

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, May 15, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period

41st Parliament, 2nd Session

Monday, May 15, 2017

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

Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Last week we revealed a leaked Cabinet document showing that skyrocketing hydro prices were going to be back to Normal in Ontario. Hydro bills will hit a record high in 2024, and then in 2028, the average bill will hit well over \$200. Those families already faced with a ridiculously high hydro bill will see it jump another 6.5%. And 10.5% in 2028. Hydro rates will be higher than they've ever been before. Mr. Speaker, why does this government refuse to actually fix the structural problems in hydro? It's about time they -- Hydro.

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that the member opposite knows that he's referring to a document that is out of date, Mr. Speaker. A document that was part of -- that was part of the deliberation as we developed our fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, and, you know, the reality is, as a plan -- as a plan is developed, and it may be -- Mr. Speaker, as a plan is developed, there is much input and there are many -- Mr. Speaker, the many iterations of options and information that come forward in the development of a plan. We want an Ontario with an even playing field, Mr. Speaker. Our fair hydro plan is about moving in that direction, creating a fairer Ontario where people have the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, all Ontarians, to achieve equally, and so taking 25% off all the electricity bills of residents in this province, Mr. Speaker, from the residential bill, that is the fair thing to do and that's what our plan will do.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. So the Premier's defence is the document was out of date. We're talking about just a few months ago. 2017 is out of date. The only thing out of date is this government. Population of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, the Liberal press secretary called these leaked Cabinet documents on energy false and inaccurate. Now the new speaking point is out of date. The Minister of energy said he's seen thousands of graphs but he couldn't comment on the leaked Cabinet document. Well, if he can't comment on that leaked document, will the Premier pledge here today to show us the graph, recent graph that will actually show hydro rates going down? That would be one -- Mr. Speaker --

>> Premier Wynne: Speaker, a document can be false and out of date at the same time because it is not a

document on which our plan is built. It was part of the process of developing our plan. But, Mr. Speaker, you know, when I talk about a fairer Ontario, I talk about an Ontario where people have the opportunity to live out their dreams. And, Mr. Speaker, we recognize, we recognize that we have wonderful institutions in this province. We have a wonderful health care system. We have a wonderful publicly funded education system, Mr. Speaker. They are strong. They have been built up over the last number of years, Mr. Speaker, and we intend to keep them that way. But, Mr. Speaker, there are people in this province, even though our economy is doing very well, there are people who are not sharing in that. So our budget, Mr. Speaker, is about addressing those concerns, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that it is the first balanced budget in a decade. In nearly a decade in Ontario. We have the opportunity now to invest in people and make sure that that playing field is more level.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. And my question was, given the recent Cabinet document that hydro rates are going to go out of control again -- and that's their graph -- my question was will the Premier commit to showing a new document that shows hydro rates actually going down? This fair hydro plan is a boring plan. It kicks the can down the road. It does nothing on reining in executive salaries. Does nothing on these bad contracts. It does nothing on the water power every day. It does nothing on the hydro we're giving for free to Michigan, Pennsylvania, Ohio and New York. It's not a plan. It's a reelection gimmick. So when will the Premier actually show us the hydro plan with hydro rates going down?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise to show the official opposition leader a plan on how to reduce rates. If passed, Mr. Speaker, by 25%. And I know he doesn't have a plan, Mr. Speaker. So what they want to do is stand up and complain. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? We made sure that we looked after families, farms. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We looked after families, farms, 500,000 small businesses right across the province, Mr. Speaker. And again it just shows that the party opposite has no idea what to do on the energy file, has no plan, because all they have to do, Mr. Speaker, to look at the 2010 long-term energy plan, the 2013 long-term energy plan, Mr. Speaker. You know what? We have a plan coming forward in 2017 that will continue to show. That prices will continue to be lower, unlike that party. No idea. No idea on how to work for electricity for the people of Ontario.

