can save families and save seniors some money on their electricity bill. We've done that, Mr. Speaker. Last week we passed the bill that relates to the 8% reduction on helping families and helping individuals and seniors like Mr. Tory. I think it's important that the opposition let him know this is going to happen on January 1st of 2017. It's good news. We also have the oesp program. I'm not sure of the details that relates to Mr. Tory's case. If he heats his home with electricity he can qualify up to 75 dollars a month. I'm more than happy to ensure Mr. Tory and all seniors and families across the province are aware of the great programs we have in place to help families and seniors.

>> MPP Clark: My question is to the Premier. In addition to soaring costs and unreliable power, the government's energy system has a new way to make it harder for businesses. Louise of Severson cleaners in Brockville contacted me about Hydro One's deposit charges. After decades of being an outstanding customer, Louise had a slightly late payment. She's immediately hit with a 1300 dollar deposit charge. That's outrageous. A letter and a personal call from her bank couldn't void the charge. She had to spend 100 dollars on a credit check. The Premier can claim this isn't her fault but the buck stops with her. She's in charge. Does she agree that this is wrong? Will she join me in demanding Hydro One stop gouging businesses with these charges?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank the member for bringing forward that question and talking about businesses within his riding because we do have programs to support businesses right across the province from southern Ontario to northern Ontario to eastern Ontario to central Ontario. We have programs that help businesses with their electricity cost. So when you look at many of the programs we offer to help small businesses, I hope that the member is talking to this individual about the save on energy program that Hydro One would be able to offer this business. They're offering these programs to businesses across the province, Mr. Speaker. I can talk about many programs. One in Thunder Bay, Mr. Speaker. The Canada malting company. They invested in the save on energy program. Got 2 million dollars back in a 7 million dollar cost and they're saving a million dollars a year in their energy costs.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Windstream NAFTA Ruling

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question for the Premier. When the Liberal government cancelled the gas plant contracts for political reasons, it costs taxpayers over a billion dollars. Does the Premier know how much it will cost the people of Ontario to cancel the 5.5 billion dollar signed contract with wind stream?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it relates to wind stream, we're well aware the tribunal has provided us with 20 days to work with our federal government to do our due diligence and look at all aspects of this, Mr. Speaker, to make sure we get this right. When it comes to our

investments in this province and the electricity system, we've actually brought forward 18,000 megawatts of renewable energy, Mr. Speaker. That's something we should all be proud of. When you look at coal, the next best thing in reducing our ghgs is the 18,000 megawatts. When it comes to natural gas firing, I think that's important for us to talk about the Québec deal. That's something we should all be proud of. The two terawatts of power will be directly targeted toward the natural gas peaking plants which will reduce our ghgs further.

>> MPP Tabuns: Speaker, it's clear they don't like this question. Signing the wind stream contract has cost taxpayers 25 million dollars plus 3 million in legal fees because a tribunal says the contract is still enforced and the province has put it on hold. If the government was committed to producing public power Ontario's energy system would be free to serve the public's interest instead of being tied up in courtrooms and tribunals. When Liberals and Conservatives sign private energy contracts, it means putting the interest of big corporations ahead of the needs of the people of Ontario. How much more are Ontarians going to have to pay because the Liberals signed a 5.5 billion dollar contract with stream? How much more? (Clapping)

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I'm happy to answer this question. Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, we have 20 days to review this case. The question that the member brought forward is purely speculative. But what I can talk about, Mr. Speaker, are facts. Facts that we've invested in renewable energy. Fact that we've invested in nuclear energy creating hundreds of thousands of jobs and providing base load power for the province. We're very proud of this system we have in place. It's clean, it's green, it's reliable. On this side of the House we don't know where they're coming from. They're not in favour of renewable, of nuclear. They have no plan. Both opposition parties have no plan when it comes to energy. On this side of the House we have a plan and we're acting on it.

>> MPP Tabuns: If this is your plan, it's a very scary thought. When our government invested in the energy sector it should be for the benefit of everyone. Signing contracts with private companies leaves taxpayers on the hook if the contracts are cancelled. We're seeing it with the sell off of Hydro One which will benefit shareholders over regular Ontarians. My question is this: What will it cost this time to get out of a contract the government is cancelling to serve its own political interest just before an election?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very, very proud of the electricity system that we have in the province, Mr. Speaker. We have an adequate supply of power. The ieso have told us that clearly. When looking at the power that we have in our province, there was no need for us to continue to move forward with the Irp2 decision. So we were able to suspend that and save 3.8 billion dollars to the ratepayers because we know it's important. We understand some families are having difficulty. So finding ways to help them is important for this government. We've done just that. We made sure we brought forward our bill. That's reducing and permanently reducing bills by 8% come January 1st. 330,000 families that live in northern parts of the province will see that reduction go up to 20%. The ici program is helping businesses across the province and we're looking forward and we're looking forward to helping them all.

