

Hansard: Brown to Thibeault -- Hydro Costs

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INSTANT HANSARD

>> Patrick Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of energy. This morning's Ontario association of food banks released their annual hunger report. This year it included a special feature called "Shedding the light on energy poverty in Ontario." The report notes and I quote -- Ontario's hydro rates are rising faster than any province in Canada or even the United States, and an 8% government rebate isn't stopping that. The report goes on to say, I quote -- Ontario's food banks are seeing an increase in the number of clients who say they simply cannot keep up with their rising hydro bills. I fear this trend will only continue under these Liberal policies. So, Mr. Speaker, given this astonishing report from the Ontario association of food banks and their annual hunger report. My question to the Minister of energy is what will this government finally do to help?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Ontario association of food banks are an important partner and they do extremely important work right across our great province and I know the Minister of housing and poverty reduction will want to comment on this later, Mr. Speaker. But our government is committed to combating poverty and food insecurity and that's why we've invested \$5 billion in affordable housing since 2003, Mr. Speaker. We've raised the minimum wage and we've done more, Mr. Speaker. But I get, Mr. Speaker, that there are families in this province that are vulnerable and are continuing to struggle, Mr. Speaker. And that's why we want to ensure that we make this access to our clean and reliable electricity system also affordable, Mr. Speaker. We've introduced the oesp program back in January, Mr. Speaker. That will provide up to \$600 O bill rebates, Mr. Speaker, for many of these families. \$900 for seniors, Mr. Speaker, and there's also the low-income energy assistance program, Mr. Speaker. There are many programs out there and I know we've got more we need to do. Thank you.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of energy directly. Because the Minister of energy mentioned low-income energy assistance program. Well, the report actually referenced that. It says that is insufficient. To put this simply, if you are a single person working full time for a minimum wage, you are not eligible for leap in a rural area. And, Mr. Speaker, we're the highest number of hydro customers struggling with their bills? In rural Ontario. They're not eligible. Mr. Speaker, according to the report. Accessible aid programs do nothing for struggling attempt -

- families so the Minister has just raised their program highlighted in their report as being insufficient. What are you actually going to do to help families?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The programs that we've brought forward, Mr. Speaker, are helping families. We've helped over 145,000 families get on the O.S.P. Program, Mr. Speaker. We want to see over 300,000 families get on this program, but unfortunately in on -- Mr. Speaker on that side of the House they're not promoting it the way they should to make sure we can get every family on it as we can, Mr. Speaker. We've got many, many programs that are out there. The 8% -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 8% rebate that we talked about in the speech from the throne, Mr. Speaker, will help 5 million families, farms and small businesses right across the province, Mr. Speaker. The triple R.P. Program, Mr. Speaker, is going to help over 330,000 families, Mr. Speaker. So we know we've got more to do. That is something the **Premier** has tasked me with since June, Mr. Speaker. I will continue to work on ways.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of energy. He referenced this time the oesp program, Ontario electricity support program. That was also referenced in the food bank's hunger report. It said, I quote -- this program also is arguably insufficient. With the cost of hydro reaching unprecedented heights, a credit between 30 to \$50 per month is not enough -- Low-income House holds. That's a direct quote from the report. So these programs aren't reaching people. I don't need Liberal spin. I don't need Liberal talking points. I don't need you to say that that's someone else's problem. It's the opposition's fault for not promoting it. Give me a break. You blew the program on Liberal consultants. Families are struggling. People can't afford their bills and this Minister of energy doesn't care. I don't want spin. When will you help families?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually very pleased of a party that is actually helping families. We're the actually party that raised minimum wage. Didn't freeze it. Actually helped thousands and thousands of families across the province, Mr. Speaker. We had to rebuild the electricity system that they left in Tatters, Mr. Speaker, and it was affecting every family and business across this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've brought forward many programs that are helping families but we recognize, Mr. Speaker, that more needs to be done and that's what we continue to do, Mr. Speaker. We're bringing forward a plan that will continue to help families with what we have. That side of the House, Mr. Speaker, they have no plan and they could care less about the programs that are out there helping families, Mr. Speaker.

N.B.: Transcripts are captured by a closed captioning system and may contain errors.