

Hansard: Gates to Thibeault -- Small Business Hydro Rates

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INSTANT HANSARD

>> MPP Gates: My question is to the **Premier**. Last week I had a chance to sit down with the chamber of commerce in Niagara Falls. One of the issues on the agenda was hydro rates. These small business owners in Niagara Falls are saying they're struggling to pay their bills. In some cases, they're saying these rates are going to drive them out of business. It's jeopardizing jobs in my riding of Niagara Falls. **Premier**, what do you say to these business owners that don't know if they can keep their business's float with rates like these and at the end of the day jeopardizing jobs.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for the question. Small businesses of course are very important part of our overall economy, Mr. Speaker. We recognize the important they play. That's why when we brought forward the 8% reduction back in the fall economic statement, Mr. Speaker, small businesses actually qualify for that 8% reduction that they started getting off their bills as of January 1st. One of the things I do know is we're going to continue to find ways to reduce electricity bills for small and medium-size businesses across the province and all ratepayers. But there are also many incentives for small businesses to actually talk with their local utility. Talk with them about the save on energy program in which they can actually save significant money off their bills, Mr. Speaker. We were in Niagara Falls back in the fall talking about one of the local industries there that utilized many of these programs and are saving hundreds of thousands of dollars. I encourage all small businesses to talk to the local utility to make those savings.

>> MPP Gates: My question is back to the **Premier**. Mr. Speaker, it's the chamber of commerce that is talking to us and saying they're going to have to close their businesses. The 8% you talk about was put on by the Liberal party. It's nice you're taking it off. But you put it on in the first place. Every day residents in my riding drive right back Niagara Falls. In case you forgot, Niagara Falls is a landmark that drove public power in Ontario for over 100 years. That same 100 years those hydro prices were affordable in the province of Ontario. **Premier**, how can you explain these rates to the residents of Niagara Falls who see Niagara Falls every day and also see hydro bills with some of the highest rates in North America? Thank you.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We shut down coal plants. We rebuilt the system. We made sure our system is reliable so when we had the blackout in 2003 places like Niagara Falls will still have their lights on. That's what we've done. We made sure we have a clean reliable system that people can actually use. We know we need to do more. We're acting on that, Mr. Speaker. We're going to be coming forward with a rate mitigation plan in the very near future. We have the save on energy program that we encourage all of our small businesses to use. There are many, many programs out there helping. For example, hematite manufacturing in Brantford have saved 200,000 dollars every year on their equipment. We encourage all small businesses to use the programs.

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