MPP Fife to Minister Hoskins Re: eHealth

>> MPP Fife: This weekend I was in my riding. This is to the Premier. The modernization of health. The leveraging of ehealthcare. This Premier seem obsessed with privatization. Now asking their privatization expert to figure out the sale price of health. If she's not planning to sell off part or all of ehealth, why did the Premier and the Minister of health in his letter ask Mr. Clark to figure out how much money the province can get for it? It's a good question.

>> Min. Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I have to repeat. I'll repeat it as many times as I need to. Ehealth is not for sale. Canada health infowave to a large agree inspired us to approach Ed Clark because Canada health infowave has valued records as providing substantial benefits. Attached a dollar value to that. It's important as we look forward to taking advantage of opportunities, new technologies, the strength that we have already seen in the building of health in this province, that we look at the assets that we have. We do an inventory to see what assets we have and use it to build a stronger

health program. We fill those gaps. It allows us to invest more in consumer facing aspects.

>> MPP Fife: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Clark said 6.8 million dollars on consultants to come to the conclusion the province should sell off Hydro One. Surely Mr. Clark won't be doing this alone for free. How much will the people of Ontario be paying the consultants so Mr. Clark can make the case to privatize or assets?

>> Min. Hoskins: We're not selling health. We have no plans to. But I want to talk, it gives me the opportunity to talk about those assets that we're asking Ed Clark to value. About a decade ago, less than a million Ontarians were benefitting from electronic records. There are 12,000 providers providing that service to them right down to the family doctor and nurse practitioner. More than 80% of primary care providers are using electronic records. We have medication history is accessible for our seniors in all our hospital and energy rooms. When I was practising as a doctor I had to go to the back and pull files. Now we have immediate access to their list for seniors in hospitals.

>> MPP Fife: Thank you very much. Modernization, optimization, leveraging, we needed a privatization thesaurus. The Hydro One sell-off has been disastrous. We'll be in a deficit position after the next election because of revenue loss. We've seen rates so high that families are forced to choose between saving for their children's future or paying for their bills. This is a reality of the people of this province. Consultants are about the only group who have done well by the Premier's sell-off. The people of this province paid the last consultant bill of 6.8 million dollars. How much will it cost Ontarians for her to decide to sell off another vital public asset, health.

>> Min. Hoskins: The third-party can try to spin this any way they want. But the truth is we're not selling health. We actually want to make it better and stronger, and take advantage of the expertise that exists. We're going to be doing it. It's explicit, my letter with the information officer. We have to admit we have almost 3 million lab test results for nearly 10 million Ontarians stored digitally. We have more than 700,000 hospital reports sent digitally every day to patients' primary care providers. This is an amazing system that we've built up over the past decade. We have much more work to do. By having Mr. Clark look at the assets he can help us understand how we can make a strong system even stronger.

MPP Munro (Barrett) to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Affordability & Agriculture

>> MPP Munro: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today my question is to the Premier. Dawn Chapman and Jim Chapman are the owners of Lakeview vegetables. They're here today in the gallery to join us. They have made many efforts to reduce and conserve power. The nature of this vegetable processing work is both energy intensive and weather dependent. Their bill is set to exceed 1 million dollars. Up 67% since 2013. This hydro usage hasn't differed much but the bill sure has. This year they hired a paid hydro consultant. The consultant says that the best Ontario for them is to actually use more hydro, yes, more hydro, you heard that correctly. By using more hydro, they have a chance to apply to a different class of hydro user. They say doing so might save them 100,000 a year.

