

Transcript of Provincial Question Period for September 27, 2016

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Date: Tue, 27 Sep 2016 11:50:01 -0400
Attachments: 20160927 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (122.37 kB)

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Tuesday, September 27, 2016

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown (Yakabuski, Smith) to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Green Energy - Fundraising

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Thank you for taking the P.C. Caucus's advice and -- But again, Mr. Speaker, let's be clear, just like the rebate announcement, today's announcement is just too little too late. The government has plowed ahead for years signing contracts for energy we simply do not need. The Premier has become the best Minister of economic development that Pennsylvania, New York has ever seen, giving away our hydro at pennies on the dollar. Mr. Speaker, the Premier was wrong on green energy. She was wrong on O.L.G. Will she complete the hat trick today and acknowledge the government was wrong on the fire sale of Hydro One?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me just go through the process here, Mr. Speaker. As this House well knows we inherited an electricity system that had been badly neglected under the previous government, Mr. Speaker. There were Brownouts and blackouts and smog days, Mr. Speaker, that put our economy and our people at risk. Unreliable system, Mr. Speaker, and we made it clean and reliable. We invested in it and it is ... that all of us can count on, Mr. Speaker. We eliminated coal. The source of those smog days. This saves \$4 billion in health and related costs, Mr. Speaker. \$4 billion because of this clean -- as confirmed recently by the independent electricity operator IESO has said our investments. Have secured a strong, steady supply of clean power. And that, Mr. Speaker, is because of the investments that we have made, because of the decisions we have taken, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP John Yakabuski: Back to the Premier. Now with your back to the wall and on the road to Damascus you decided not to proceed with energy contracts that wouldn't happen until well into the future but what you've admitted to the people of Ontario and what we've been saying for years is that you've paid way too much for energy contracts all the way along. The people have been hurt by your contracting for that unneeded energy. The auditor has said \$37 billion too much that your energy contracts as a primary reason that energy costs in this province are too high. So will you commit to no further contracts signed under this government for energy we don't need? And will you once again stand up for the right thing to do and stop any further sale of the shares of Hydro One?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Honourable member for the questions. I'm very pleased to be able to rise today and talk about our suspension of the L.R.T. 2 program, Mr. Speaker. We are suspending the 1,000 megawatts to make sure that we can find ways to continue to reduce rates for electricity consumers right across the province. And though the recently announced L.R.T. Contract, I know the -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In terms of a price, the member talked about price, the price contracted for solar power represents the lowest cost for solar projects that have been contracted in Canada to date, Mr. Speaker. We have some of the lowest prices right across the country, and in terms of a plan from this party, Mr. Speaker, they have no plan. They have no plan when it comes to energy. They don't even know if he's signing letters, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. Perhaps this change of heart has more to do with dollars for the Liberal covers than it does anything else. We have this gift from Adrian Morrow of the "Globe and mail" this morning. An e-mail sent from Chris Benedetty one of the biggest green energy lobbyists in the province promote ago private fundraiser with, you guessed it, the Minister of energy. The Minister told this House all private fund-raising events would be posted on the Liberal website. When we searched the website this morning there were no events listed for October 5th at the Peter Pan bistro. Speaker, given the Minister's announcement this morning affecting no renewable contracts currently signed, I have to ask will companies that have signed contracts be at this little get-together on October 5th and what is the Premier going to do about Minister's violating. Her phony rules about fund raising from stakeholders --

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the member for the advertisement for my fundraiser coming up that everyone knows about. But let's talk about fund-raising, Mr. Speaker. The MPP For Leeds- Grenville on May 24, 2016 held a private fundraiser in Yorkville marketing himself as the P.C. Deputy leader of a tourism, culture and sport critic. He advertised Mr. Bob Runciman and the chief opposition whip would be on hand. Cost? \$1,300 per supporter.... The M.F.P. For Lambton-kent- Middlesex -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. MPP For Huron- Bruce held a private fundraiser at Rags Centre \$600. Mr. Speaker, you know what? On this side of the House we're going to worry about making sure that we find ways to lower rates for consumers with the simple largest electric trisry reduction bill in this province's history. They don't have ... We do.

MPP Clark (Thompson, Fedeli) to Thibeault Re: Energy Costs

>> MPP Steve Clark: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Speaker, the government claims outrageous hydro bills are the price for reliable electricity system. Try telling that to Brad Worley, franchisee at Canadian Tire in Gananoque. In 2013, Brad spent \$69,000 on hydro and had zero power outages. This year he'll pay \$120,000, a 42% increase. So what does he get for that 42% increase, Speaker? Because there's been no investments in the Hydro One feed to Gananoque, he got seven blackouts. To cost him \$50,000 in lost revenue and damages, and that's just one business. The cost to the community was in the millions. So, Speaker, my question is if the \$10,000 a month. Brad pays for hydro isn't enough to keep the lights on, will the Premier tell me how much it will cost?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the members of this House know -- So, Mr. Speaker, as the members of this House well know, the previous government left our electricity system in a state of disrepair. Our government spent more than a decade making it clean and reliable for Ontarians. We've already invested more than \$15 billion in upgrading more than 15,000 kilometres of transmission -- Yet in recent days, Mr. Speaker, the opposition has begun to make some truly bizarre claims about our system's reliability pointing to planned outages or weather related outages as evidence, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps when the leader of the opposition talks about outages, he's --

