

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, February 27, 2017

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Energy Content Highlighted

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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro Rates

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. In 2011 the auditor general pointed out the government's energy policies were disastrous. It took until last week for the Minister of energy to actually come clean and admit it. Why did it take 6 years, 6 years, for the Liberals to acknowledge the damage they have done?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I think the leader of the opposition knows full well there have investments made in the electricity system that were absolutely necessary. The jump-starting of renewal industry across the province, investments in a system that had been degraded because of a lack of investment by previous governments. Mr. Speaker, for months now, we have been working to find ways to take costs out of the system. We've renegotiated contracts like the contract with Samsung. We made decisions not to invest -- We know there's more to be done.

>> Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier. The Minister of energy actually went off his Liberal talking points and said, quote, hind sight is 20/20 when it comes to Premier Wynne's energy policies. Hind sight doesn't put money back into people's pockets. Hind sight doesn't turn the lights on. It doesn't make it easier for seniors to choose between heating and eating. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, the Minister of energy says hind sight is 20/20. Does the Premier agree that her policies have been disastrous or is this more talking points?

>> Premier Wynne: This is a very, very important issue. It's an important issue to people and businesses across the province. But I have to say the leader of the opposition has embellished what the Minister of energy said. The Minister of energy is very supportive of the fact that we're saving 4 billion dollars a year in healthcare costs because the coal fire plants are shut down. The Minister of energy and our whole government is very supportive of the fact that we have a reliable clean electricity grid. Those were decisions made in order to have a clean grid, in order to rebuild an electricity grid that was not reliable. Are

there things we could have done differently? Yes, of course there. Hind sight is 20/20. We acknowledged that. The reality is we know more costs have to be taken out of the system. We're going to deliver that.

>> Patrick Brown: The Minister of energy's mea culpa was Friday. They've already forgotten. The Minister of energy said how did we get here. I'll answer that for the government. Mr. Speaker, this may be a laughing matter for the Liberal benches. But it isn't. Ontarians are struggling. The Minister of energy said how did we get here on Friday. Let me answer that for him. The green energy act. Absurd executive salaries. Cancelled gas plants. Giving away millions of free electricity to neighbouring states. Mr. Speaker, my question is this. If there really was a mea culpa, which policy will you walk back. Which one of the policies are you going to walk back?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious issue. We're taking it extremely seriously. That's how we have to deal with the facts of the matter. We have to deal with the possible solutions that we are considering, Mr. Speaker. I've said I support what the Minister of energy said. Hind sight is 20/20. Maybe the leader of the opposition would go back to when his power was in office -- when his party was in office and look at the decisions that were made during those years. Maybe he'd look to sell off the 407 and the lack of benefits for the province of Ontario. The reality is we're dealing today and more needs to be done. And we're going to do that.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Duguid) Re: Job Creation

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Premier, do you believe, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, does the Premier believe the recent mea culpa will bring back jobs. We have lost investments because of this hydro policy. I hear the government heckling. They have lost investment. We have lost jobs. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, how are you going to get these jobs back that we've lost?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the opposition seems to not recognize that Ontario actually is leading economic growth in the country. Mr. Speaker. We're leading in job creation. We're outpacing the growth of oecd countries. So in fact, in relative terms, Ontario is doing very well. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that there are parts of the province where they're not sharing in that economic growth as evenly as others. We recognize that. But the net new jobs, the net growth, Mr. Speaker, Ontario is doing very, very well.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. In this bubble of queen's park, the Premier may believe Ontario is creating jobs but you leave queen's park, you hear stories of businesses. It's very different reality. On the weekend I visited an 89-year-old. Run north star ice in London since -- His hydro bill has gone up 100,000 dollars or 55%. He employs 25 local London residents. But he said it would be cheaper to run his business in Michigan. He's poured his heart into the company for 63 years. He's struggling to keep it in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is all these jobs you say you're creating, what's your message to Ross who is struggling to keep his business in Ontario because of your policies. What is your answer to him?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, whenever there's a job loss in the province, obviously that affects the family and the community and it's a serious concern. But the reality is in Ontario we've created 697,000 net new jobs. 28,000 jobs just last month. 2,000 tech jobs in London. The reality is there's job creation happening. There are different jobs. I will absolutely acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that there's a change in our economy. We're going through a transition. That is a reality. But to suggest there are not jobs being created is just not the fact. Mr. Speaker. There are jobs being created in this province. There are net new jobs, Mr. Speaker. Unemployment rate has been below the Canadian average for 22 months.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The government's own Cabinet documents say there are fewer jobs today relative to the population than before the recession. Let me share another story. Master product limited was rewarded the Premier's agrifood innovation award. They had to move that project they got the Premier's award for to Michigan. In fact, they've invested 100 million since 2011 in Michigan. They're an Ontario family. They want to invest in Ontario. But because of this government's policies they can't. They tell me they're worried now that all their future investments are going to go to the

US Mr. Speaker, why hasn't the Premier created opportunities that are driving jobs into the US And not into Ontario?