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for bringing forward that question because I think it's very important for us to talk about what we did with the bill that passed last week. We're actually lowering the threshold for many businesses that couldn't qualify for the program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to tell them they actually need to contact their local utility to see if they do qualify for this. We lowered it from 3 megawatts to 1. That's over 1,000 other businesses across the province that can qualify for the program. I know many greenhouse growers in the southwest of the province are very excited about this because they will now be able to qualify for this. That savings is significant. It's up to a third of their electricity bill that they will be able to qualify for by this change we passed in this House last week, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Barrett: Back to the Premier. We just heard about the pressure on the processing vegetable sector. As the Ontario chamber of commerce reports, 380% increase in hydro bills. When will the Premier stop signing energy contracts we don't need. The Ipr2 has been suspended. The Minister of

energy said projects under an earlier program includes all the fit programs will still go forward. With business and residential paying the bill, when will the Premier stop selling surplus energy at a loss? When will the Premier restore basic economies, matching supply and demand and restore rational decision-making to Ontario's electricity?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise. On this side of the House we're very proud of the work the Minister of agriculture is doing with our farmers meeting the goal of the Premier to make sure we have 120 more jobs. We can see the benefits that many of these businesses can get especially in the agriculture sector when they reduce their bills. Many small farms will also benefit from the 8% reduction that we'll see come January 1st. The one thing I do have to comment about and when he talked about rational, on this side of the House we're very proud of making sure that we close all coal fire generation in this province. On that side of the House, the PC party are very pro coal. It's the only way they talk about getting things back to the way they were.

MPP Armstrong to Premier Wynne (Naqvi) Re: OPP Woodstock-London Area LTC Investigation

>> MPP Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. This hour we have just learned about a horrific multiple murder investigation in woodstock and London. Police have revealed at least 8 people were murdered. Our hearts go out to the families and loved ones of these victims. But there's a genuine question that people are asking this morning. How do murders go undetected for nearly 10 years inside any long-term care home in Ontario?

>> Premier Wynne: I want to join the member opposite in recognizing this is an extremely distressing and tragic thing for all of the families involved, Mr. Speaker. I don't think there's anyone in this legislature who would not agree this is a tragic, tragic circumstance. I know that the member opposite knows it would be inappropriate for me to comment on an ongoing police investigation. The police have made it clear there's no threat to safety and we now need to let the police do their job, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Armstrong: Speaker, of course the investigation is ongoing and the matter is before the courts. But these horrific multiple murders raise serious questions of oversight by the ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and they need to be asked. Again, my question is straightforward. How do 8 murders happen in long-term care homes without the ministry noticing?

>> Min. Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I do want to echo the sentiments that were expressed by the Premier and the member opposite about how extremely distressing a time this must be for the families involved in these cases. As being stated appropriately, Speaker, it would be highly inappropriate for any one of us to comment extensively on the ongoing police investigation. Police have made it clear that there is no threat to safety and we do, Speaker, have to let the police do their investigative work in this manner. I also want to inform the House the woodstock police services has set up a phone number for people to share any information as it relates to the investigation and that phone number is 519-537-2323.

MPP Hardeman (MacLeod) to Minister Thibeault (Duguid) Re: Hydro Affordability

>> MPP Hardeman: My question is to the Premier. Premier, the temperature is dropping and winter is approaching. Ontarians are scared of their hydro bill. I heard from a mother whose hydro bill was almost 600 dollars a month last winter. Every morning her family woke up in a freezing House. They were left in the cold. She said it was like living in 1900. Even little things like pizza days and art classes had to be cut. What does the Premier have to say to this mother of 3?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and answer the question. Mr. Speaker, it's very important for us on this side of the House to understand that some families are very difficulty. That's why we're so pleased that our bill that's going to help families reduce their bill by 8% permanently reducing the provincial hst portion on their bills come January 1st. We also did many things even before that, Mr. Speaker. We ensured that the debt retirement charge has been eliminated for families. The oesp which they don't like, we on this side absolutely like it. It helps

families with 45 dollars a month. If they heat their home with electricity and I don't know the details relating to the specifics of that family, but they can get 75 dollars a month on top of the other programs that I talked about. That's a very big benefit for this family.

>> MPP MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question back to the Premier. Chris Buttersson a manager at Sentry position in Ottawa. He reached out to me over the summer. He told me Sentry Precision was considering winding down one of their subsidiaries because their hydro rates are too high. He said she couldn't care less about the number of companies that close due to the high cost of electricity. It's one of the many businesses facing the prospect of shutting down or moving their operations into a more business friendly jurisdiction. Quote, Premier Wynne's government has made it all but impossible to do business and be profitable. I haven't given an increase to my staff for 8 years. We're in survival mode. How will the Premier address the businesses who can't afford to make a cost of living increase for their employees.

