

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Thursday, March 2, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
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The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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

>> Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. The Premier acknowledged this morning she made a mistake. At least 6 times she used the word mistake. We know the cost of mistakes is 42 billion dollars. Mr. Speaker, whether you pay today, whether you pay tomorrow, eventually the Liberals are going to go back to raising rates. Mr. Speaker, hydro bills may go down temporarily but eventually ratepayers will have to pay this back. The question is how long and how soon is that going to be.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the reason the people on this side of the House are standing and cheering is that the people of Ontario who pay electricity are going to see a 25% reduction. That's why they're cheering. Time's up. That's all I needed to say.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, rehearsed applause for a 42 billion dollar mistake. Mr. Speaker, 42 billion dollars to make up for a mistake. The incredible thing is this government is proceeding tomorrow with more of these bad green energy contracts. Pay more to pay for bad contracts. They're proceeding tomorrow. Mr. Speaker, my question is given that you've said this morning 6 times you made a colossal mistake are you still going to proceed tomorrow with these additional bad contracts for generations we do not need. When does it stop?

>> Premier Wynne: Let's just get the facts on the table. What we're talking about, Mr. Speaker, is spreading the cost of the investments that have been made as a result of neglect that was in the system from all governments. For 50 years investments were not made. All governments, Liberal, NDP, Conservative have to answer for that. We're talking about spreading those costs over 30 years. I don't know where the member got 42 billion. People across the 30 years will share the costs of those investments that had to be made.

>> Patrick Brown: This scheme does nothing to end the unmitigated disaster of the green energy act. Mr. Speaker, why does this scheme do nothing to add the bad contracts -- When is nothing being done about the green energy act and the bad contract. Is the reason they're not touching any of these old bad contracts, it is because of the donation to the Ontario Liberal party.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Here's what we're doing. We're putting in place relief for everyone, Mr. Speaker, because what we have all heard is that everyone across the province, whether you live in the north or south or urban or rural Ontario, everyone has seen prices go up too far too fast. That's on average 25% reduction for everyone. We also heard, Mr. Speaker, that people who live in some of the more rural and remote areas --Paying distribution costs that are higher. We are providing relief for those people as well. And people on low income, we're expanding the electricity support program to help them. We're making structural change because people need relief right now and that's what we're delivering.

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

>> Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. This scheme is simply robbing Peter to pay Paul. But both Peter and Paul are taxpayers. Paul may pay less next month. Peter may pay 1.83 billion dollars a year for decades to come because of this mistake. Because of these mistakes of this government. Mr. Speaker, is the scheme about making all of Ontario pay more in interest payments simply to save this government politically in the short term. It absolutely is, Mr. Speaker.

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the schemes we're bringing in which will spread the cost of assets and investments that that have made that were absolutely necessary to upgrade the system, we're going to spread those over a 30-year period. That will be about 25 billion dollars over the 30 years. Again, we need to deal with the numbers that are real. That is the number, Mr. Speaker. We're doing