>> Minister Brad Duquid: They may not matter to the leader of the opposition, but they matter to the people of this province. They matter to our communities.

Mr. Speaker, facts still matter. The fact is 697,600 net jobs have been created in this province since the global recession. 87.8% full time. 78.6% above the average wage. Those are the facts. The leader of the opposition can deny them till the cows come home but he's wrong. We're creating jobs in this province. We're at the lowest level of unemployment that we've had in Our Premier cares about those areas that -- We're going to keep investing our fund. We're going to keep --

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro Rates

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Families are at a breaking point when it comes to keeping up with their hydro bills. Jane bought a new car. Her hydro was cut off. It took a political crisis for the Liberals to take winter disconnections seriously. What will it take for the Premier to address the root causes to finally bring hydro prices under control.

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: I know the leader of the third-party knows winter disconnections should in every part of the province should not be happening. If there's a situation where it's happening, the Minister of energy will want to know about that. I have said that I understand that there are people across the province who are overburdened by their electricity costs. We have moved to reduce their costs by 8%. We know there's more to be done. We'll be bringing a plan forward. We're looking at all options. We'll be bringing a plan forward to do just that too, further reduce people's electricity costs across the province.

>> Andrea Horwath: Electricity isn't a luxury. It shouldn't be priced like one. People have had bills so high that she's being forced to choose between filling the family's prescriptions or paying to keep the lights on. No mother should have to make that kind of choice. The Liberals have had almost 14 years in government. They have put the interest of a small group of their well-connected friends ahead of Ontario families by selling off Hydro One and selling out people like Rochelle. When will the Premier wake up.

>> Premier Wynne: The decisions that we have made to clean up the air by shutting down the coal fired plants to rebuild lines that had been neglected by governments of all stripes. Mr. Speaker, investments that have not been made, those were decisions that had the people of Ontario at the heart. Kids with asthma. We have acknowledged there was a cost associated with those decisions. That's hard for people to bear across the province. Electricity prices have gone up very quickly. We have moved to reduce costs already. We're looking at all options to further reduce people's electricity costs. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to bringing forward our plan in the very near future.

>> Andrea Horwath: People are trapped in a struggle every month to keep their family above water. People like Jane and Rochelle lie awake at night worried sick about how they're going to pay their hydro bill. The Liberals have spent 14 years driving up hydro costs for families. Premier Wynne is doing more damage by selling off Hydro One and selling control over our hydro system. Now it's the hydro crisis for families has become a political crisis for the Liberal party. Will the Premier finally admit her sell-off was a mistake and take real action to lower people's electricity bills?

>> Premier Wynne: We have been working to reduce costs in the electricity system for months. We have -- actually years. We have worked with Samsung to make sure we renegotiated that contract. We have made sure that we made a decision not to invest in new nuclear. We put in place the Ontario energy support program to help people on low income. We know there's more to be done. We're looking at all options. I really look forward to the response by the leader of the third-party when we bring our plan forward which will reduce people's electricity costs in the immediate term. I really look forward to her reaction because I think that, Mr. Speaker, she would be very pleased with the response, pleased with the plan that we're going to bring forward.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Rates

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: As long as it's stopping the sell-off of Hydro One. Speaker, I'll be very pleased. In fact, prices went up 50% since this Premier has been in office. 50%. Families need to see immediate relief and permanent change on their hydro bill. Rural and northern Ontarians are paying sky-high electricity bills usually driven by delivery charges. The Premier has had many chances to fix this unfairness. Instead, she chose to watch rural Ontarians go broke trying to keep up with ever rising hydro bills. Will the Premier get rid of the premium rural and northern Ontarians are paying?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: I'm very concerned about additional burden people in northern and rural people carry because of distribution charges. I think it's a huge concern. It's something the Minister of energy is working very hard at addressing. In fact, we have already begun to address that with an extra 12% reduction on top of the 8% reduction. We know that still there is more that needs to be done. It's interesting that the leader of the third-party in her lead off to this latest question said that as long as our plan stops the privatization, the broadening the ownership of Hydro One that she's supportive. It's one thing that would not take a penny off people's bills. The one thing she's interested in would not reduce people's bills. We're looking for ways to reduce people's electricity bills.