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

Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The government has a fictional 25% band-aid solution. Their hydro scheme, Mr. Speaker, doesn't help struggling families. It's all about helping a party with struggling polling numbers. Now the reality, Mr. Speaker, is -- Leaked Cabinet document, it says very clearly that because of their hydro plan, there will be a temporary 25% decrease but it will be matched -- now this is as reported in the cbc as from the Liberal Cabinet document -- it will be matched by a 61% increase after the next election. So temporary borrow, get a temporary decrease then skyrocket 61%. People can't afford their hydro buys right now in Ontario and they put forward a plan that's going to have hydro rates go up 61%? Mr. Speaker, it's unbelievable. When will this Premier actually -- Solve structural problems at hydro?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, and it is not to be believed because the leader of the opposition is using a document, Mr. Speaker, that was given to the cbc but is out of date, was not the document on which the plan was built, Mr. Speaker. So let's just deal in the facts. The facts are, Mr. Speaker, that the document that the leader of the opposition is referencing is not the document on which our plan was built. Our plan will reduce people's bills across the province by 25%. We were very, very clear, Mr. Speaker, that we were asking right now, this generation, to pay costs of the investments that have been made in our electricity system to upgrade it because it had been neglected and that those costs needed to be spread over a longer period of time. That's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker. That's how people will receive a reduction. And Mr. Speaker -- We came up with it and it will reduce people's bills by 25%.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The government simply can't come clean. There is a recent Liberal Cabinet document -- I realize they're frustrated that there's now whistle-blowers exposing this government, but their numbers do not add up. Their plan doesn't help Ontarians. It's a temporary decrease for a massive increase. Even the Minister of energy said the fair hydro plan will cost more and it will take us longer to pay off. Thank you for that assessment. But the reality is how much more is it going to cost Ontarians? Because every time this government touches hydro, they make it worse. And with projections of it going up 61%, that gives Ontarians a heart attack. And so they say this document is outdated because it is a few weeks or a few months old. My question, Mr. Speaker, is this. If they're saying that graph is not accurate, will you release the most recent graph. Show Ontarians that you don't have a plan to skyrocket hydro rates.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: I not leader of the official opposition is having a very hard time understanding how a plan works and how a plan evolves because they don't build plans, Mr. Speaker. They wait for a magic weekend in November to actually devise plans for the entire province. On this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we've been working hard for the last six months on making sure that we can deliver real relief for families in this province and in short, Mr. Speaker, they will see a 25% reduction if this bill passes, Mr. Speaker, on average. As we move past, Mr. Speaker, for the next four years, we are holding these costs to inflation, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that families have predictability -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And as I was saying we're holding it to the cost of inflation for the next four years and then after that, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to find ways to pull costs out of the system to ensure that we can keep rates as low as possible. I know they're waiting for their magic weekend to make things magically appear. We're acting now, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Once again, people deserve to know the truth. If the document is not precise, what are the real figures? Mr. Speaker, how will we know that the tariffs will not increase and how will families pay?

>> Minister Thibeault: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government here works very hard to reduce costs for Ontarians by 25%. For us, for the government, Mr. Speaker, it's very important to change it, because the party opposite of us has not changed anything.

[End of Translation] Making sure we're acting and we're bringing forward legislation. If passed, we'll make sure that we see a 25% reduction.

[Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: But the opposition forgets people in the rural province.

[End of Translation] See reductions between 40 to 50%, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely no idea on how to deal with that on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker. We're acting -- Mr. Speaker.

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

Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my question's for the Premier. Thanks to documents leaked by a whistle-blower last week, we now know for sure that hydro rates will soar as a result of the Liberal government's hydro scheme. And what's worse is that these documents prove that the Premier knows it too. So can the Premier explain, Speaker, why she is so clearly putting her desire to get reelected ahead of the well-being of Ontarians?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well again, Mr. Speaker, the document to which the leader of the third party refers is a document that -- The document that was not used to establish our plan, Mr. Speaker, and in the development of a plan, there are many options that are put forward, Mr. Speaker. There's modelling that is done. Our plan was built to reduce people's bills by 25% across the province, Mr. Speaker, and keep those bills down in the immediate term and in the midterm and the long term, Mr. Speaker, we will develop a long-term energy plan that will continue to take costs out of the system. Mr. Speaker, our fair hydro plan was designed to meet the needs of residents across this province. Already seeing those initial reductions, and by summer they will see a 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, this is a height of arrogance. Ontario families who are struggling under the crushing weight, the crushing weight of the damage that this Premier has done to our hydro system are frustrated. And rightfully so. The Premier bragged, Speaker, for two months the Premier bragged about her hydro plan, not once telling Ontarians that it will actually make their bills go up. How can this Premier, how can this Premier justify this disgusting betrayal of Ontarians?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been saying all along that you know, Mr. Speaker, we had to clean up our electricity system. You know one of the things that we did, Mr. Speaker, was we removed coal and we talked to many families, and one family in particular, T Y young man was named vernment made by eliminating coal, he hasn't had to visit the hospital in one year, Mr. Speaker. That is a very positive thing. When you think about the investments that we've made. We know, Mr. Speaker, that that came with a cost. So what we've done is we've brought forward a plan. We worked with stakeholders. We worked with the community. We worked with everyone involved in this sector, Mr. Speaker, to come up with plan to reduce bills on average by 25%. If we can get this legislation passed, Mr. Speaker. We want to see this relief for families as soon as possible. We want to ensure that we help families --

>> Andrea Horwath: The Premier has prioritized her party and her high-powered friend at every opportunity, Speaker. At every opportunity. She has sold the majority stake in Hydro One, against the wishes of 80% of Ontario families, and her borrowing scheme will end up costing these same families more on their already skyrocketing hydro bills. But you know who benefits, Speaker? Bay street bankers and Liberal insiders. That's who benefits from 14 years of Liberal government in the province of Ontario. When will this Premier do her job and look out for regular Ontario families instead of those who are already at the top?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because of the Ontario fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, if it passes, 25% on average will be the reduction for every family in this province, Mr. Speaker. 800,000 families in rural Ontario and in northern Ontario. They will see a 40 to 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker. Low-income individuals. First nations individuals will see significant relief if this legislation passes, Mr. Speaker. And I know they can only add a very small line on the last page of their 13-page document, Mr. Speaker, but we're making sure that we're bringing an additional 50% on the Ontario electricity support program for the most vulnerable, Mr. Speaker. And I know, Mr. Speaker, that they don't like seeing infrastructure and jobs being created in this province but that's what we're doing. When we make \$2.8 billion, Mr. Speaker, on the sale of Hydro One, surpassing the goal of \$9 million, we're creating jobs. We're making sure that we're building our province up and at the same time reducing electricity rates.