>> Min. Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I'm absolutely sure that the member opposite explained to that business that we are indeed the most competitive jurisdiction in all of North America when it comes to offering electricity. I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that she explained to that business that they're soon going to get an 8% cut in their energy rate. I'm sure she explained that to them. I'm sure she also explained to them, Mr. Speaker, that we've eliminated the capital tax the business would have been eliminating. I'm sure they also told that business that we now have the lowest effective corporate tax rate in North America. 13% lower than the competition in the United States. I'm sure that member shared all of those factors. I'm very confident that business will want to stay in Ontario and continue to grow like so many other businesses are.

MPP French to Minister Orazietti Re: Prison Segregation

>> MPP French: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of community safety and correctional services. Last week the Minister announced changes to disciplinary segregations. Based on data received, a majority of inmates are isolated for reasons other than discipline. 40% were for mental health. This Liberal band-aid does nothing to address that. The data has a name. Adam was locked up under isolation for 4 years. I'm sure that I saw Adam when I toured the Thunder Bay jail. The Minister would have too. How does this government's changes to segregation helped Adam today?

>> Min. Orazietti: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for asking this question. Very serious question. One on this side of the House that we're acting on. That's why last week I announced these changes in relation to segregation. I have had an opportunity to sit down with Ontario's human rights commissioner. Also spoken to the Ontario Ombudsman about this. We introduced changes in our correctional facilities where segregation will be used only as a last resort. Where there is no other viable option. We've also reduced it from 30 days to 15. We created a weekly segregation committee review that will review the cases of every individual in segregation. We eliminated the loss of all privileges related to segregation. And we are improving the data collection. There is important work to do as part of our transformation in our correctional system. We're doing that work.

>> MPP French: Thank you, Speaker. Segregation is the last resort. It's hard to make something a last resort when the government has cut all supports and it's become the only option. This government's announcement came a day after this. This government has spent 44 million preparing for a lockdown that never came. Surely mental health supports is one area where money could have gone. Will the government end segregation for all inmates and provide mental health supports for those who need it?

>> Min. Orazietti: Thank you, Speaker. We're working to transform our correctional system. We have in fact hired about 1100 staff, correctional officers since 2013. We added 36 mental health nurses. We're adding body scanners to help make the institutions safer. We take these issues very, very seriously. That's why we also announced last week an independent review, a third-party independent review of our entire correctional system in Ontario with one of the keys being the

reduction and goal of eliminating the use of segregation in Ontario. As it stands today, we are using segregation as a last resort only when there is no other viable option. Those supports for the individuals, the member opposite referred to, are in place in all of our institutions.

MPP Martins to Minister Coteau Re: Children's Nutritional Programs

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of children and youth services. As a mother of two young boys enrolled in the Toronto catholic school board, our system positions kids to succeed in life. They go to school, they work hard and take on new challenges. However it's difficult for children to learn when they're hungry. Research shows access to nutritious meals help children learn. Not everybody has access to nutritious meals including some of the children in my riding. Speaker, can the Minister tell the House what he's doing to help children in my riding and across the province to succeed?

>> Min. Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for her question. I know she's a strong advocate for children in her community. Mr. Speaker, it's so important that young people have healthy diets. We know that not everyone in this province has the opportunity to provide their child with a healthy nutritious meal. That's why, Mr. Speaker, we have a nutrition program that's delivered right across the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, this program delivers snacks, and meal programs to thousands of young people across the province. This is a program that we really built over time. It's over 32 million dollars investment by the province of Ontario. I want to thank volunteers, parents, teachers, principals, our educational partners for the work they do to ensure young people get the nutritional healthy diets in their schools. I'll finish off in the supplemental. Thank you.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for his response. We have communities that benefit greatly from attention of these investments including communities like my riding. Local providers and schools work hard to support kids learning and development by making sure kids get the nutrition they need. However, Speaker, we know some of the most remote communities that struggle with access to nutritious foods are first nations communities. Speaker, my question to the Minister is: Does the student's nutrition program reach these communities as well?

>> Min. Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'd like to thank the member for the question. Over 850,000 young people across our province receive some type of nutritional program in their schools with community partners and we know that there are first nation communities here in the province of Ontario that have challenges finding affordable and nutritious food. That's why, Mr. Speaker, we've expanded our program to over 120 educated settings in first nation communities that help really support young people as they develop not only their body but their mind, Mr. Speaker. First nations have worked in partnership with our government to develop innovative programming models that meet the needs in their communities. We're going to continue to build on those programs. It's a 4 million dollar investment this year. We know that there's a lot more work to do. But we know we're off to a great start, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Coe (Walker) to Minister Mauro (Thibeault) Re: Municipal & Healthcare Hydro Affordability

>> MPP Coe: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Municipalities are in charge of delivering services to their residents. It's up to them to ensure they're making the most of taxpayers' hard earned dollars. Under this government hydro rates have continued to skyrocket and they continue to deny they're the problem. The city of Oshawa received a hydro bill for street lights. The cost of power was 3,000 dollars. Speaker, what was the cost of the global adjustment? Almost 100,000 dollars. 100,000 dollars, Speaker ! Which is outrageous. Can the Premier explain why she's adjusted to city bills over 100,000 dollars when they're using just 3,000 dollars worth of power.