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: It's time for a government that gets what families are dealing with and takes action to take make life easier for Ontarians. Mandatory time of use pricing may have made sense in theory but it has punished seniors who need to keep the heat on during the day and busy families juggling work and their kids after school activities who can't fit their chores into off-peak hours. The Premier is punishing parents for cooking at dinner time. People need relief now, Speaker. Will this Premier immediately end mandatory time of use pricing?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and talk about what the iso has been hard at. Doing exactly that. They're looking at market reform. One of the things that we've been talking about with market reform and making sure there are opportunities for choice and the Ontario energy board is also looking at putting pilot projects in there to offer different pricing solutions. We get, Mr. Speaker, that these types of fixes would benefit many of those families like seniors who are living in a bungalow in Sudbury on a fixed income. There should be some choice. We've tasked this and the iso and oeb have been hard at this for months. We're going to continue to find ways to help all families.

>> Andrea Horwath: Here's a news flash for the energy Minister, pilot projects do not create systematic change. (Applause) Lower hydro bills start with more public control of the electricity system. The Premier has been in government for almost 14 years. She's been Premier for over 4. All she has done is make the hydro prices worse for people with her wrong-headed sell-off of Hydro One. She's ignored regular people in favour of well-connected insiders on bay street. Why doesn't the Premier understand when Ontarians pay their bills they expect to be paying for electricity. Not for someone else's profits. And stop the sell-off of Hydro One.

>> Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, this House well knows the sale of Hydro One has absolutely nothing to do with rates within the province. There's absolutely nothing to do with that. What they should know, Mr. Speaker, is that time of use is something that is actually saving all ratepayers money. What we need to do is ensure that we find ways and work with our system operator and work with the oeb to ensure that we can create a system to keep our conservation efforts down because conservation is the cheapest form of electricity. We on this side of the House recognize that. That's why we brought forward the plan to work with our iso and oeb to look at those time of use options. But we know that families need help right now. That's why we brought forward the 8% rebate.

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Energy Costs

>> MPP Todd Smith: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. On Friday the Minister of energy said hind sight was 20/20. According to the auditor general, experts told the government in 2009

prior to the green energy coming effect, to use competitive procurement. The ministry decided to move ahead with the green energy act that we know is a disaster today. Speaker, which is it? Did those experts mislead the auditor? Or did the Minister not want to admit the government ignored the experts so he could shirk the responsibility for the hydro rates in Ontario.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Investing in eliminating coal and building transmission were the absolute right thing to do. Investing in renewable energy was absolutely the right thing to do, Mr. Speaker, because of our foresight, because of this government's foresight, we now have a clean and reliable system, one that we can depend on. Not something that was in Tatters when they were in power. But the whole time I recognize that we were not perfect every step of the way. The what was correct. Green energy, renewable power. But Mr. Speaker, we did make some mistakes on the how. Fixed contracts and being technically specific in terms of those methods, Mr. Speaker, actually didn't inhibit competitive tension. We're making sure we brought forward fixes to this. We're seeing competitive tension, lowering rates and we're also working on other solutions, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Smith: Speaker, the Minister watched as energy prices, electricity prices in this province skyrocketed out of control. Increase of 35% in one year. The leader of the official opposition and I went to Sault Sainte Marie where the price in one year at that senior's long-term care home went up 39%. It's all on the backs of this Liberal government. They ignored the advice of the energy experts to go down this hole. Every time a member of the government takes a question on the electricity crisis, they say they only had two options. Either they could do nothing or the most expensive thing possible. Why does the government think doing their job right in the first place wasn't an option in the case of electricity?

>> Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, there was only one option which was to rebuild a system that they left in Tatters that was blacking out. Making sure businesses keep the lights on was our option. Making sure hospitals were able to do the surges they needed. When you deinvest in a system and run Niagara Falls dry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to find ways to help families across the province. Mr. Speaker, when it comes to renewable energy, we'll make sure -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to find ways to have competitive tension when we're looking at lowering rates to families. The cost of solar and wind is the lowest it's ever been and provinces and states are looking to us for the leadership we provided on building a French). Voice of Interpreter: Thank you.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Energy System Improvements

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the Premier. New Democrats know privatization of hydro by the Liberals has hurt Ontario families and businesses. But we haven't forgotten and neither have Ontarians that it was the Conservative privatization that helped get us into the message. It's time to stop the damage the Liberals and Conservatives have done to our hydro system and take immediate steps to regain control over hydro costs. Can the Premier tell us after 14 years in government when will she finally taking action to deal with the hydro crisis that her Liberal government has helped create.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: We've been taking action since 2003, rebuilding the system. We made sure we've invested in renewable energy. We've invested in making sure we have a reliable clean system. One that I know the Minister of health is very proud of as well. We have a system that is seeing reductions in our air pollution deaths being reduced by 23%. Air pollution hospitalizations reduced by 41%. We know that this investment in building our system, in eliminating coal, in making sure our system is clean and green came with a cost. With that, Mr. Speaker, we've worked hard. We're continuing to work hard on finding further reductions for families. 8% was off their bill January 1st. 12% for those in the Hydro One or 2 areas. We'll continue to find ways to help.

>> MPP Tabuns: Speaker, the Premier has never taken the hydro crisis seriously until it became a political crisis for her party. As for the Conservatives, they're offering no real solutions. After 17 years as a Conservative politician, people have no ideas where Mr. Brown stands or what he's proposing to do. The NDP knows people have to have at the centre of hydro policy and the time for action is now. If the Premier thinks so too, will she immediately halt the further sell-off of Hydro One and come up with a real strategy to

address the hydro crisis.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, there is no cost increases related to the sale of Hydro One. We know that. The Ontario energy board is the energy that is quasi judicial that sets the rates. When it comes to the Premier and this government actually taking it to the next level and finding ways of reducing costs for people across the province, Mr. Speaker, we saved 3.7 billion dollars by renegotiating the Samsung agreement. We saved 1.9 billion by reducing the fit prices. We created the competitive lrp process. We suspended the lrp2 process which saved 3.8 billion dollars. We also put new dispatches for wind. Saves 200 million dollars. We'll continue to find ways to help families across the province.

MPP Mangat to Minister McMahon Re: Ontario 150

>> MPP Amrit Mangat: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of tourism, culture and support. 2017 is an exciting and festive year where Ontarians will have the opportunity to come together and celebrate the 150th anniversary of our incredible province. This year our government's goal is to celebrate the culture of inclusion, innovation and opportunities that uniquely define Ontario through the Ontario 150 program. Last week the Minister was in Mississauga to announce through the partnership program to provide south Asian youth artists with business skills, media training and support network. Mr. Speaker, my question to the Minister is can she tell the members about the programs that will promote community --

>> Minister Eleanor McMahon: Voice of Interpreter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. Speaker, I'm thrilled about the energy we saw in Mississauga at last week's announcement. Include incredible. The room was on fire. It was wonderful. We're delivering 87 projects through the 150 partnership program to support communities. We're inspiring our youth which I know every member cares about. The province wide grant programs that we're rolling out include a 25 million dollar capital program that supports the repair of existing infrastructure to better address the needs of Ontario communities. A 5 million dollar partnership program that empowers our youth. 7 million dollar community celebration program that will ensure the environment of Ontario's 150 reaching Ontarians in every community across Ontario. We're funding over 650 events initiatives and infrastructure projects to commemorate this milestone year. I look forward to the supplementary to provide more information.

>> MPP Mangat: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Minister's comments about the success of the event last week. I was in my community office. I received several calls from young artists to further inquire about the program. I look forward to celebrate Ontario 150. It will boost community pride and build a deeper connection to the place we call home. It's a year-long celebration of the qualities and values that define us as Ontarians. The Minister has announced there will be initiatives in the years ahead. Can the Minister please inform my community as well as the members of the House about French). Voice of Interpreter: Thank you. Minister.

>> Minister McMahon: Thank you, Speaker. I had the pleasure of watching ginger ail and the mono whales playing a place to stand in Toronto. This important song will serve as a sound track across Ontario this year. A modern energy making it relevant to a new generation. We presented the Ontario 150 television ad to let people know we're celebrating our qualities and values. It's clearly touching Ontarians. We're investing in a number of high profile signature projects such as Ontario tour, a themed music showcase, and a film day in April. Our 150th anniversary is a chance for us all to celebrate. I know all members will join me in celebrating our communities, our province and our country in this important year.