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

Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question's also for the Premier. The leaked documents

show that hydro bills in Ontario will rise by over 50%. If the Premier's borrowing scheme is passed into law. Given that this plan will actually increase people's hydro bills, Speaker, and given that the Premier is not disclosing all the facts, we have called on an independent review of the legislation by the financial accountability officer for the province of Ontario. So will this Premier co-operate with the F.A.O. So that the public has the full truth, the unbiased facts about her \$40 billion borrowing scheme?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have and we always will work with the financial accountability officer, Mr. Speaker. And in fact we have a very good working relationship and expanded his authority recently, Mr. Speaker. So we will of course work with the financial accountability officer. But, Mr. Speaker, the plan that we brought forward, which is not based on the document that the leader of the third party is talking about. That document was part of the development of the plan, Mr. Speaker, but it was not used in the final analysis of the plan that we brought forward, Mr. Speaker. Our plan is designed to reduce people's electricity bills because, Mr. Speaker, we had to make investments in the electricity system in this province. The fact is that the shutting down of the coal-fired plants, the rebuilding of lines across the province -- The development of clean renewable -- Electricity in this province, Mr. Speaker, has meant that there was a cost associated with that. We are spreading that cost over a longer period of time. Making structural changes to reduce people's electricity.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, we asked the Premier months ago, in fact two months ago today we asked the Premier not to ram this bill through the House. Bringing this bill in at the last minute, Speaker, especially now that we know how much damage it's going to do to Ontario families, is absolutely undemocratic. Shutting down the public's right to review this bill is not -- How a government with integrity would work. Will this Premier at least, at least allow the F.A.O. To conduct its assessment on the long-term impact of this borrowing scheme and direct her Minister to release all documents, sing -- every single document that they relied on to put this scheme together to the F.A.O. And do it immediately?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And as the Premier said, we welcome and encourage the F.A.O. To review our fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker. You know the F.A.O. Has already received a full technical briefing last month and we've responded to all follow-up requests for information, Mr. Speaker. So remember, though, Mr. Speaker, that it was this government that created the F.A.O. And we expanded its authority and oversight again last fall. But what's disappointing, Mr. Speaker, is that the NDP know all this and yet they try to distract from the legislation we have tabled. We've been clear all along. Our plan is spreading out the costs over time, Mr. Speaker, and over our system. But it will reduce the burden on ratepayers today and it will share costs more evenly with future generations who will also benefit from our investment. But the NDP, Mr. Speaker, they don't want to seem to want to provide relief to ratepayers or reduce bills by 25% if passed and they have no credible ideas to replace it, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: This is nothing more, Speaker, than a new gas plant scandal. Except that this time, this time it's going to cost families 40 times more than the \$1 billion it cost them for the Liberals to buy that election. Everything seems to go up under the Liberals, Speaker. Withdraw, Speaker. Everything seems to go up under this Liberal government, including the cost of an election. How can the Premier ram this legislation through this House without sufficient time for debate, public input and without an assessment from the F.A.O.?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So let's talk about what's been going up. Highways and bridges have been being built and being created. Creating jobs thanks to the Minister of economic development and work by this Premier, going up, Mr. Speaker. We're making sure that schools are going up, Mr. Speaker, hospitals, programs that go in those hospitals going up. Thanks to the leadership of this Premier and this government, Mr. Speaker, our province is being built up right across this province. You know what's going down, Mr. Speaker? If we get this legislation passed? 25% of everyone's hydro bills across this province. 800,000 families will see a 40 to 50% reduction in their hydro bills and for our low-income individuals, 50% reduction when they actually get on to the oesp program, Mr. Speaker. And let's not forget. That our first nations individuals, they're going to see their delivery charge eliminated, Mr. Speaker, but it's quite upsetting that either opposition party don't think it's important enough to vote on, Mr.

Speaker .

MPP Smith to Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Todd Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question this morning is for the Minister of energy. To the Minister. Speaker, at what point was the Minister going to inform the people of Ontario that he was bringing back the debt retirement charge, at four times the cost that it was when it was removed from bills last time?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So I believe the opposition member knows that the debt retirement charge comes from when the original Ontario hydro corporation was dismantled and hidden debt, Mr. Speaker, that they actually -- we had to find a way to pay for that, Mr. Speaker. I know that's something that his party was involved in and I know that's something that he probably is well aware of. But when it comes to making sure that he's look teg fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, I hope he can get an understanding of how to do a plan because I know they have this magic weekend planned in November where they think they can come up with a plan. So one of the things that will happen -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about the weekend. When you do a plan, Mr. Speaker, you just don't go with the first one that you get. What you should be doing, Mr. Speaker, is reviewing and making it better and better. Hopefully they can use that advice --