this because people need relief right now. The investments that have been made were necessary, Mr. Speaker. Having clean energy is necessary. Having clean air is necessary. We're not backing away from those decisions. We're saying people need to pay now but they also need to pay into the future. There needs to be a sharing of those costs over a longer period of time. That's fair, Mr. Speaker. THAs why our plan is being brought forward.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier, this is simply another Liberal shell game. We saw it in the fall with Liberal hydro plan number 17 where they shifted the clean energy rebate with the hst. It's another shell game. It's ship. This government is not getting at the root cause. I'll ask again. Why does this government not -- I understand why the government doesn't want to hear this. It's not in their self-interest. But the reality is these bad contracts, they're not looking at. They're still proceeding tomorrow with more bad contracts. When you have this massive surplus, what we're giving away to our competitors in the United States, I can't understand why they're going ahead tomorrow with more bad contracts. The Premier said this morning she made a mistake. She's making more mistakes tomorrow. How can you really be remorseful when you're going to do the same thing tomorrow? Do the right thing. Stop signing these bad deals and actually help ratepayers. That's what you need to do.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Really helping ratepayers is exactly what we're doing. Mr. Speaker, I will be very honest with everyone in this House and in Ontario. We looked at everything. We looked -- We looked at every possibility. Mr. Speaker, you know the notion of renegotiating contracts was something that we absolutely looked at. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds of contracts. To renegotiate every one of those first of all would be incredibly expensive. Secondly, would take an enormous amount of time. And finally, Mr. Speaker, as someone said to me, why don't you just legislate the cancellation of those contracts. That would put a chill on doing business with Ontario for decades to come. So the reality is we were not going down that path.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. I hope in this Liberal hydro announcement they would have at least said maybe they don't have the courage to look at the bad contracts because they're friends. They're donors. But I would have hoped they would have said on Friday, tomorrow, they're not going to sign more. They're still proceeding. The government doesn't want to look at the bad contracts. Will they at least rein in the executive salaries. There's nothing about the offensive executive salaries. We pay sometimes 10 times for executives that other provinces do. If you're not looking at bad contracts, can you at least look at the 4 million dollar dowries.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are reducing rates by 25% for every ratepayer in this province. I don't know why the leader of the opposition can't hear that, Mr. Speaker. So let me say it again. 25% for every ratepayer in this province, Mr. Speaker. Our plan provides fast substantial and widespread and long lasting relief. The PCs, they're struggling to agree with one another on their own schemes. On their biggest idea of ripping up the energy contracts, let me be clear, this will lead to increased rates, lawsuits and penalties. Even the leader of the opposition's own energy critic noted. Yesterday what did he say on radio in Ottawa. This will come at a huge cost to taxpayers and will see prices grow.

MPP Singh to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> MPP Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. The Premier has a very bad record of saying one thing to Ontarians and doing the exact opposite in reality. She promised to lower auto insurance rates by 15% before an election. But after she got re-elected, guess what, that turned out to be a stretched goal. So how can the Premier expect Ontarians to believe anything this government says when they promised to do the right thing before -- how can the people of Ontario expect to believe anything this Premier says when the Premier and government say one thing before election -- They promise to do the right thing before an election but they break that promise right after they get re-elected.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We said we were going to reduce people's electric bills by 8%. That is happening. We have brought forward a plan to reduce people's electricity bills by 25%, Mr. Speaker. People will see those reductions by the summer. We have said further that people who live in remote and rural areas will see a further reduction. They will see those results, Mr. Speaker. And it's extremely important to me that we recognize that this is about people's needs. This is about the reality of electricity prices across the province. We brought forward a plan, Mr. Speaker, that will give people relief in the immediate term and, Mr. Speaker, that is more than I can say for the third-party.

>> MPP Singh: The Premier promised not to sell off a vital public asset before an election. Guess what happened after the government got elected. We know the government broke this promise. Making promises to the people of Ontario and then breaking them once they're re-elected does nothing more than make people cynical about the government. How can the Premier honestly believe after so many broken promises the people will have any faith on what this government has to say.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise and respond because the first thing I get to say is we're reducing rates by 25%. Also, Mr. Speaker, this isn't more than just a proposal. This is a change that will see the rates continue to stay low for the next 4 years. We're going to continue to bring forward a long-term energy plan to continue to make sure we take costs out of the system. When you look at the NDP proposal and what they were talking about the, their biggest idea is to rebuy Hydro One shares. That will not take one cent off any of the bills, Mr. Speaker. That's why -- it doesn't take one cent off electricity bills. The Toronto star editorial says there's no evidence that keeping it public would make this particular issue any better, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, the reality is this proposal doesn't do anything to address the mess in the hydro system. Ontarians are right to be cynical about it. They know come June 8, 2018, if the Liberals win, the hydro rates will go right back up. The Premier refuses to address the real issue. They won't stop the sell-off of Hydro One. They won't address the unfair time of use pricing or the bad contracts or the fact that we oversupply electricity and then pay foreign private companies to purchase that oversupply of electricity. This is a quick political fix to a problem the Premier ignored, her party ignored. They only care about it now because there's an election looming and the Premier has bad polling numbers. That's the reality. Ontarians know that. Will the Premier admit this plan will only end up costing ratepayers more in the long run.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Honourable member outlined quite a few points. Let us outline quite a few points. The relief we're talking about will be substantial relief. 25% right across the board for every ratepayer. For those living in rural parts of our province, Mr. Speaker, in northern parts of the province, 800,000 House holds, they'll see the number jump up between 40 and 50%. That's significant. (Applause) As I said, Mr. Speaker, there are many things that we're doing. The important thing, Mr. Speaker, is that this relief will be lasting because it's built on real change, Mr. Speaker. It's built on real change, Mr. Speaker. It's not looking at making sure we might possibly be able to have a conversation in a few years down the road with some group we may want to make up. We're looking at plans, Mr. Speaker. We're bringing forward relief. This 25% is coming. It will help everyone in this province.