MPP Clark to Minister Del Duca Re: Electric Cars

>> MPP Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. My question to the Premier. Regardless of any deals made in the back room, it's time this government takes a U turn yet again on its 14,000 dollar luxury electric

car rebates. Speaker, will the Premier put the car in reverse and cancel this rebate?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of transportation.

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. As I mentioned last week when the same member asked the question, we know and I think the members opposite know in 2010 our government initially launched our very first electric vehicle incentive program. We know over the last number of years it was a program that was successful. A number of months ago we decided to undertake a modernization of the program to look at the new technologies that exist. What we're witnessing on a month by month basis, more auto manufacturers are putting more options out providing more vehicles. We wanted a program that was modernized and could take advantage. So we want to take advantage of all of the new options there for consumers by Voice of Interpreter: Thank you.

>> MPP Clark: Thanks. I'd love to go back to the Premier. Even the Toronto star editorial board is questioning the government on the 14,000 dollar luxury car rebate. As the star see it the wealthy should not be turning to government coffers to subsidize luxury cars. They're robbing Peter to pay for Paul's Tesla. A former Premier once said it's never too late to do the right thing. I'm going to do ask the Premier again, will the government put the brakes on this 14,000 dollar luxury car rebate.

>> Minister Del Duca: Thanks, Speaker. I was getting to an answer in my first response. There are literally more and more products coming out on the market every single month. I'm not sure if the member is aware of the fact that today there's somewhere in the neighbourhood of 2 dozen vehicles that can receive the support. Right across the spectrum in terms of all the price points including many options available today which our program took into account when we did the update a number of months ago that provide more options for middle-class families across the province of Ontario. I would encourage that member to take a look at the products now available across the entire spectrum of all prices, many of which support people in the middle-class families that he purports to want to support. This government is supporting those families and will continue to do so.

MPP Gates to Minister Thibeault Re: Small Business Hydro Rates

>> MPP Wayne 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 Glenn 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.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Mauro Re: Government and Municipal Relationship

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: My question is to the Minister of municipal affairs. There are more than 2200 municipal leaders in Toronto for the Ontario good roads association conference. It's one of the oldest associations in Ontario. This year we celebrated Ontario 150 and the association is not too far behind. I believe this is their 123rd year. They advocate for the transportation of public work interest of municipalities and represent cities, towns big and small across the province. You could say they paved the way for many municipal provincial conversations about critical infrastructure. Last June members assembled in my riding to meet with city officials, tour city hall and the surrounding area. I understand that the Minister spoke at the conference this morning. Can the Minister elaborate on our government's participation in the conference.

>> Minister Bill Mauro: Thank you very much, I thank the member for the question. I did have an opportunity this morning to speak down at the conference and spoke to them while we were there about the work that our government has been doing to reset the relationship that exists between our government and the municipal sector. We remember before coming into government there was a period of acrimony in the province. Downloading costs into the municipal tax base. We spoke at length and we'll have an opportunity to speak later about the work we're doing as a government to reset that relationship with the municipal sector. We respect them. We've demonstrated that in a variety of ways especially I would say the table speak. We meet at least every two months. Sometimes every months. Looking for the input. I think their value the relationship. In the supplementary I'll have more to add.

>> MPP Kiwala: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister. The Minister and many others started politics at the municipal level. We all know the role local governments play in Ontario's communities. They provide many front line services like libraries and rec centres and help provide critical infrastructure like the roads we drive on, the pipes, and the treatment facilities that bring clean water to our taps. Our government is making the largest infrastructure government in schools, hospitals, roads and bridges in the province's history. We're investing in communities that make Toronto strong. Infrastructure will be the key theme at the conference. Will the Minister elaborate on how Ontario's infrastructure investments will support local communities.

>> Minister Mauro: I thank the member for the question. Part of what I talked about this morning was how we're resetting the municipal fiscal sustainability relationship. The total supports were 1.1 billion. Today total supports are in the range of 4 billion dollars. That's an average increase for municipalities of 264%. We talked about the Ontario community infrastructure fund being increased. That's going to be guaranteed bankable money that all our municipalities can count on. We're doubling gas tax. By 2019 we're starting. For example, for the city of Toronto, currently receiving 170 million dollar in gas tax, that will double to 340 million every single year. Toronto has received 1.9 billion in gas tax under our government.