>> MPP Lisa M. Thompson: My question's to the Premier. A small business owner in my riding recently wrote to me about how she and her husband invested half a million dollars energy retrofits to reopen a grocery store because I'm sure you would agree every community deserves one. Well, Speaker, the bills started at \$3,500 a month, but in two short years they have jumped to a staggering \$6,000. The energy Minister's announcement today says absolutely nothing to reduce the electricity bills people already can't afford. It's just a desperate ploy. So, Speaker, what is the Premier going to do to make life more affordable for people of Ontario today?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our proposed legislation that we have before the House will actually make life more affordable for Ontarians. A 20% reduction for families in rural and remote and northern communities like in my part of the province, Mr. Speaker, will actually have a significant savings for many families, Mr. Speaker. We are also seeing the elimination of the D.R.C.. Mr. Speaker, we're doing many things to help families. Even the O.E.S. P. Program is there to help low and medium income families. They can apply for this program and see an additional \$75 a month, Mr. Speaker, come off their bills when you compile all the stuff that we've done in the last few months, Mr. Speaker, this is the single largest reduction we have done for families when it comes to electricity bills in Ontario's province, in Ontario's history, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of what we've done and unfortunately they voted against it when we asked for unanimous consent to get this through the House.

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Premier, your new talking point about reliability come from polling and have nothing to do with reality. The blackout tracker found the number of outages increased by 275% just from 2012 to 2015. Lake Cowan residents in my riding experienced a 25-day power outage this spring. On their hydro bills, though, they were forced to pay the delivery charge for power they never received. Speaker, a month without the most basic necessities in rural Ontario without power, you can't pump water or flush a toilet, and what did Hydro One tell them regarding the loss of all the meat they harvested in their fall hunt? You

shouldn't be storing meat in your freezer. Speaker, I ask what does the Premier have to say about reliability to the people in lake talon?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So just last week a dump truck hit a line near Windsor that caused a brief outage. Trees blow down by windstorms in Muskoka one of the days in August caused some homes to lose power for the day. So if the opposition has suggestions on to you O -- how to prevent car accidents or weather, we're all ears, Mr. Speaker. But in the meantime we on this side of the House know what real outages are. We remember 2003, the broad-scale rolling blackouts which characterized the opposition's benefit of our electricity system, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, these weren't small outages. These were blackouts that were put forward by a government that didn't invest in electricity system, didn't invest in generation of transmission. We have done that. We've cleaned up their mess and will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Energy Management - Hydro One

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Premier. Liberal insiders are telling the media that the Premier is in favour of helping to sell off Toronto hydro. Is that true?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party will have to speak to the mayor of Toronto and councillors if she wants to talk about Toronto hydro.

>> Andrea Horwath: The Liberals are selling off Hydro One and that means higher hydro bills. Now they're helping to sell off municipal hydro utilities like Toronto hydro. We know from the f.a.o.'s release, the financial accountability officer's release, that increasing bills are going to hit low-income Ontarians and northern and rural people the hardest. People can't afford the sell-off of Hydro One, Speaker, and they can't afford the sell-off of their local distribution company either. Are the Liberal insiders telling the truth that the Premier thinks it's a good idea to privatize hydro and that she is, quote, interested in helping make it happen?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The initiative of this government to invest in transit and transportation infrastructure across this province, Mr. Speaker, is very important to the people of the province. It's important to communities across the province. And when we ran in 2014, Mr. Speaker, we said that we were going to look at the assets of the government, Mr. Speaker, and we were going to work to leverage those assets so that we could invest in new infrastructure that would be owned by the people of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, there are infrastructure projects going on across this province. Roads, bridges, transit, hospitals, schools, Mr. Speaker. There's building happening because we are making those investments. We cannot sit back and let infrastructure deteriorate, Mr. Speaker. We have to make sure that we make those investments, and the fact that Ontario. Is one of the leading jurisdictions for economic growth in the country, Mr. Speaker, has to do with those very investments.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, Liberal insiders say that the Premier thinks helping to sell off Toronto hydro would quote deflect some public anger away from the Liberals and their decision to sell off Hydro One. People are struggling to pay their hydro bills and every increase will disproportionately hit low income and rural and northern families. But instead of making the government's priority affordable electcity, the Liberals' priority is to deflect public anger from themselves. Why does this Premier continue to make decisions to behave, to act in the best interests of the Liberals instead of the best interests of the people of this province?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm solely in politics to work to benefit the people of this province. To make sure that the people of this province --- Continue, Mr. Speaker. That means rebuild the infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, that has served us for so many years but we know we need renewals, Mr. Speaker, and to make sure that people have a reliable electricity system, Mr. Speaker, and that we move to make sure that it is as affordable as possible. That's what the initiative in the throne is about, Mr. Speaker. It was about making sure that we take that professional portion of the H.S.T. Off electricity bills across the province, that we help further people

in rural and remote communities to the tune of 20% reduction, Mr. Speaker, and that we work with small businesses, Mr. Speaker, and medium sized businesses. To make sure they have a break as well, Mr. Speaker. That is about helping people in their lives every single day.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Energy Investments - Hydro One