MPP Singh to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> MPP Singh: My question is to the Premier. Let's be honest here. Ontario families will not be fooled by this desperate -- We all know the government is re-elected, we'll be right back here in the same mess with hydro bills so high that small businesses are shuttering their doors and families are forced to choose between heating their homes and putting food on the table. The Premier has had 14 years in the government to fix the problem and 4 years as a Premier to fix the systemic problems with the hydro system. When will the Premier stop kicking the problem down the road and actually address the systemic problems of the system and help Ontario families and businesses.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know when families see their bills in the summer, Mr. Speaker, they are going to see a reduction of on average 25%, Mr. Speaker. And I believe that is going to make a huge difference to families across the province. In addition to that, families who are living in more rural and remote areas, Mr. Speaker, who have been paying exorbitant distribution charges will see a further reduction, Mr. Speaker. That is a structural change. As well, Mr. Speaker, what we said is there were some costs that were being borne by ratepayers that need to be borne by the whole group of Ontarians. That's a structural change that we have made. In addition, financing the payoff of those assets over 30 years, that's a structural change, Mr. Speaker. Those were the structural issues that were driving costs. Structural change is exactly what we're delivering to Ontario.

>> MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, this is a plan that doubles down on a bad plan and extends it for a long period of time. That's all it is. The people who will be the happiest with the plan are the Premier's small group of well-connected friends. They're the ones who will be happy. The Premier is hoping this plan will help her Liberal party but she knows certainly this is going to help her banker friends. It doesn't actually address the systemic problems of the hydro system and it doesn't permanently lower the bills. It just makes people cynical. That's absolutely the wrong thing. A short-term fix is not enough. A plan that doesn't make concrete changes to address the systemic problems with our hydro system is nothing more than a desperate attempt from an unpopular government to cling on to power. That's all it is. Will the Premier show Ontarians the respect they deserve and actually come up with a real plan that addresses the real problem to permanently lower the cost of hydro.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Honourable member mentioned our small group of friends. That small group of friends is every single ratepayer in this province, Mr. Speaker. It's a 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker. They're going to see in the very near futures. It's not a bumper sticker plan like they brought forward that talks about a number that they could maybe work with if they can get a group put together. We have substantial structural changes that we have brought forward, Mr. Speaker. We are bringing forward significant changes to the triple rp. We are upgrading the oesp program. Their plan, low income individuals were on the last page and were told to sit and wait. We're not waiting to help. We're creating a fund that low income individuals can access. It's going to help many, many people get out of the perpetual cycle of not being able to pay their bills.

>> MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, the problem with this Liberal hydro system is one, they continue to sell off our public asset. They continue with an unfair time of use fee. They're doubling down on bad contracts. They're paying private foreign companies. They're paying them for the energy we overproduce. These are the problems. Guess what, none of these problems are being solved by this plan. Ontarians can't trust this Premier with their hydro bills. They don't believe that stretching out the payments is in any way addressing the root cause of the problems. Will the Premier show she's serious about tackling the mess that her government and her leadership have created and implement a plan that will develop a real solution to this problem and permanently lower the cost of hydro in this province. The people deserve that.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we've done exactly that. We made sure that rates are coming down by 25% for every single ratepayer in this province. When it comes to, Mr. Speaker, to those that are living in our rural or smaller communities, Mr. Speaker, that's 800,000 House holds, 800,000 House holds will see even more than that. They'll see more than that. Those who have a hard time, Mr. Speaker, even paying their bills when it's 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker, we have now programs in place that will actually help them and help more of them. The one thing that we are also very proud of is making sure that we have a new on reserve first nations rate, Mr. Speaker. Helping 21,500 first nations people across our province. Mr. Speaker, we will continue to listen and work with the people of Ontario. That's why we have this 25% reduction plan, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> MPP Smith: My question is for the Premier. Thanks to this morning's Liberal scheme, we know Ontarians are going to be on the hook for another 42 billion dollars in brand new interest costs in Ontario. The Premier said this morning she can't even guarantee long-term relief for ratepayers.