>> MPP Smith: Speaker, the Minister didn't answer the question yet again. But what he's doing is bringing back the debt retirement charge. It's going to be \$22 a month, which is four to five times larger than the old debt retirement charge. Only he's calling it something else. He can call it whatever he wants but it's going to be a big hit on the pocketbooks of the people of Ontario, particularly electricity customers. The fact is it's not just going to pay for energy costs though, Speaker. The Minister gets pretty wide latitude in his bill to include whatever he deems necessary in this new charge. How much is the new debt retirement charge will be going to pay interest or fees and commissions to

bankers and bond traders as part of the government's latest debt retirement charge on steroids?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now I know that they can actually project without actually doing any work or have any plan into that, Mr. Speaker. We've been working with the system operator, with the Ontario energy board wall of our utilities right across the province, Mr. Speaker. So let's talk about the 2017 long-term energy plan that actually projects where our costs are going to go. The 2010 long-term energy plan predicted that costs today should be \$178. We took costs out of the system, Mr. Speaker, \$3.5 billion from renewing the Samsung agreement. Then the 2013 long-term energy plan, its average was \$170 today, Mr. Speaker. Pull more costs out of the system, the average today, 156 bucks. When we get this plan pass through this House, Mr. Speaker, if we can pass it with their support. We will see an additional 25% reduction coming, making sure that costs are low for the next four years and continue moving forward into the future.

MPP Tabuns to Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Peter Tabuns: Speaker, thank you. To the Premier. Thanks to the Premier and her privatization of hydro, people's hydro bills are already sky high. Now we learn that the Premier plans to ram through legislation that will drive it even higher. Families are struggling. Businesses are struggling. Why doesn't the Premier get that people can't take any more of her hydro hikes?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I know I've talked about this in the past but, you know, the criticism of the NDP's obsession with Hydro One doesn't just, you know, seem to revolve around, you know, that side, Mr. Speaker. Phil of the "Globe and mail" calls the belief ownership of utilities in Ontario affects rates one of the biggest misconceptions about electricity. Martin redcode agrees Hydro One can only charge what the O.E.B. Deems reasonable, Mr. Speaker. Obviously they don't get how rates work, Mr. Speaker. The Ontario energy board will set the rates, not Hydro One. When we're looking at a plan that is reducing rates by 25%, Mr. Speaker, the only thing that they had when talking about a 5% reduction, Mr. Speaker, was a -- excuse me. A conversation with the federal government. I believe, Mr. Speaker. The member from Bramalea- Gore- Malton to actually have that conversation there tonight. Maybe he can start having that and add something to their plan.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the Premier. What the Minister was talking about, this borrowing scheme, is a \$40 billion plan to avoid the Liberals losing the next election. That's where that \$40 billion is being spent. It will make life harder for families and businesses who are suffering under already sky-high hydro rates. Is the Premier so desperate to win that she plans to pass this bill at the last minute, knowing that it will end up costing Ontarians more on their hydro bills?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I know the Honourable member is talking about our plan and the costs that are projected out in 2027. Well, that means that we'll be in government by then, Mr. Speaker, for 24 years making sure that we can continue to find ways to pull costs out of the system. We've done that over and over again, Mr. Speaker, on a consistent basis. We have found ways to pull out \$3.5 billion by renegotiating the Samsung agreement, taking \$1 billion out of the fixed price contract, Mr. Speaker. We also suspended the L.R.T. 2 contract which also reduced billions of dollars from the system, Mr. Speaker. So when looking at what we're doing as a government, we continue to find ways to reduce costs out of the system, and if passed, Mr. Speaker, a 25% reduction coming for all families, small businesses and farms in this province, Mr. Speaker. Once we can get this legislation passed through this House, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Fraser to Mauro Re: Flood Relief for Municipalities

MPP John Fraser: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of municipal affairs. Across eastern and central Ontario communities, families and municipalities are working to repair the damage caused by recent flooding. It is clearly a very difficult situation. I know that the thought every member in this House are with them -- thoughts. Last week I was able to join the Premier, the Minister of community safety and correctional services, the member from Glengarry- Prescott- Russell in Cumberland as they visited communities along the Ottawa river. I know that the Minister was in Minden hills and saw these efforts firsthand. Many of our MPP S have been working with their constituents to ensure they're getting the help that they need. I know the member from Ottawa Centre was in the westborough beach area. I saw the member from Carleton in Constance bay bagging sand. Cot Minister please elaborate on our government's effort. To respond to the flooding events?

>> Minister Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for the question and I want to thank our first responders, our municipal leaders, residents and volunteers for their efforts in response to this crisis. On Friday, May 5th, ministry staff reached out to all eastern and central municipalities to ensure they had a point of contact with us and had information about our relief programs. Speaker, the Premier, the Minister of community safety and correctional services and I have seen the hard work people are doing locally to respond to the floods. I know a number of MPP S including the member for Ottawa South have been on the groundworking with constituents as well. Speaker, we want to ensure and reassure residents that we're working closely with our municipal partners to activate the program where it will be needed. Last Friday, Speaker, I activated the disaster relief assistance for Ontarians act for areas in central and eastern

Ontario including areas along the Ottawa river. Bruce county and Minden hills where I met with mayor Devlin and council and staff and I look forward to providing a bit more detail in the supplementary.