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I can say that it really doesn't show if that's the Premier's goal. But this question is actually to the Premier as well. People see that the Premier is making decisions that are about privatization, and those decisions are more based on the political interest of her party than what's best for people. That is totally obvious. They're based on and I quote deflecting anger. They're based on political cover. That's not what the people voted for, Speaker. That's not what the people asked for when they voted in the last election. People had hoped for so much better, and they are so disappointed in what they're getting from this government. So my question is one that's pretty straight up. Will this Premier come clean and let us know whether or not she's going to continue to facilitate the privatization Of more of Ontario's hydro system?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The decisions that we make as government are often very challenging, very complex, Mr. Speaker. And I said, as a pillar of our plan, that we would invest in infrastructure in this province, Mr. Speaker. So we made a difficult decision. It actually is kind of laughable that the leader of the third party suggested somehow the decision around Hydro One was in our political interests, Mr. Speaker. It was a challenging decision. It was a practical decision. It was not an ideological decision but it was a decision that will lead to and is already meaning that we can invest in people's lives by providing them with the transit and the transportation options that they need so they can get home to their kids, so that they can pick up their kids from child care, so that they can have time with their families, Mr. Speaker, that otherwise they would not be able to have.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, what it was the wrong decision. That's what the decision was. It was the wrong decision. People are worried about their future, Speaker, and they're worried about whether their kids are going to be able to build a good life here in this province. But instead of making decisions that make life easier for people, the government is making it harder for people. Especially low income people who feel the burden the hardest when it comes to their increasing hydro rates. And for rural and northern Ontario families, who are paying the very highest bills, Speaker. And the Premier's only concern is to, quote, deflect some public anger away from Liberals, end quote. Now people expected and I have to say, Speaker, people deserve so much better than this. Will this Premier commit to stopping any further privatization. Whether it's local utility corporations or whether it's Hydro One?

>> Premier Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the third party knows full well that the decisions that are made at the local level around utilities. Those are their decisions, Mr. Speaker. The decision that is on the table in the city of Toronto, the leader of the third party will have to speak with the people at council and the mayor at the city of Toronto, Mr. Speaker. If the leader of the third party is asking whether we will stop investing in transit, Mr. Speaker, whether we will stop investing in transportation infrastructure across the province, Mr. Speaker, no. We will not. Those investments are needed. They're needed in order to create jobs right now and that's what's happening. There are thousands of people working across the province, Mr. Speaker, because of those investments, and those investments are necessary into the future, because if we are going to compete globally, Mr. Speaker, we must have that modernized infrastructure in place. We'll draw business and allow businesses here to expand, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier is not being clear. She knows very well that she has a role to play in facilitating the sell-off of local distribution companies. She knows that she has a role there and for her to suggest she does not is not being up front with the people of this province. People, Speaker, were surprised when the Premier announced that she was selling off Hydro One because it's not what they voted for. They didn't vote to sell off local distribution companies either, Speaker. So whether it's Toronto hydro or whether it's any other local distribution company, people did not vote for privatization. They can't afford to pay more just to give the Premier political cover and deflect

anger away from her Liberal government. So will the Premier stop all of the hydro sell-off in the province of Ontario?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the third party was asking whether I would intervene in decision-making at a local level in a unilateral way, Mr. Speaker. I just want to comment that one of the reasons that I got involved in politics, and I know actually there are a number of members who were municipal elected officials, Mr. Speaker, mayors who had lived through the experience of having a provincial government that imposed decision making on local governments, Mr. Speaker, that amalgamate, Mr. Speaker, that didn't consult, didn't work with the municipalities. And, Mr. Speaker, I have a very different *modus operandi*. The member talked about green energy. Mr. Speaker, when I became the premier one of the first things I did was work with our minister of energy to make sure that we changed the process. Around the siting of wind turbines. I've been working with local governments, Mr. Speaker, rather than acting unilaterally.