That's because they're pushing even more of these expensive fit contracts onto the grid tomorrow. These are the same types of contracts that got us in this mess in the first place. Speaker, if you're spending 42 billion dollars of today's money to pay for yesterday's mistake, how much more will we have to pay for the mistakes you're about to make tomorrow?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously the Honourable member hasn't actually really looked at the plan because he would then understand that what we're talking about, Mr. Speaker, is 25 billion dollars over 30 years. We're making sure one generation does not pay for something that will be used by many generations. We're off-loading the costs and making sure everyone will pay their fair share. We're making the system fair, Mr. Speaker. 25% reduction right across the board for every ratepayer, Mr. Speaker. But I know, Mr. Speaker, he keeps talking about our fit contracts and all about contracts he likes to frame. Yesterday when he was talking on cfr's show in Ottawa, out of his mouth, Mr. Speaker, he said ripping up these contracts would come at a huge cost to taxpayers. We agree. Mr. Speaker, we are making sure that we have a fair system in place, Mr. Speaker. One that's helping 25% reduction right across the province.

>> MPP Smith: On a radio interview a couple of weeks ago, the energy Minister called London listeners dumb. 42 billion dollars in new interest costs. The big power company who gave 1.3 million dollars aren't going to be out of a dime. 64% of the costs come from generators. Guess who is not going to be affected. Their Liberal friends. The generators will not be affected. A bunch of them are getting new approvals for plans tomorrow to build more of these things. 6 times the Premier said she made a mistake. If you keep doing the same thing, it's negligent. It's been negligence from this government for years now. Will the government fix the underlying problem. Or are we going to continue robbing Peter's grand kids to pay Paul's grand kids.

>> It's actually this government that's making sure we look after Peter's grandparents and grand kids by reducing rates and eliminating coal. They forget about that. The reductions we have made to ensure that we make sure that our children have clean air to breathe. That's something they never worried about, Mr. Speaker. They actually left the system in Tatters. When they're talking about renewable energy, they completely forget about 42,000 jobs that were created in this sector. They forget about billions and billions of dollars that were made in investing in this province. Of course, Mr. Speaker, we have now brought forward a plan that will make sure that we have an affordable system, a clean system, and we have a green system, something that is the envy of not only this country but the world.

MPP Fife to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Access to Childcare

>> MPP Fife: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last 14 years Ontario has made so little progress for families who need quality childcare. There are only enough licensed spaces for 1 in 5 Ontario families. People in Ontario pay the highest childcare fees in Canada. People in Ontario have the poorest access to quality care for their children. Experts in the field continue to say we do not even have a childcare system in the province. By default, your government has left the creation of these spaces to the private market. Later today we'll be debating my private member's bill that will ensure childcare is high quality, accessible and affordable. My question is simple. Do you really believe that childcare in Ontario should be delivered by for profit operators.

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: I want to thank the member opposite for this question. I want to make sure that as we transform and really deliver the childcare that Ontarians need in our province that we are doing our best to help all Ontarians, all Ontarians across the province. What that means after consulting with thousands of Ontarians around the province is that they want choice. They want choice and they want affordability. The forms that come in is many different forms. Not just one option. So Mr. Speaker, absolutely. When it comes to not-for-profit childcare spaces we understand how important that is. Our investments have only gone to not-for-profit spaces. 77% of childcare licensed centres are either non-profit or operated by first nations. We want give parents in rural areas choice when they don't have those options and we want make sure we're doing the right thing.

>> MPP Fife: Mr. Speaker, this Minister was quoted today saying she believes not-for-profit childcare is ideological. Only this Liberal government could say that 30 years of research and study on childcare is ideological. Those 30 years of research show that childcare delivered by not-for-profit and public models a greater quality of care. When you remove the profit motive, there's more funding for special needs children, subsidies to improve access, it leads to lower fees for families. We could even pay the salaries they deserve. We believe childcare is a public service, not something that should be traded on the stock exchange. Will the Minister commit to supporting public not-for-profit childcare.