>> Min. Mauro: Speaker, thank you very much for the question. I think it's really interesting for us on this side of the House to get a question from the Conservative party, the official opposition, when it comes to issues relating to municipal affordability. Speaker, many of us on this side of the House used to sit on municipal council. One of the reasons that many of us on this side of the House ran

for election in 2003 is because we sat on municipal councils from 95 to 2003 when perhaps the biggest tax shift in the history of the province occurred when the Conservative party downloaded into the municipal rate base billions of dollars of long-term responsibility. So to get a question from the Conservatives about municipal affordability...

>> MPP Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier. The hydro disaster in long-term care homes where electricity spiked. Instead of putting money into better food for seniors -- nursing homes are forced to redirect 30 million dollars to cover last year's hydro hikes. For one nursing home, that's 325 extra dollars. More than this government's -- this Premier calls fairness and stability in the system. I ask her: What's so stable? About paying more for hydro hikes than feeding and bathing frail senior patients?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very important question that the opposition member brings forward. In relation to hospitals and energy bills. I'm very proud to say that our conservation program helps hospitals and municipalities and arenas and everyone. For example, in my riding, the hospital had an event with greater Sudbury utilities in which it saved over 300,000 dollars. They can put it back into the system. They can use the money in helping families in the healthcare system. We have conservation. We have demand response. We have the ici program. We have so many programs out there. We continue to promote them. Unfortunately on the other side of the House they

MPP Gretzky to Minister Hunter Re: EQAO Online Testing

>> MPP Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, last week's failed launch of the grade 10 literacy test cost nearly 200,000 students an entire school day and months of hard work and preparation. While experts say an online test is important, experts say an online attack came as no surprise. This Liberal government was caught blind sided. It's back to the drawing board for a Liberal government that continues to let -- How much will the latest I.T. Blunder cost Ontario taxpayers?

>> Min. Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for the question. Mr. Speaker, we were very disappointed to learn the students who had prepared for their online literacy test were not able to do so. This was a pilot that was set up by eqao after many months of testing and building the system. Only to learn that through a deliberate and sustained attack from entries around the world on this system that our students here in grade 10 were not able to complete their online literacy test. Mr. Speaker, this is absolutely outrageous. Our eqao officials are looking at what specifically occurred and doing their due diligence on that, Mr. Speaker, and will come forward to make that information available once it is.

>> MPP Gretzky: Thank you. Again to the Premier. While the Premier speaks of cyber-attacks as if they're science fiction, the reality is her government should have foreseen this type of scenario. Instead they were left scrambling as students and education workers stared at blank computer screens for hours. Nearly 16,000 students. For the nearly 16,000 students that were able to complete the test, in places like Sudbury and Lambton Kent, they don't know whether their passing grades will count or if their efforts were wasted. Again, how much will the failed literacy test launch cost Ontario taxpayers? I'm not asking how disappointed the Minister of education is. I want to know how much has it cost Ontario taxpayers.

>> Min. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I know that the team at eqao, they worked all weekend long to figure out what the source of the issue was. It's actually very consistent with issues that occurred last week at Twitter and Netflix. These types of global attacks are very unpredictable. I also know that the eqao folks are doing their due diligence to make sure they discover the source of the issue and make sure that we're prepared in this spring. We know that our students prepared very, very hard for this test. That's why I have expressed my disappointment in the fact they were not able to complete the test. We'll ensure that no student is treated in any manner that puts them at -- the opportunity to write the test in the future and get the grades they've earned.

MPP Vernile to Minister Flynn Re: Worker Mental Health Safety

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, speaker. My question is for the minister of labour. Last year all parties in the legislature came together to pass bill 163, supporting Ontario's first responders act. It was a new initiative to help mitigate the risk of post traumatic stress disorder. This government has created a radio and digital campaign aimed at increasing awareness of PTSD among first responders, their families and communities and eliminating the stigma often tied to PTSD. There's also a free online tool kit with resources for employers and grants for research. There are all important initiatives and resource for our first responders. The minister also announced an annual leadership summit that he'll host. It's taking place today. Could the minister please tell the house about this summit?