>> MPP Fraser: Thank you to the Minister for his answer. I understand the disaster recovery assistance for Ontarians or D.R.A. O. Program is a new program introduced in 2015 to be faster and more responsive to the need of people in the province. It helps victims of natural disasters to get back on their feet by offering emergency expenses, financial assistance and repairing or replacing essential property. The program is activated when a sudden and unexpected natural disaster causes costly and widespread damage. It has been activated in the areas you mention, and residents can apply to receive assistance through this program. But for the members of this House and for those watching who have experienced flooding damage, would the Minister elaborate on how the D.R.A. O. Program works? -- Drago program.

>> Minister Mauro: I want to note there are still a number of areas under assessment by staff. When those assessments are completed a recommendation will be made to me about whether or not to activate the program in additional areas. The Drago is a new program introduced in 2015, designed after much consultation. No fund-raising, Speaker, a major change in the new program. No fund-raising is required on the ground. The program can now be activated much quicker within days or weeks as opposed to a number of months, which sometimes could have been the case under the previous program. Great advancements on the program. This is a program, Speaker, I will reiterate, that's not a replacement for insurance. It provides financial assistance for essential property in a resident's primary home. Some things like cottages or finished basements are generally not covered but essentials are, Speaker. So we're there on the ground trying to provide help for people -- Anyone who experienced flooding, take receipts and records of any communication with your broker. Go online if you're unsure. Feel free to call in. We're there to help. Thank you very much, Speaker.

MPP Fedeli to Naqvi (Sousa) Re: Ontario Budget

MPP Victor Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Just before noon today, the government will call for a vote on the budget bill. Even though most of the members on our side haven't spoken to this bill yet. In fact only three of us have given a speech on it. If this bill passes, it will be sent to committee at 1:00 today. There will be less than one hour notice to the public to scramble here to Queen's Park and make a presentation on this budget. They can't come tomorrow, Speaker. It's all over at 7:00 tonight. That's what this government calls being open and transparent: One hour notice, in and out in the same day. I ask the Premier why, why is this debate about your budget 24 days shorter than Normal budgets?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. And I -- you know, I appreciate the question the member is asking, given the fact that it's his party and his caucus who have been delaying the work of this assembly in dealing with a very important bill, Speaker. Speaker, this is -- this is a piece of legislation that will, if passed, will provide historic investment, Speaker, in our health care system and create the OHIP Plus pharmacare program -- Speaker, this bill if passed will create the OHIP Plus pharmacare program providing children and youth with free access to over 4,400 prescription medications, Speaker. I have not yet once heard from members opposite as to what their plan is going to be when it comes to providing for universal pharmacare for our children and youth. Speaker, the party opposite is only interested in one thing and one thing only and that is to delay the passage --

>> MPP Fedeli: Back to the Premier. The government doesn't want the people of Ontario to have a chance to discuss this budget. This fits right in with what the financial accountability officer said. He told us there's, quote, a broader pattern of secrecy and it's all because of political direction. He went so far as to say, quote, it is highly disappointing that instead of looking to maximize the information provided, the

government is focusing on how it can restrict disclosure of information. He finishes with, quote, they are impeding the ability of MPP S to perform their constitutional duties of holding the government to account. So, Speaker, I ask the Premier why the rush? Why don't you want us to see what's in this budget? What are you hiding?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be really, really clear as to what's going on here. We are -- the financial accountability officer. He's been given much more powers to initiate his recommendations. We work closely with him contrary to what the member's saying. And contrary to what the member's saying, they are now providing delay tactics to provide one of the most Progressive balanced budgets in history, one that provides for the people of Ontario -- One that provides support for our young people, Mr. Speaker. Free did you wigs coming this fall and enabling our economy to grow. They're opposing the people of Ontario, Mr. Speaker.

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

MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Last month more than 100 people attended a hydro town hall in my riding of London west. They shared the anxiety they felt every time they opened their hydro bill. They shared their fears for the future of their children and grandchildren because of the \$40 billion hydro debt the Liberals are passing along. Many at the town hall, like Steve Everett and his wife, were seniors living on fixed incomes, who have been hit hard by soaring hydro bills. Since the Everetts' rent doesn't include electricity they are doing everything they possibly can to cut back their usage. They do their laundry off peak and only turn the lights on when absolutely necessary. Over the winter, they even shut off their electric heat, using blankets and a ceramic heater instead and dressing in layers to keep warm. But still they -- \$200 a month on top of their \$800 monthly rent. Speaker, why is the Premier planning to implement a scheme that will Jack up. Hydro rates even higher than they are now?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I hope that the member in her town hall had the opportunity to tell this family particularly about the fact that they will see their electricity bill come down an average of 25%, Mr. Speaker, if the legislation passes. I hope that she also had the opportunity to make sure that they are signed up for the Ontario electricity support program, Mr. Speaker, so that they would be able to benefit from a further reduction, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I hope that the -- I hope that the member also, also made it clear that we were moving to put rent control in place. I don't know when the building they live in was built, Mr. Speaker, but I hope she assures the group we are moving to put rent control in place for all buildings, all private rentals across the province. I hope she made sure they got all of that information at the town hall, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Sattler: Again to the Premier, Speaker. It's not only renters who are being affected by the Liberal government's hydro fiasco. London homeowners are also starting to worry that they will lose their homes. Kurt and Phyllis gopaul from London are seniors who live on fixed monthly incomes of \$1,475. Their hydro and gas bills are eating up more than \$400 a month, almost one third of their monthly income. They applied for the oesp but they were told they don't qualify. They are worried that skyrocketing energy bills will make it impossible for them to afford their bills and force them to have to give up -- Speaker, instead of a \$40 billion borrowing scheme that will cost hydro bills to soar, will the Premier listen to the concerns raised by Londoners? Will she reverse the privatization of Hydro One and bring down hydro rates once and for all?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So a few things in relation to the Honourable member's question. If passed the Ontario fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, will reduce that seniors couple bill by 25%, Mr. Speaker. One of the other things that the Ontario fair hydro plan does, Mr. Speaker, is it enhanced the Ontario electricity support program so more people can qualify for that program. Right now,