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for this question. I will tell you that transforming the way we deliver childcare in this province is a priority. That's why the Premier created this and made me the Minister responsible for this because we understand families need support. We are doing our best to build the system up and do the right thing. One of the things we did is we went around the province and talked to thousands of families. Either in person or online. Here's what they told us. They told us they needed access and they told us they needed affordable care. So we need to build that into the system. We need to give families in the north and remote areas the options they need. Sometimes some of these areas only have for profit centres. We need to make sure we're creating spaces and ensure we're creating support in urban areas. All Ontarians will be getting the childcare they need.

MPP Martins to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of energy. I would first like to congratulate the Premier for listening to Ontarians, caring enough to act and make people's lives better. That's what leadership is. Mr. Speaker, over the course of many, many months, families and businesses in my riding have expressed concern over the rising cost of hydro. They don't understand why hydro rates have gone up. They're frustrated by the bills delivered to their door. People are worried about the price they're being asked to pay and the impact it's having on their household budgets. For some of them it's reached a point where they're choosing between keeping the lights on and keeping food in the fridge. This is unacceptable. I know you'll agree that's unacceptable. North or south, rural or urban, this issue affects us all. While I know our government has already taken concrete steps to help, we agree more is needed. Can the Minister of energy tell us what we're doing to ensure prices are fair.

>> Minister Thibeault: I want to also acknowledge the member for her important question and of course her hard work in her constituency. I know, Mr. Speaker, electricity is an essential part of our life. Everywhere I travelled in the last 8 months I hear from people worried about the price they pay for electricity. Over those past few months, I know the Premier, myself and many of our Colleagues, MPPs, have been made a point of connecting with those individuals. So we've gone to visit them or we've called them. And Mr. Speaker, people want to know three things. First off, that the relief, substantial relief is on its way. It is. Second, that relief will get to everyone. It will. And third, the relief will be lasting because it's built on real change. Bills won't jump back up. I was pleased to join the Premier in making the announcement this morning. I'll making sure the bills come down as soon as possible.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister for his response. I believe most of us are aware of today's announcement and are keen to learn more about what it means. I know this is true for my constituents. Earlier this week the NDP released their own proposal. Ontarians are still waiting for the Conservatives to produce a proposal to bring down rates. We welcome new ideas. I believe it's important for Ontarians to understand the differences between these approaches. My question to the Minister of energy is can you provide more details on our plan and how it compares to the others.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're moving forward with the largest cuts to electricity rates in Ontario's history. We're tripling the size of the cuts we're making to bills to an average of 25%. For those living in rural communities, the break, Mr. Speaker, will be even greater.

Right now neither party has a credible approach to dealing with electricity costs. Our plan provides fast substantial long lasting relief. The PCs are struggling to agree with one another on their own schemes. Their biggest idea of ripping up contracts will lead to increased rates, lawsuits and penalties. The other idea, helping the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One, it won't take 1 cent off bills. Meanwhile, we're actually acting. We're reducing bills and helping people.

MPP Martow (Oosterhoff) to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan and Job Creation

>> MPP Martow: I would say to the member, stop signing contracts. My question is to the Minister of energy. John and Virginia live in my riding. John has had to switch jobs resulting in a pay acut. His wife is on a medical leave from work. John and Virginia are working hard but their electricity bills are almost as much as their mortgage. Their utility threatened to leave them in the dark. They were told if they don't have the money by April 1st, they could be disconnected. If they don't have the money for their electricity use, is this Minister planning to play a vicious April fool's joking on this family?

>> Minister Thibeault: One thing that's important to recognize is that's why we acted, bringing forward this 25% reduction and changing the program to making sure they get help. When it comes to possibly disconnections, the oeb said there won't be disconnections until April 30th. They have an opportunity to work with their utility to make sure it doesn't happen. There are many things they're doing to ensure they're working with customers and helping customers make sure they don't get disconnected, especially, Mr. Speaker, and I encourage my Honourable Colleague to tell them to talk to the led. If there are health issues, they need to know that. They'll help in every way possible.