MPP Jones to Minister Jaczek Re: Development Services

>> MPP Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of community and social services. I've been working with a mother whose son has developmental disabilities. On Friday she was told she must pick him up from the hospital. She needs her son to be in a group home. With no spaces available, she is considering surrendering care of her son to get him the residential space he needs. How can this be happening in Ontario in 2017?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the member opposite for her question. Of course we do understand that quite often situations where caregivers are looking after those with development disabilities do face a number of challenges. I'd certainly like to hear a little bit more about this particular situation from the member. What we are doing is transforming the system here in Ontario. We have committed as we did to the Ombudsman to ensure crisis situations don't develop. We're working hard to ensure before a situation becomes a crisis that we work with families and with caregivers to provide the very best solution.

>> MPP Jones: While you're transforming the system you're giving away 14,000 dollars to people who purchase a Tesla and individual families are having to abandon their children. In October media reports said a young adult was abandoned in Oakville. In Peel, I know of 9 abandonments and 7 threatened abandonments. Abandonment is the last option. It's your government that is abandoning these families. After the select committee report in 2014, after the Ombudsman's report last year why is this still happening?

>> Minister Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, our government does spend some 2 billion dollars on development services here in Ontario. I certainly don't remember hearing from either of the two opposition parties in their platforms in the last election about any increase in services for this very vulnerable population. Whereas we have made an absolutely unprecedented investment. 810 million dollars over three years. We're making really meaningful progress. We have eliminated the 2014 past port wait list one year ahead of schedule. We provided direct funding for an additional 13,000 adults with development disabilities. This has brought the total number of individuals to approximately 24,000. This is a program that our government introduced in 2005. It's providing real help for families. We'll continue to work to ensure everyone is taken care of.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rates and Seniors

>> MPP France Gelinas: Voice of Interpreter: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Very concerned about her hydro bill. She and her husband are retired seniors on pensions. They were paying 140 dollars a month for hydro on equal billing. Last spring to save more energy they spent over 400 dollars and switched all of their lights to LED. But instead of seeing their hydro bill go down, their bill actually went up to 200 dollars a month. Premier, how is that these seniors who worked so hard to use less energy are now paying more for their hydro bill.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for the question. It's important to recognize that, Mr. Speaker, we're working hard to ensure those individuals like the Honourable member has mentioned are finding ways to see their bills reduced. Mr. Speaker, we are encouraging conservation because conservation saves the entire system. When we have people saving, conserving energy, we don't need to build new generation. When we don't have to build new generation, we can have cost savings for everyone. That's something we encourage. When it comes to individual cases and reasons for individual bills, I'm more than happy to work with the Honourable member to find out ways that we can continue to help this family. There are many programs in place that help seniors. The Ontario electricity support program is one of those programs in which seniors see their bills reduced significantly.

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. I can guarantee you if there was a program out there to help them, we would have helped them. We do this inside and out every single day in my office. These seniors do their laundry at night. They change all of their lights to LED. For all of their effort their hydro bill has gone

up. They're on fixed income and finding it harder and harder to get by. They have no confidence the present government will ever make their life better. The Premier said the sell-off of Hydro One would not increase hydro costs but this is exactly what's happening to each and every one of us in the nickelbelt. When Premier, will you end the higher cost of rural delivery and give this family some relief?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As of January 1st, those customers with Hydro One on r2 have seen their bills drop by 60 dollars. We enhanced that by 45 to bring it up to 60 dollars. We recognize there's more to do especially for folks in northern or rural parts of the province. We're working right now to find ways that we can address that issue. We do want to make sure that electricity bills across the province, specifically distribution is more equitable. We're going to continue to invest in this system that is clean, that is reliable, one that is benefiting the families like the Honourable member is mentioning. We'll make sure that we can continue to have this clean green system and find ways to help.

MPP Potts to Minister Flynn Re: Service Industry Employees

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of labour. Speaker, last year we passed an important piece of legislation that helps Ontarians who work in the service industry. Through my private member's bill, the protecting employees tip act, we made sure the money was given to them and not skimmed off. People work very hard for their money. We're happy the legislation passed unanimous consent. I've seen advertisements of late and I know people people in my riding have seen these advertisements as well. Can the Minister tell the House how the Minister is promoting the legislation and ensuring employees know their role.