MPP N. Miller (Barrett) to Minister Thibeault Re: Rural & Northern Energy Rates

>> MPP Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier. Hydro prices in Ontario are at a crisis level. Recently ... foods the owner of axiom auto contacted my office saying what is going on with Ontario electricity rise? The manufacturer of world class Speaker s and audio equipment. It employs 20 people in a town of 200 east of Huntsville. Axiom competes for business worldwide. Hydro bill. In June his cost for electricity was \$973 but the delivery charge amounted to \$2,127. The total cost of electricity for the month amounted to over 3 cents per kilowatt hour. Remember this is June. Speaker, how can the Premier expect a rural manufacturer, manufacturing business to continue to operate in the province of Ontario with hydro rates that are so high and getting higher?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Honourable member for the question. I hope the member told them about our plan with the I.C.I. Program that can save him up to 34% of his bill directly on the delivery charge, Mr. Speaker. Because right now, Mr. Speaker, it's important for us to insure that businesses are aware of the savings that they can make because our industrial electricity rates in Ontario are extremely competitive with other Canadian and American jurisdictions. With the prices in northern Ontario in particular among the five most affordable jurisdictions in north America. He can make savings of up to 34%, Mr. Speaker. I do hope that that Honourable member will insure that he lets those companies know, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

>> MPP Toby Barrett: Well, Speaker, back to the Premier. As a fellow in my riding Walter wheeler, Jr., he's installed energy efficient appliances, lighting, new heating, air conditioning. He has an on demand water heater. He's never home during on-peak hours. He does everything right. Yet he gets a monthly electricity bill of over \$400. People want to know why is that? This gets worse. Mr. Mueller's family business, springer meats pays 40 grand a month for electricity. Last year it was \$30,000 a year. No increase in sales, but a 30% increase in expenses. Will the Premier please explain to this House how can people stay in business, let alone establish new businesses. With a 30% annual hydro hikes?

>> Min. Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I do thank the Honourable member for that question. With it's coming to the individual home, there's an 8% saving coming to all families right across the province. What makes this even more spectacular, Mr. Speaker, and significant savings for family are those families in the rural and remote areas of our community and in the northern parts. They can save 20%, Mr. Speaker, with that money going directly on the delivery charge. When it comes to the business component of the question that the Honourable member asked, if this individual qualifies for the I.P.I. Program, they can save up to 34% on their bills. If not, if he's a small business he will also be receiving that 8% reduction, plus some of the other programs that we have out there, Mr. Speaker. We're doing it for the families because we recognize that some families, Mr. Speaker, are having a difficult time but you know what, Mr. Speaker ? We had to make sure that we built a safe, reliable and clean system after they left the system in Tatters, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Energy Rates

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question to the Premier. Today Ontario's financial accountability officer reported that people living in rural and northern Ontario see more of each pay cheque going to paying their energy bills. Low-income people spend three and a half times more of their income on energy bills than the wealthiest Ontarians. Selling Hydro One is always going to push those rates higher. Opening up local hydro utilities to privatization is always going to push up those rates higher. For a lot of people living in rural and northern Ontario or people living on low incomes, they already feel like they're at a breaking point. Bills go higher, their kids won't be able to afford a better life. Will the Premier commit to no more sell-off of the hydro system?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Honourable member for this question. Of course you know I hope he's referring all of the rural customers to the 20% reduction that we've brought forward in our bill. But let's not forget about all the other programs that we have in place, Mr. Speaker. We got rid of the debt retirement charge, Mr. Speaker. That's no longer on the bills for our consumers. Let's make sure that we have six programs. The O.E.S. P. program is one that I would encourage the Honourable member to encourage individuals to contact their local utility. But when it comes to the financial accountability officer, Mr. Speaker, the F.A.O. Report this August confirmed the average family in Ontario spends less on electricity than in every other province except British Columbia. When it comes to total home energy costs, Ontario is –So what's remarkable about these findings is that Ontario has already done the heavy lifting in modernizing? Our infrastructure and transitioning off of coal generation, Mr. Speaker. We continue to find to reduce costs to consumers.

>> MPP Tabuns: Speaker, the other side didn't hear the question. So I'll rephrase it. Over and over people say they want the next generation to be able to build a better life. But for too many people they feel like their bills are making that almost impossible. To quote the F.A.O., House hold home energy spending is a greater burden for lower income House holds. Rural and northern families and low income families feel every increase. Taking the H.S.T. Off hydro is a first step, but it can't be the only step to getting bills under control. Stopping the sell-off has to be the next step. Will the Premier commit to ending the sell-off of the hydro system?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to find ways to reduce energy costs for consumers right across the province and today's announcement of suspending and cancelling the Irt2 program, Mr. Speaker, will save families additional 2.45 off their bill, Mr. Speaker. But in terms of broadening ownership of Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, we've done that, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we can continue to do what Ontario families want, to create growth and to create jobs, Mr. Speaker, and I was in the great riding of North Bay and Kapuskasing to make announcements of infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, that's going into these communities. And that's thanks, Mr. Speaker, in terms of broadening Hydro One. We will continue to do what's best for families on this side of the House while they just shake their fists, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

MPP Potts to Minister Oraziatti Re: Elgin Middlesex Detention Centre

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Well thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of community safety and correctional services. Now intermittent sentences have existed in Ontario since 1972, and these are sentences that convicted persons serve typically in periodic intervals, typically on weekend. Intermittent inmates can contribute to overcrowding in our correctional centres beginning on a Friday night when they enter the system for the weekend sentences. So Ontario's first dedicated facility for such inmates opened in Toronto at the Toronto intermittent centre in 2011 as part of the Toronto south detention centre. Speaker, the Minister was in London recently for the opening of Ontario's second dedicated facility for offenders serving intermittent sentences and so through you, Speaker, can the Minister please tell us more about this new facility and what it will mean for Ontario. And in particular for the Elgin Middlesex London area?