>> MPP Oosterhoff: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of energy. I know the Liberal party really appreciated the 1.3 million dollars they received from big green energy companies before signing the preferential green energy contract with them. But the people in Ontario would really appreciate answers for a change. Will the Minister acknowledge the green energy act was a mistake, apologizing for forcing industrial wind turbines on my constituents and force the Liberals to pay back the 1.3 million dollars back.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Honourable member stands up. But let's talk about the jobs that were created by the green energy contract. 42,000 in the sector. By putting a wind turbine, getting on a boat and going over to the U.K. Where they can build wind turbines over there. We've created a sector that's creating jobs. When it comes to ripping up contracts, I know, Mr. Speaker, that will cost billions of dollars. It will have penalties. It will make rates go up even more. That's why we're not doing that. Maybe they should talk amongst themselves. They seem to be arguing over that. They don't have a plan. The only thing we're hearing from them is they want to change the name from PC to procoal. That's the only way they'll be able to figure out how to lower rates. We're lowering rates by 25% for every single family.

MPP P. Miller to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> MPP P. Miller: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Jeff lives in Hamilton and is behind on his bill. Had he listened to the Premier he might have thought he was safe from winter disconnections. But Jeff pays his bill to a private company. The Minister of energy said on Tuesday that the oeb's winter disconnection ban included such companies. But yesterday the oeb said the exact opposite. Stating in an email that the oeb's decision and order does not apply to unit submetering providers. Can the Premier explain what's going on?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to answer that question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'm pleased to address this issue. We're going to work with the oeb to address this because we do recognize this is something that needs to be addressed. When we talked about no winter disconnects across the province, we meant everybody. So we're going to continue to work with the oeb. When it comes to where we have seen these issues arise, we recognize that some families, some individuals, were having a hard time paying their bills. That's why, Mr. Speaker, today

we've announced that we're reducing all rates, Mr. Speaker, by 25%.

>> MPP P. Miller: Speaker, Jeff allows odsp to manage the payment of his bill. But his bill is going up so quickly that odsp through no fault of their own can't keep up. They pay a pre-determined amount each month based on his typical hydro across. It hasn't been enough because bills are going up so quickly. They're still behind the curve. Arrears are spiralling. Jeff's Neighbours are in the same situation. Many in Hamilton are. Today's announcement won't help Jeff or his Neighbours. I'd like to announce today that I'm taking a second mortgage on my House so my grand kids can pay their hydro bill. What will this government do to help the government climb out of the hole being dug by this Premier.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plan that we announced today is actually going to help families and individuals like the Honourable member mentioned. The affordability fund will help these individuals, Mr. Speaker, get out of that perpetual cycle of always being behind because of many reasons. Let's say they have electric heat and they haven't invested in insulation or upgrading their windows because they haven't had the money to do that. This fund will allow them now to access those dollars, to making the necessary upgrades to their home, and that way they'll see their bills lower even more by conserving which then on top of that, Mr. Speaker, has the benefit for everyone across the province. Just like the benefit that we announced today, Mr. Speaker. That 25% reduction that everyone will be getting across the province is something that we should all be proud of, Mr. Speaker, because we're helping every family in this province.

MPP Kiwala to Minister McGarry Re: Forestry Sector

>> MPP Kiwala: My question is to the Minister of natural resources and forestry. Recently the opposition has been accusing our government of not paying attention to our forestry industry. We hear accusations we're making lives harder for people in Ontario. Surely they're mistaken. Can the Minister please tell our government what we're doing to look out for the people who are working in Ontario's forestry sector.

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for her question. Making sure that we make life better for people across the province is a major priority of our government. Our government understands how important a strong forestry sector is to Ontario's economy and the key job creator it plays in over 260 communities across Ontario and the 172,000 direct and indirect jobs it supports. It's why I'm constantly engaged with members of the sector. Over the course of the last month I've written to federal Ministers about softwood lumber and travelled to Ottawa to meet with my provincial counterpart. We discussed challenges the forest industry has been facing. I'm part of the federal provincial task force on softwood lumber. Just this morning I met with our partners. I don't know where the members opposite are getting their information from.

>> MPP Kiwala: I thank the Minister for her answer. I'm very pleased to hear that as a government we're so engaged with the forestry industry. The forest sector is extremely important for our province's economy including my region of eastern Ontario. Forestry generates 15.5 billion dollars of economic activity annually which is up from 12.9 billion dollars in 2013. And not in fact the 11 million dollars that was claimed by the leader of the opposition in his speech yesterday. The leader of the opposition gave many alternative facts yesterday, including -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister clarify what exactly is going on in this case.