>> Min. Flynn: Thank you to the member for that important question. Speaker, before I rise in the legislature this morning, over 200 people joined me. They were first responders, employers, experts, advocates from all over the province of Ontario joined me at our summit organized by the minister of labour. This summit is a very important part of the it said strategy that we announced last year. People attending the summit, they'll share their experiences, the expertise, their best practices and we're going to mitigate and prevent it said in our first responders. One of the main goals is to develop prevention plans. We know they're crucial to the success of all programs. Speaker, the keynote speaker is BOB Delaney, former state trooper, mba referee who along with others will share their struggles and contribute. Not this Delaney. Another one. This afternoon I'll be ... to the summit. We'll hear from more experts and leaders. I urge other members to come down and join me at the summit.

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you. I want to thank the minister for his answer and for sharing the details of the summit. I'm sure the day will be a success and those attending will feel inspired. In the minister's new mandate letter, the premier asked the ministry to continue improving mental health protections for Ontario workers. The minister said it's very important to him and we see that following his work on Ontario's select committee on mental health and addiction. The Canadian mental health commission has reported in any given year, 1 in 5 people in Canada will experience mental health illness. This is clearly an issue that impacts many people who go to work every day in Ontario. Could the minister please tell us what else the government is doing to protect the mental health of Ontario workers.

>> Min. Flynn: I want to thank the member for that question. In the last few years, we've become more aware of the issue of psychological health and safety in the workplace. Up until about 10 years ago, people didn't really talk a lot about this. We didn't know a lot about the issues. Now people are talking about it and they're taking action on it. Our government, the minister of labour as well, takes mental health in the workplace very, very seriously. We're taking very positive steps in this area as the member mentioned. PTSD summit I told you about a second ago is a great way to share best practices. We're seeing action now at the federal level, speaker. They continue to raise the issue at other levels of government. Speaker, preventing injuries and illnesses in the workplace and encouraging workplaces to promote psychological health and safety, it's an essential component of the well-being and economic success of all Canadians. It's mental health month in October. It's a time to celebrate the advances.

MPP Fedeli (Yurek) to Minister Thibeault (Duguid) Re: Northern, Rural and Business Hydro Affordability

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you, good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Robert and his wife Carol live in northern Ontario. As seniors on a fixed income, they are hurting under this government's failed energy policies. They can no longer afford to stay in their home. Carol wears winter clothing and a toque to bed because they cannot afford heat. Significant mould has formed in their home because they can no longer afford to run their dehumidifier. The officer confirmed House holds in northern Ontario paid 45% more in costs. This government responds with band-aid solutions and more talking points. Northern Ontario deserves better. I ask the Premier, will the government end its failed hydro policies and truly address the concerns of northern Ontarians?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Honourable member for the question. It's important for us to recognize that we did act on helping families in rural and northern

parts of our province. 330,000 families will benefit from the 20% reduction in hydro rates come January 1st. Specifically seniors, I don't know the details, but if they heat their homes with electricity, the program will help them up to 75 dollars a month. There's the debt retirement charge that's been eliminated and they have the tax credit for northern Ontario residents which is also a significant saving. I know the Honourable member mentioned the fao. He talked about energy prices increasing. We're in the middle of the pack. We recognize and agree with the report.

>> MPP Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. Do to your government's failure to manage energy, small businesses are struggling. A small cafe have done everything they can to conserve energy. They've seen their rates go from 1300 to 3,000 dollars a month. 2,000 is global adjustment and delivery charges. Speaker, small businesses like the cafe in southwestern Ontario are on a verge of bankruptcy. Will the Premier explains to my constituents how can small businesses continue to afford these sky-high global adjustment rates and delivery charges.

>> Min. Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the member like the previous member that asked a business question, would have ensured their business is aware if their bill was around 3,000 a year, because of the action this government is taking, they're going to save around 35 to 3800 dollars a year. That's a significant savings for a small business. So I'm very sure the member opposite would have make sure they're aware of that. I'm sure they would have let the business know of all of the work we're doing with small businesses in the food processing area where we've got a red tape challenge that's reducing regulatory burden for small businesses. We addressed it in the autoparts sector. I'm sure that member would let our small businesses know that. I'm sure he would let that business know we're a leader in North America.