>> Min. David Oraziatti: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to thank the member for Beaches-East York for the question. I was certainly pleased to speak recently at the opening of our new 112-

bed regional intermittent centre on ground of the Elgin Middlesex detention centre in London. It is the second intermittent centre built in Ontario as part of our intermittent regional strategy across the province. The goal is to ease pressures in relation to capacity when inmates enter facility by building stand-alone intermittent centres on the site of existing facilities. However it's also has a number of other benefits including increased security, by reducing the potential for contraband and weapons to be brought into the main facilities on those ground by weekend offenders. The \$9.3 million investment by our government was built with an innovative design, lower costs and had help significantly to reduce overcrowding at the Elgin Middlesex detention centre. It was a key part our government's transformation strategy for corrections. I have more to say in supplementary.

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for his description of this new facility. Just another example how we're using assets to build Ontario up. And I'm please today hear about the new benefits of this new intermittent centre and the impact it will have on the London and surrounding areas. I'm also quite pleased that the reception the facility has received -- at the. I understand for instance opseu's president has expressed deep satisfaction with the opening of the new facility, saying it will go a long way to improving conditions at the Elgin Middlesex detention centre. Opseu president Thomas noted and I quote -- with the new R.I.T., the province just got a little bit safer. The chairman of the local community advisory board also commended the new facility saying the R.I.C. Will make Elgin- Middlesex detention centre a much safer place. But these improvements. New facility. Can the Minister talk about the other improvements made to the Elgin-Middlesex detention centre?

>> Min. Oraziotti: I'm happy to speak about the other improvements. Again thank the member from Beaches- East York. I'm pleased with the reception opseu and others have responded with, and we've hired, Speaker, 60 additional correctional officers since 2013 at this particular centre with 12 more set to graduate from our correctional officer training assessment program will be scheduled to work at this location by the end of the month. The emdc also now has a mental health service and seven full-time nurses on-site with 24-hour nursing coverage. We've added approximately 350,000 cameras security cameras. Six additional metal detectors and a full X ray body scanner will be present in 2017. Speaker I'm please with the progress we're making in corrections. I want to thank the former Minister, Minister Naqvi, superintendent Dave Wilson and all of the frontline officers.

MPP Walker (Pettapiece) to Minister Thibeault Re: Energy Rates

>> MPP Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Premier. My constituent Nicole lahart burns wood to save money. Nicole pays for the roof over her head and electricity bills, after that she comes short every month. Bruce- Grey- Owen Sound 60 families have been disconnected because they couldn't pay their rising hydro bills. Nicole la heart fears she could be next. She owes Hydro One \$20,000. This government broke its promise to protect consumers and provide lower rates and it broke its promise of a reliable supply of new electricity. Given all of these broken promises, given all of the all going bungling, tell me why anyone should trust this Premier to fix the hydro rates her party created?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Honourable member for that question. He highlights one individual case that is difficult for that family and that individual. I know when I was meeting with the executive director of Bruce county we specifically spoke about that case and there are some anomalies in there, Mr. Speaker. But, you know, in terms of disconnections, our government is committed to ensure that we're going to keep that clean and affordable system or clean and reliable system and make it as affordable as possible. So that's why we brought forward many of those programs, Mr. Speaker. In terms of individuals that are facing disconnection, if they contact the leap program, Mr. Speaker, through their local utility they can get a \$600 instant rebate on that, Mr. Speaker. That may have helped that family before it got into such a crisis, Mr. Speaker. And then of course, Mr. Speaker. We're ensuring we have that 20% reduction specifically for northern and rural families, Mr. Speaker, because we recognize that some families have difficulty.

>> MPP Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. Speaker, as the cost of hydro suddenly Fair to ask what change understand no wonder hydro costs so much. They spent billions of

dollars putting up unwanted wind turbines to produce power the province did not need, and they ran roughshod over rural Ontario. But who finally got this government to pay attention to hydro rates? Scarborough. So I ask the Premier, will the Liberals start listening to my constituents or do they have to take up residence in Scarborough?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Honourable member for the question. I think we need to thank the Honourable Minister of infrastructure for his past work on this file, Mr. Speaker, because he recognized that we could make savings by not building two new nuclear units, Mr. Speaker, saving \$15 billion to the ratepayers. We actually save 3.7 billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, by renegotiating our Samsung agreement. And the 2015 long-term energy plan, Mr. Speaker, when we did a price renewal on our renewables, Mr. Speaker, we saved an additional \$4.0 billion, Mr. Speaker, and that was all by his leadership. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to come forward today and bring forward a plan where we are going to actually suspend and cancel the long-term -- the L.R.T. 2, Mr. Speaker. That will save an additional \$30.8 billion. And that will save more money for families right across this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Sattler to Minister MacCharles (Flynn) Re: Domestic & Sexual Violence & Workplace Accommodations

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Today I will be reintroducing my private member's bill to provide paid leave for workers who experience domestic violence and sexual violence, a bill that received unanimous support when it was debated in the last session. Speaker, it's traumatic enough for someone who has been sexually assaulted or abused by their intimate partner. Survivors should not also have to worry about losing their jobs because of the violence they experienced. The Premier can commit today to helping people maintain employment and making life a little easier by including paid leave for domestic violence and sexual violence in the government's employment standards act changes. Will she do that?