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for her question. She's quite right. Over the last 5 years two new mills have -- 2 are in stages of expansion. Companies have made significant investments in Ontario creating jobs and supporting restarts and expansions and creation of brand new modern facilities. So in fact Ontario has a number of new mills. We've launched the forestry growth to help the sector to increase and production capacity and the first recipient will be receiving 4 million dollars over 5 years in support of a total investment of 16.9 million dollars. The support allows the company's fast growing mills to expand business, increase sufficiency and maintain jobs. That's the state of our sector.

MPP Yurek (Bailey) to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> MPP Yurek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of energy. Speaker, I received a copy of a bill from one of my constituents this past week who paid 295 dollars for electricity. The high global adjustment fee is directly related to their green energy policy which is bankrupting Ontarians. The government today is forcing the municipality to accept wind farms even though 84% of the population voted against it. It will add to the global adjustment fees. The Minister has made a mistake. He's announced it previously. Will he announce another mistake today and cancel the wind turbine farm.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, very pleased to stand and rise and talk about, Mr. Speaker, green energy and the importance of green energy and making sure we have clean air to breathe. We haven't had a smog day since 2014 thanks to the investment this government has made in green energy. I've talked a lot about the 25% reduction when talking about resident families. But let's talk about the 25% reduction for mom and pop shops. They're part of the retail price plan. They're also going to see this reduction when it comes to the global adjustment. We're helping many of our small businesses across the province. On top of that, Mr. Speaker, the one thing the opposition hasn't talked about is the importance and the successful iCi program. We're making that even bigger, even greater by lowering that threshold to 500 kilowatts, having thousands of more businesses qualify to save a third on their bill.

>> MPP Bailey: My question is to the Minister of energy. Minister, Liz in my riding has been pushed to the brink. She's been pushed to the brink by the hydro prices. She's 83 years old. She lives alone. The only home she's known host of her life. No TV. No computer. She keeps the temperature below 16 degrees celsius. She sees bills between 500 and 600 dollars. She has emptied her savings to pay her bills. She still finds herself hundreds in arrears. Minister, what do you have to say to her today? How is it acceptable to treat seniors like this in Ontario?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the Honourable member tells this fine woman that her bills are going down 25% at a minimum. It's going to be going down because he mentioned she lives in a rural area. Depending on whether she's an r1 or 2 -- She would qualify for the oesp program that's enhanced. It's not just us talking about the significant reductions we've announced today. Let me quote, Mr. Speaker. The executive director of the United Way of Bruce Grey. This shows the Premier's government is listening to people. With these positive changes, our real community will truly benefit from the low cost power it produces. I agree with her. So will everyone in the province.

MPP Hatfield to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> MPP Hatfield: My question is to the Premier. Good morning, Premier. Speaker, I'd like to tell you and the Premier about my constituent Ron. Ron contacted my office recently because he was under the impression that the Premier and her Liberal government were going to do something about his hydro bill before. So imagine his surprise when January 1st when he saw the 8% rebate -- the bill was actually higher than it was the month before. So Speaker, why doesn't the Premier get that people like Ron, people from all over this province, can tell when she puts forward solutions that only address the Premier's sticky political situation and don't actually fix the mess that she's made in our hydro system.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and address the concern that the Honourable member brings forward. It's great when we all can talk to our constituents and talk about the issues that are affecting them, Mr. Speaker, and the programs that are out there to help them. Knowing the Honourable member I'm sure he told them about many of the programs we do have out there. The 8% reduction did take effect January 1st. Depending on how their bill structure

was in place, Mr. Speaker, that will change. As now we're moving forward, that will come into full effect. Let's not forget, 25% is what this individual will now see when he gets his bill, Mr. Speaker, come summertime. A reduction of 25%. That's something that is very important. That's a significant reduction for people like Ron and everyone like Ron across the province.

>> MPP Hatfield: Yesterday it was immediate relief. Now it's in the summertime. Ron is suffering under this government's manoeuvres. The school board saw hydro costs increase by 50,000 dollars in 2015. And 431,000 dollars in 2016. How can the Premier honestly say to this school board that the plan she released today will actually keep their hydro costs down permanently. Speaker, doesn't she understand that people like Ron and school boards all across this province see this plan for what it actually is. A desperate party playing political games with the hydro system that they made a mess of in the first place.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had to clean up the mess that was left by previous parties when they were in power. Never investing in the system. Never investing in conservation. We made sure we made those investments. When it comes to substantial changes we have made by taking all of the social programs that we talked about, we've taken that, Mr. Speaker, and pulled it off the rate base and put that in the tax base where it should be. Rightfully so. That will now see our rates reduced for all of those type of schools, arenas. Those will be a significant cost reduction for those organizations. These facilities as well, Mr. Speaker. The announcement that we made today, Mr. Speaker, when they finally read it all, Mr. Speaker, they will see that there is reductions for every person and every business in this province.