Mr. Speaker, 192,000 families qualify for this program. We want more families on this, specifically seniors. They can see another \$580 reduced, Mr. Speaker, on top of their bill when it comes to the 25%. That's significant, Mr. Speaker, when you put those -- put those two together. When you're making sure this relief is sustainable for the next four years that relief is staying at the comfort of inflation. We will ensure it stays as low as possible moving forward.

MPP Vernile to Flynn Re: Changing Workplaces Review

MPP Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of labour. Speaker, we continue to hear more and more about precarious work and the nature of changing jobs in Ontario. In today's workplace, people are no longer working nine to five Monday through Friday with weekends off. It's common for people to be self-employed or have part-time work or temporary work. As a government, we need to make certain that we're doing all that we can to provide support for these changing conditions. I can tell you that in my riding of Kitchener centre, I heard that kind of feedback at a recent forum where we gathered to discuss the issue of poverty. Businesses and workers want our laws to reflect the reality of our modern economy. When the Minister announced the changing workplaces review, it was very encouraging to hear that we're taking this issue very seriously. So, Speaker, could the Minister please tell us more on the changing workplaces review?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Speaker, thank you and thank you to the member for the question. Really happy to stand in the House today to speak on this really important issue, because we all know that the world of work is changing and we're facing the challenges that it presents head on by doing the changing workplaces review. Speaker, we started this important conversation over two years ago. We've talked to poverty advocates, organized labour, business. We've talked to hardworking people in Ontario. And what we found, Speaker, is that precarious work is on the rise and we need to address fundamental changes are needed. We want to reward those employers, those successful employers in Ontario, that are committed to fair, productive and productive workplaces by levelling the playing field, Speaker, so that certain employers can no longer get ahead simply by taking advantage of vulnerable workers, Speaker. The advisors have submitted their final report. And recommendations. I'm considering them. I look forward to sharing them very, very soon, Speaker.

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for his answer. I know that we're all looking forward to that report. As the Minister said before, the changing workplaces review is a very important opportunity to make certain we provide protection for workers and that we help businesses in our province to prosper. When you look at the overarching stats there's lots to be proud of. We have one of the lowest unemployment rates in Canada. Our growth here in Ontario is outstripping all G-7 nations but not everyone is sharing in the benefits of our current strong economy. Action is needed to see that no one is left behind. In my riding of Kitchener centre, people are working hard each and every day and we're looking forward to how the changing workplaces review is going to make everyday lives that much better. Speaker, could the Minister please tell us more on what we can expect to see in the release of this report?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, thank you to the member for that question again. I also want to thank her for her own involvement in this and the interest in this important review that she's shown. What's clear to me, Speaker, and to the government is that after reading the report is that responsible change, we make the right decisions here, we can ensure that every hard working Ontarian has a chance to reach their full potential, Speaker. And that's what we need. The majority of employers in Ontario, Speaker, are excellent employees. They treat their employees well but still a growing number, Speaker, of hard working Ontarians whose rights are being violated. That tradition of decency that's been the hallmark of Ontario workplaces, Speaker, I think is being eroded at the expense of those good Ontario employers who play by the rules and understand the value of respect and dignity, Speaker. That needs to change. No person in Ontario. Should be made to feel unappreciated or undervalued. No one should ever feel like they can't get ahead. We aim to change that, Speaker.

MPP Arnott (Pettapiece) to Murray Re: Green Ontario Corporation

MPP Ted Arnott: Mr. Speaker, our next question is for the Minister of environment and climate change. We all know that life just keeps getting harder for the people of Ontario under this Liberal government. We all know their reputation for scandal, waste and mismanagement. But now we've learned that they're setting up the Ontario climate change solution deployment corporation. How is this new agency not redundant? How much is it going to cost to administer? Does it overlap with other existing ministry functions and programs? Why do we need it? Will the Minister commit to this House that this new agency will not become just another Liberal slush fund?

>> Minister Glen Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I always find it entertaining getting questions from the party that managed to double hydro rates. Managed to double hydro rates -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's very kind. Manage today double hydro rates in one summer talking to us about costs is a little amusing, Mr. Speaker. The green Ontario corporation operates very much like its counterpart in Québec which has been hugely successful. It will deploy billions of dollars into home heating retrofits reducing the energy and heating costs of Ontarians and cutting the costs to businesses. I can -- in the supplementary, Mr. Speaker, can already give you a list of people that are doing that. It works very much on the model of aqua. As a very highly -- And it will continue in that tradition, Mr. Speaker. There's many good models around the world. It's a much more efficient system for delivery.