>> Min. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. I think we can all agree domestic violence is a very serious problem. It crosses every social boundary and it will not be tolerated in Ontario. And as the Minister responsible for women's issues, it's a priority for me that women feel safe in their homes, in their workplaces and in their community. I know the Minister of labour will want to provide additional detail from the a labour point of view in the supplementary. Let me just say this, Speaker. In 2015/16 we've invested over \$4.6 million in programs and services to help victims of domestic violence. Since releasing our domestic violence action plan in 2014, the women's directorate has implemented many initiatives. Domestic violence and strengthen support for victims and taken strong action in our sexual violence action plan.

>> MPP Sattler: Speaker, recently we learned that the federal Liberals are looking at the provisions of my bill to allow workplace accommodations for federal workers. We know from the murders of Lori Dupont and Teresa Vince that violence often follows victims to the workplace. The ability to change hours of ... or transfer to a new location can literally mean life or death. Will the Premier follow the lead of her federal cousins and implement workplace accommodations for Ontario workers who have experienced domestic violence or sexual violence?

>> Min. Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for that very important question and thank her for bringing forward this private member's bill. We clearly understand, I think both caucuses share the importance of this issue. We know the impact it has on individuals, on family, on children. Let me tell you, Speaker, in the province of Ontario, our occupational health and safety act is the only legislation of its kind in the entire country that requires employers in this province to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect the worker from domestic violence in the workplace and at home. Speaker, this is an issue being brought to the attention of the changing workplaces review. We have reached the report stage. It's clearly discussed in that report, Speaker. So thank you for bringing attention to it. Look forward to working with the entire House to resolving this issue in the right way, Speaker.

MPP Milczyn to Minister Damerla Re: Seniors Community Grant Program

>> MPP Peter Z. Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister responsible for seniors' affairs. Ontarians are living longer and healthier lives and many of Ontario's seniors want to continue being active and engaged in their communities. We see through the many community groups active in Etobicoke- Lakeshore and ridings throughout the province of Ontario. These groups are integral parts of our communities and work to provide seniors with a space to share and learn and opportunities to enjoy new and exciting experiences. Mr. Speaker, when the seniors community grant was developed in 2014, it opened doors for many of those groups to expand their programs and offer unique experiences to Ontario seniors. It's been a successful program. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of seniors' affairs inform the House about the current status of the seniors community grant program?

>> Min. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by thanking the member from Etobicoke- Lakeshore for his question about seniors' community grants. As the Minister responsible for seniors I also want to take a minute to welcome all of the seniors in the gallery today. Mr. Speaker, these grants which have been in place since 2014 has provided Ontario seniors access to 700 different types of programs. The programs range from education, arts, culture and healthy living and focus on making sure seniors feel included and encouraging To get an idea, Mr. Speaker, of the reach of this program, consider these numbers. Since 2014, these grants have touched the lives of a quarter of a million Ontario seniors. And this year we expect the grant to touch the lives of another 142,000 seniors. Mr. Speaker, --

>> MPP Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for her answer. As we're building Ontario up and investing in our people, that's not just youth and students. It also includes our seniors. Seen nearly 700 projects across the province receiving these grants is an amazing accomplishment. These projects are strengthening communities throughout Ontario. By supporting these local grassroots organizations and giving them flexibility in the programming, the grant allows these organizations to develop projects that better fit the unique needs of their communities. However, Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether this grant benefits indigenous and multicultural seniors, as well as seniors outside of urban centres in the same way. This grant is an excellent way of providing seniors with opportunities. And I want to ask, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of seniors affairs whether she can inform how the seniors' community grants are helping multicultural, indigenous and rural seniors.

>> Min. Damerla: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very important question, and I'm delighted to answer that question. Here are some examples, Mr. Speaker, of the diverse communities that we are reaching. Thanks to the seniors community grant, indigenous elders in Little Current on Manitoulin Island will be working with students to create a local story guide booklet opening communication and sharing histories across generations and communities. In Kitchener- Waterloo, pride is training LGBTQ seniors to help facilitate workshops to raise awareness of their special needs and concerns, and in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, the Ottawa Chinese Canadian heritage centre is offering 10 monthly lectures to Chinese seniors teaching them how to manage everyday issues. Because of these examples, Mr. Speaker, the diversity of programs. I do want to say this program has been so singularly successful. That in two years we have increased funding four fold. Thank you.