MPP Vernile to Minister Murray Re: Waste Free Ontario Act

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of environment and climate change. Waste diversion has been an issue. Simply put we're producing too much waste and we're not recycling enough. The government took a leadership role by introducing the waste free Ontario act. Having listened to business and stakeholders and with all parties voting on side, the government is confident that the waste free Ontario act is the best path forward. Yesterday the strategy for a waste free Ontario was announced. The vision calls for a zero waste future where waste is seen as a resource and can be recovered and reused. Speaker, could the Minister speak about the aims of the strategy and how this is going to benefit everyone.

>> Minister Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all the members who have supported this legislation. I also want to thank the member who joined us yesterday and spoke eloquently. This is a fundamental shift. We're the first jurisdiction in the Americas to go to a zero waste economy. We'll be at 80% waste free by 2050. That's world leading. Industry is responsible for the end life of the product which means more products will be developed to be durable and last, have zero waste, and be put into the economy. This follows in the leadership of my friend from St. Catharines.

>> MPP Vernile: I'd like to thank the Minister for his answer. This strategy marks an exciting next step toward our zero waste future. This is very important to the constituents of Kitchener centre. It's also important for the province in embracing a move toward a circular economy. This will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. We also know this new strategy is going to help increase productivity and create jobs for every 1,000 tons of waste diverted from landfill, 7 full-time jobs are created. This new network is going to foster economic growth and help to reduce local government spending on waste management. Speaker, could the Minister please explain to the House how a producer responsible framework will help support this.

>> Minister Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me go through some of the good news that falls from this. One, we're uploading 117 million of costs. We are going to be creating more jobs from this than most environmental initiatives we have. Every ton that we reduce creates another job. Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell you a small story that tells the bigger picture. There was a coffee pot created by waste parts of a coffee plant. It was developed by a company in Guelph bought by

loblows which meantime the plastic coffee pots are no longer required because these coffee pods go back to farmers' fields and help retain water. That's a circular economy.

MPP Barrett to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> MPP Barrett: To the Premier. -- Told the finance company their company's electricity bills skyrocketed last year. As a result, maple leaf calculated its potential costs if it were to move to other jurisdictions. Savings ranged from 7.5 million to 12.8 million a year. If they move to Manitoba, 65% savings on electricity. If they move to Alberta, 60% savings. Maple leaf could move their 5,100 employees to New York state and save 47% in electricity. Canada's retailer of packaged meats could go to Michigan. The numbers don't lie. How can you argue with these figures?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Exactly. Numbers don't lie. And that's why the reduction in the ici program, Mr. Speaker, from 1 megawatt to 500 megawatts will help maple leaf foods. They'll save up to one-third of their electricity costs. That will make sure they have money to create jobs. He's been talking about how well our province is doing with foreign investment and creating new jobs. I know they don't like hearing about that. On this side of the House we're doing everything to create a business climate that now has very affordable electricity rates, Mr. Speaker, and when it comes to all people, all businesses in this province, we're reducing rates by 25%. We're making sure significant reductions are happening for businesses as well.

>> MPP Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of energy. You made the mess. It doesn't work. Life is harder and harder under your Liberal government. Pushing hospitals and other public institutions deeper into debt. A 40% increase in just one year. Because of your scheme, they may have to make bold cuts such as to close the operating room. I want to know will the Minister guarantee that your game will prevent such dangerous cuts to patient services.

>> Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, residents are going to see their rates cuts and all other businesses and institutions are going to see rate cuts. That's something that we made sure as a government to looking at all aspects of. I know the member is talking about individuals in his riding often. I know the executive director of the United Way has been a very vocal critic of the government. Now when we come forward with the plan, she's quoting, quote, the changes announced today along with the changes already announced along with the changes that are still coming will go a long way in addressing the affordability issues that people in this province are seeing. We are doing it.