>> MPP Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let the Minister be further amused then. The government wants to stuff the board of directors of this climate change agency with green energy insiders and lobbyists. Of course under the Liberals' terrible long-term hydro contracts, many green energy firms have already cashed in, big-time. The result, amongst the highest hydro rates in north America. Now they're appointing insiders and lobbyists to spend cap and trade tax money on Liberal vanity projects. Instead of putting the money back in the pockets of hard working Ontarians. We needed Minister's personal guarantee. Will he tell us that -- Will see no personal or commercial benefits from this boondoggle in the making?

>> Minister Murray: Oh,, Mr. Speaker. This is so -- this is so very simple. People go and retrofit their homes. When they retrofit their homes, they buy a high efficiency furnace or geothermal system, and this corporation gives them a grant to help -- This corporation helps them sort out what is the most -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think you and I are having a good aerobic workout this morning. So with the opposition in lieu of this would cut \$8 billion of subsidies to Ontario families and businesses. To help them reduce J.C., Mr. Speaker, and reduce the cost per tonne by 400%, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Vanthof to Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Premier. The upcoming may 24 weekend otherwise known as the may run weekend is a rite of passage in northern Ontario. And camping is a big part of our culture in the north. And one of the most beautiful places, there's many beautiful place -- places but one of the most beautiful places is the river valley park, close to river valley. Tony gabor and his family have owned and operated this park for years. But they are being squeezed by hydro costs. Last year, for the same amount of power, their costs went up by \$2,400. The same amount of power. Why is this government -- has this government ignored the plight of struggling small businesses like Tony in river --

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not knowing the specifics of the business, the small business that the Honourable member is talking about, but one good news, Mr. Speaker, that I can say to him to tell to those constituents is that the Ontario fair hydro plan, if passed, will bring forward 25% reduction for all 500,000 small businesses right across our province, Mr. Speaker. And then of course there's, you know, folks that live in the rural and remote parts of northern Ontario. And he is right, Mr. Speaker, that the red river area and throughout parts of northeastern Ontario is the beautiful part of our province. These families are going to see a 40 to 50% reduction on their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. And that's all thanks to us bringing forward the triple R.P., the rural remote rate protection plan, Mr. Speaker. We've increased that from \$20. To \$60 to \$135 on average for a Hydro One r2 customer, Mr. Speaker. That is significant relief on top of the 25% reduction.

>> MPP Vanthof: Again to the Premier. River valley park is a place where northern families have come for years to relax and enjoy nature. They're also struggling to pay their own hydro bills. I guess the question they all want to ask is so how much is their power going to go up after the quote-unquote fix for the next election? How much is it going to go up after the four years? How much is their power going up? You should know, Minister. How much is their power going up?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's going down by 25% if we actually can get the opposition to actually vote in favour of this, Mr. Speaker. And those families that are in his area when I know the Minister of agriculture was just up there, Mr. Speaker, talking about some great work that we're doing and talk about agriculture, Mr. Speaker, in that part of our great province. They were talking about the 40 to 50% reduction that they're going to see on top of that. Mr. Speaker, we've got the 2017 long-term energy plan that is going to come out in the very near future, projecting where energy costs and electricity costs are going to go, Mr. Speaker. But rest assured, we are going to do everything we continue to do, Mr. Speaker, to pull costs out of the system. We've got market renewal happening. We've got market reform. We've got a capacity option, Mr. Speaker. All of these things, all of these items will continue to take costs out of the system. Because we have a plan, Mr. Speaker, a plan that will work for all families no matter where they live in our great province.

MPP Milczyn to Del Duca Re: GTA Transit Projects

MPP Peter Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of transportation. Mr. Speaker, in June 2014 when Ontarians elected our government, they gave us the clear mandate to deliver on infrastructure projects that Ontarians are both depending on and deserve. From hospitals to transit, we're fully committed to doing just that. As our balanced 2017 budget demonstrates, we're reinforcing that commitment. Speaker, I know that many of our infrastructure projects are complex and often require solutions that are both creative and prudent to get the job done. And to that effect I'm aware the Minister made an announcement recently about how to ensure critical projects are going to be delivered on time. Would the Minister please elaborate on what exactly that plan is and why it's so important?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I want to begin by thanking the member from Etobicoke- Lakeshore for his question. As Minister of course Speaker I take my job to create an integrated transit network for this region very seriously, because I understand that the people of the greater Toronto and Hamilton area rely on a transportation network that works for them and for their families. So, Speaker, projects like the leg in -- Eglinton cross town, \$5.3 billion project, single largest public transit proj in effect Toronto's history will transform the way people move themselves and loved ones. I announced metrolinx's strong plan to ensure we deliver successfully on the Eglinton crosstown as Prime Minister ed boy 2021. Our plan, Speaker, means purchasing 61 light rail vehicles from alstom Canada, a company that is already making and delivers quality 100% flow floor vehicles for the Ottawa L.R.T.. 17 of the vehicles will be used on the finch west L.R.T., another critical transit project which will be in service December of 2021. I look forward to providing more details in the follow-up.