MPP Bailey (McDonnell) to Minister Thibeault Re: Energy Rates

>> MPP Robert Bailey: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the Minister of energy. Families in Sarnia- Lambton can't afford their hydro bills. Thousands of families in my community are in arrears. Residents have been bringing hydro bills in my office that are six, seven, \$800 per month. Local service agencies and nonprofits and service clubs are struggling to keep their doors open. Small business and local industry are powering down investment and expansion plans because they fear this government's policies. Billions of dollars in investment and economic impact are at stake in Sarnia- Lambton. Minister your 8% rebate is just a band-aid solution that won't stop the bleeding. Rates are still going up. Minister, when will you announce real relief for hydro rate increases for the families and businesses in Sarnia- Lambton who struggle to pay or simply can't afford their energy bills?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the Honourable member for his question. I was just in the great riding of Sarnia a few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, working with union gas and learning about the don hub and I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, it's a great community and lots of investment going on and lots of businesses growing in that sec tomorrow. I know he should be very proud of that, Mr. Speaker, because the investments that we're making in terms of helping small businesses, Mr. Speaker, that 8% reduction will actually help many small businesses. And if they actually use more than a megawatt of power, Mr. Speaker, over 1,000 more businesses right across the province will actually now be able to participate in the I.C.I. Program, Mr. Speaker. The program does two things, Mr. Speaker. First thing it does, Mr. Speaker, it helps lower rates for these businesses between 14 and 34%, Mr. Speaker. That's one third. And also, Mr. Speaker, the I.C.I. Program actually reduces the amount of usage during our peak. Which actually helps the entire system, Mr. Speaker, which keeps rates lower for everyone, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

>> MPP Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. Residents and businesses in Stormont- Dundas and south Glengarry are struggling to keep their heads above water because of unaffordable hydro bills. Mom and pop shops in small towns are being forced to close because they can't afford to keep the coolers on. One such store owner, the hydro bills were over \$4,300 a month. He'll be forced to close after 30 years in service. Residents are in dire financial straits and are facing disconnections due to sudden increases, and they can't afford them, especially on fixed incomes. My question to the Premier is simple. She knows what's causing this hardship across the province, and today's announcement does nothing for my riding. Will she commit to stopping the construction of the four unaffordable wind and solar projects in Stormont- Dundas and south Glengarry?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's announcement is good news for consumers right across the province, Mr. Speaker. We've actually reduced \$3.8 billion, Mr. Speaker, by actually suspending the L.R.T. 2 project. That's an additional \$2.45 a month, Mr. Speaker, on average for every family. When you put that in conjunction with our three-point plan, Mr. Speaker, in terms of making sure that there's an 8% reduction for all families across the province. If you actually take that in consideration with the 20% reduction that rural and northern families are going to see, Mr. Speaker, and the I.C.I. Program with businesses and then if you put that on top of reducing the debt retirement charge, Mr. Speaker, and the six programs that we have, we are doing the single largest reduction on electricity bills for families in this province's history, Mr. Speaker. On the other side, Mr. Speaker, all they did was leave our system in shambles. We had to rebuild it and we've got a safe, clean and reliable system and we're taking it to the next level to make it as affordable as can be for everyone.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Student Loans & Tuition

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: My questions for the Premier. Yesterday I met with students at Brock university in St. Catharines. I met a young woman who is at work nearly every single hour that she's not studying in class. She has worked all summer. She's earning the minimum wage. And she says that even with working all of the possible hours she can work, Speaker, her debt continues to grow. She is stressed out and she's exhausted. Education should be an investment, Speaker, not a burden. The government shouldn't be making money off of her debt. Had the Premier agree today to take the interest off Ontario student loans?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting to hear a question like this coming from the party that voted against helping more Ontarian students -- University, Mr. Speaker, with free tuition. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that you know I agree with the member opposite that College tuition and university tuition should be accessible, Mr. Speaker. Should be accessible to everyone across the province, which is why we don't want students to be incurring that kind of debt in the first place which is why the Ontario student grant, Mr. Speaker, which will be in effect next September, September 2017, will mean that young students, students from low and middle -- low middle-income families, Mr. Speaker, will have free tuition or better than free tuition, Mr. Speaker. And it's surprising to me that the leader of the third party. Wasn't supportive of that initiative.

>> Andrea Horwath: I think we all know that Ontario can be a great place to live but it is getting harder and harder to build a good life here, especially for young people, Speaker. College or university should be a jumping-off point for finding a good job, find a job you love and building a great life. But graduating with a \$30,000 loan plus interest makes it a lot harder to build that life, Speaker. This government should not be profiting from students' debt, from student loans. It should not be happening. Does the Premier agree that it's time to take the interest off of Ontario student loans?

>> Premier Wynne: Speaker, I'd ask the leader of the third party if she thinks it's a good idea that students not have those debts in the first place, that they actually have access to grants, Mr. Speaker, that would mean that they wouldn't carry those loans. So, Mr. Speaker, what we have done is we have made a change, a dramatic change in the way support for students, postsecondary students in this province will work starting in September 2017. Students from low and low middle income families, Mr. Speaker, will have access to free or than free tuition, Mr. Speaker, and students from higher income will continue to benefit from the 30% off tuition, Mr. Speaker. But the students at most risk, the students that apparently the leader of the third party is most concerned about will have access to free tuition. I would think, Mr. Speaker, that that is something that the leader of the third party would support.