>> MPP Milczyn: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for that answer. I'm pleased to hear metrolinx has a strong plan in place to make sure we deliver on our transit commitments. I know that in my riding of Etobicoke-lakeshore, the Kipling mobility hub, which the Minister announced just last month, is one example of age pro equity that's moving forward and will transform my community. And it's absolutely critical that this project and others open on time. But, Mr. Speaker, I've heard some questions since the Minister made his announcement on Friday and those questions are why now? And why Alstom? They want to make sure Ontarians are getting the best deal for these vehicles and they can depend on Alstom to deliver. Speaker, through you to the Minister. Can the Minister please provide some clarity on why metrolinx is taking this step now. And how they will ensure Alstom delivers?

>> Minister Del Duca: I thank the member for the follow-up question. They are valid concerns and I'm happy to have the opportunity to follow up. Regardless of the outcome known as the resolution process, a process we know could take up to one year, our agreement with Alstom will help to ensure we have vehicles ready in time for the cross town which will enter into service in 2021. If Bombardier is found not to be in default of the contract and can successfully deliver, Speaker, these vehicles, the vehicles that we purchased from Alstom will still be used. However, Speaker, they'll be used on the Hurontario L.R.T. in Mississauga and southern Brampton. Speaker, this is both a responsible and creative solution that puts Ontarians first, both commuters and taxpayers. As I said in my previous answer, we already know that Alstom can deliver a quality

vehicle on time because it's exactly what they're doing for the Ottawa L.R.T. We truly believe this is a path forward that provides both metrolinx and people of this region with the assurance critical transit will be delivered on time as our Premier and province have promised.

MPP Yurek to MacCharles Re: Health Card Privacy Breach

MPP Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Speaker, I received information about additional breaches of confidential health information this time from the Markham region. Concerned father reached out to my office to inform me that, upon receiving his children's health care renewal forms, noticed something terribly wrong. The father of twins, a boy and a girl, received a health card renewals. The girl's information right. The boy's information contained the wrong name, address, date of birth and health card number obviously from another child in this province. Speaker, this problem is widespread and serious. When frontline workers break confidentiality of private records, they'll face either fines or loss of employment. Would the Minister tell the House how many people have lost their jobs over this confidentiality breach?

>> Minister Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. I was deeply concerned to learn about this privacy breach because I take privacy of Ontarians' information very, very seriously. And unfortunately some Ontario residents may have received notices containing information about another person's privacy information. It is very important to note, Speaker, though that the health card version code was not provided on the form that was sent out, and that information, the health card version code is essential to accessing OHIP services. So I've been working very actively with Service Ontario to get to the bottom of this, and actions are being taken to fix this issue and resume mailing of renewal notices as soon as possible. Of course the privacy commissioner was informed. Letters have been sent out to -- families and many corrected forms have since been returned, and I will add more in the supplementary.

>> MPP Yurek: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister. This breach of confidential health information seems to not be a priority for this government. Obviously when the Minister of Health won't even respond to the question. This government has brought forth bill 119, bill 41 and now bill 89 87, to give this government more access to Ontarians' personal health information. How can Ontarians trust this government to keep this information confidential when it can't even get the basics right? Speaker, Ontarians have lost confidence that this government has the ability to protect private information. Will the Minister himself take

personal responsibility for this breach of privacy?

>> Minister MacCharles: Speaker, I want to assure the member opposite that both the Minister of health and I take this very seriously. It's important to note this is a printing error that occurred. A printing error in a batch of 50,000 renewal notices at that go out every week in the context of over 51 million transactions that go out from service Ontario every year. I do take it seriously. We have set up a 1-800 line for families who wish to get more information, and it's important to note again that the health card version code was not included in these mail-outs the member's asking about. And that is critical to getting health care services. And we've had some inquiries back, and I shared information with members opposite. Who have had qu Eries from constituents and we're here to provide information to any MPP That requires further information in this regard. Thank you.

MPP Gates to Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier. Recently I met with a group of seniors about outrageously high hydro bills. They work hard to conserve energy but their bills keep going up. They are worried that further privatization will drive up their bills even further, like 80% of Ontarians, they want the government to immediately stop the sell-off of Hydro One. However, however this game will mean skyrocketing hydro bills after the next election. Maybe someone will leave the P.C. Party plan for hydro alone. We know they promised to privatize it last time. So my question is to the Premier. Why has she ignored these seniors and millions of Ontarians and sold off the public majority ownership of Hydro One?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I once again thank the Honourable member for his question. Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. The broadening of ownership of Hydro One will not reduce one single cent off of anyone's bills in this province, Mr. Speaker. But you know what will reduce people's bills by 25%? If we can get this passed, Mr. Speaker, the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker. And he is right. I do agree with the member from the third party. They have a plan, Mr. Speaker. We disagree with it. We don't think it actually does anything near what we should be doing for families across the province. But it makes you wonder why, Mr. Speaker, that the official opposition can't come up with a plan to talk about what they would do to help Ontarians. They've got to wait for a magic weekend in November. Mr. Speaker, the people of Ontario can't wait for the P.C.S to come up with a plan. That's why we're acting now for Ontario families by bringing forward a plan that will reduce rates by 25% if passed.

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