MPP Wong to Minister Albanese Re: Newcomer Training & Supports

>> MPP Soo Wong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Minister of citizenship and immigration. There are many newcomers arriving to my riding of Scarborough- Agincourt who are highly skilled and often possess a postsecondary education. I understand your ministry assists our highly skilled newcomers to access employment in a field discipline without Previous training and education. In Scarborough agincourt, a number of our constituents rely on programs to provide training and support in various professions. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can she share with us what programs within her ministry has for highly skilled newcomers in Ontario?

>> Min. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the dedicated MPP For Scarborough- Agincourt for this valuable question. The member is correct. Ontario's immigration strategy helps our province attract highly skilled newcomers to drive our economy forward and be competitive in today's global markets. Speaker, each year over 6,000 highly skilled immigrants access our bridge training projects in more than 100 occupations. To help them find work in their designated professions. Some of these occupations covered by our bridge training project include early child education, the skilled trades and nursing. And I know that the N.D. -- for Scarborough is a nurse. Highly skilled newcomers are able to get licence to support their families and contribute to Ontario's success.

>> MPP Wong: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister for her response. It is reassuring to know that our government is committed to helping new coming cars to succeed and I'm sure the Minister would agree with me that the work of community agencies like the Chinese professional association of Canada better known as CPAC in my area of Scarborough- Agincourt is critical to the success of newcomers. Minister, it is important we continue to encourage highly skilled newcomers across Ontario to access these programs so that they can find meaningful work within the disciplines. Recently the Minister announced a Seneca new campus in city of Toronto, new funding for Ontario bridge training projects. Speaker, through you to the Minister. Can she inform the House how the government is enhancing the support for various organizations across the province so that they can continue to help newcomers succeed in Ontario?

>> Min. Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member once again for her question. Our government has stayed true to our commitment to support highly skilled newcomers in Ontario. In early August I announced an investment of \$3.35 million over the next two years for 11 new projects by nine organizations across Ontario. I am proud to say that one of the recipients is the Ontario society of professional engineers They will be receiving up to \$369,000 to help develop a communication and workplace culture course for internationally trained engineers. Mr. Speaker, we are committed to programs like bridge training because when newcomers succeed in Ontario,

Ontario succeeds.

MPP MacLaren (Coe) to Minister Thibeault Re: Energy Rates

>> MPP Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Exorbitant electricity bills mean that many Ontarians have fallen into energy poverty. Meanwhile the Liberals are giving their cronies plumb jobs and paying them bloated salaries. David Hurley is the man who co-chaired the Premier's election campaign. The Premier has awarded -- rewarded him with contracts in which he bills taxpayers an unbelievable \$420 an hour. How does the Premier justify granting him millions of dollars worth of government contracts? How does she justify paying her Liberal friends massive salaries when 567,000 Ontario families are in arrears on their hydro bills. 60,000 families have had their hydro cut off?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise and talk about the great work that we've done, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to building a safe and clean and reliable system, Mr. Speaker. But what we're doing now, Mr. Speaker, is making sure that we've got a system that's in place that's affordable for as many Ontarians as we can make it, Mr. Speaker. We're investing 8% a rebate that every family will see right across the province on their electricity bills. If you live in a rural or remote or northern community -- community like where I come from, Mr. Speaker, many of those families will see a 20% reduction, Mr. Speaker. So we're making sure that we're finding ways to continue to reduce the rates. Today's announcement, Mr. Speaker, very proud to make the announcement because we're talking about making sure that our system stays clean and reliable and safe and that we're also suspending and conditioning the L.R.T. 2, Mr. Speaker, which will continue to save families money right across this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. Evidence mounts each and every day that this government's priorities are not Ontarians' priorities. Just like my Colleague from all parties in this House, I hear from constituents every day about out-of-control costs. Speaker, mothers and fathers in tears who must decide between whether they can feed their families or keep the lights on is unacceptable. Does the Premier really believe that ratepayers vote no when they're being bribed with their own money and when she finally stands -- Thank you. Will she finally stand in this legislature and admit that her government has failed Ontario families?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Making sure Ontario families get the single largest electricity bill rebate in Ontario's history is something that we're very proud of, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we've taken action, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And so that's why we've taken action and introduced the Ontario rebate for electricity consumers act. A set of initiatives which add to many of our pre-existing programs for helping customers using their bills, Mr. Speaker. And we also know that we're particularly focusing on ensuring that vulnerable customers have the resources to help avoid disconnection, Mr. Speaker. Through powers from the province, the Ontario energy board has implemented enhanced consumer protection rules that all local distribution companies must follow, including, Mr. Speaker. Requiring a minimum ten days advance notice of disconnection with the company resources to help customers in arrears, Mr. Speaker. We continue to do the right thing for families, Mr. Speaker.