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member for all the hard work he put into this private member's bill because it's paying off. He talked about the ad campaign. The ad campaign is a great example of how we're making sure that people in this province who work understand the rights they have. Through these ads please have to information they need to ask questions if they feel their employers aren't playing by the rules. We give them the information they need on their website. We've got information on a number of languages. We've got an interactive video, a question and answer session. Speaker, they may support people but stats can tell us 65,300 people rely on food and beverage services for their employment and receive tips. This is impacting on a number of people.

>> MPP Potts: I want to thank the Minister for his answer, his incredibly hard work and support in getting this piece of legislation through the House. People come through my office weekly. They share stories of how they work multiple jobs. They have problems of getting paid. Or they're not being notified in advance when they're going to be scheduled. These are problems all Ontarians face. These are some of the most vulnerable people. All they want is to be treated fairly and feel like the law is there to protect them. I know our government has taken steps toward helps these people. This is something of which I'm incredibly proud. That doesn't change the fact that people are still feeling they aren't being treated fairly across all industrial and commercial sectors. So Speaker, will the Minister please share with the House what our government is doing for these vulnerable workers.

>> Minister Flynn: My thanks again to the member for the important question. I appreciate all the concerns he's shared with us. I know they're not just felt in his riding. They're reflected across the province. Our focus has been to make sure we can help protect workers in this province. All the while creating a level playing field for the vast majority of employers that play by the rules. We should be proud so many people choose to live, invest and work in this great province. We want to make sure as the nature of the work changes that the laws are up to date and reflect the preparation businesses need to ensure they're playing by the rules. In the coming weeks I expect a final report from the special advisors. I look forward to introducing it in the House.

MPP Arnott (Thompson) to Minister Murray Re: Stewardship Program

>> MPP Ted Arnott: On February 17th, 2016, more than a year ago, the Minister of environment and climate change suggested the Ontario's stewardship program would be eliminated within a year. A year has come and gone. Last week in direct contradiction of that statement he said it would take until December 2018 to wind up the stewardship. How can the people of Ontario trust this latest timeline. Will the Minister commit to winding up immediately and where is the money going.

>> Minister Glen Murray: We're actually doing exactly what we said on the time table we said we would do it on. The announcement, the letter and direction went out to the Ontario stewardship to wrap up their operations. There are issues and outstanding investigations which the member is I know aware of that have to proceed separately. We're winding up the other ones. Mr. Speaker, a little humility given that this situation was the creation of him and his party. This was yet another Tory mess the Liberals are cleaning up.

>> MPP Lisa M. Thompson: How can we trust this Minister to get anything right. Board members were enjoying stays at the chateau laurier and having extravagant dinners. Under this Minister 's nose half a million dollars was allegedly stolen. A constituent of mine recently called me to express his concern about the huge burden of red tape ots is putting on his company. He wonders why should he bother because he doesn't trust ots. Speaker, the Premier knows that her Minister under the authority of bill 151 can wind up this cartel immediately. Speaker, will the Premier please tell her Minister to do the Honourable thing and take control of another one of her government's wasteful agencies.

>> Minister Murray: Mr. Speaker there's something passing strange when it was this Premier who ordered two years ago this Minister to start to wrap up those changes. We passed bill 151 which was the legislation that got rid of all of this. It was the third attempt by this government to pass a bill to do it. What's the opposition party's block in a minority government the last two attempts, bill 93. You blocked it. You also never asked the question why we were cleaning this up. You never asked the question until after we brought forward legislation to wind these up. You weren't even doing your jobs. And Mr. Speaker, these weren't your creations. You thought the private sector could run it all on its own. You created these agencies.

MPP Fife to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rates and Seniors

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. This morning you have heard the voices of Ontarians from across the province and the negative impact of hydro costs. A few weeks ago while knocking on doors I met Liz and Kenneth who told me they can't get relief from their bills. Kenneth was diagnosed with a chronic lung disease. Liz quit her job to become his primary caregiver. He is on oxygen machines 24 hours a day. Their bills have more than doubled. In January 2017 their bill was 623 dollars. They do not qualify for any of your government's hydro relief programs. They are on one pension. They have no other options. Premier, what is your plan to help Liz and Kenneth?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Honourable member for bringing up that family's situation because it is one of the situations, Mr. Speaker, that we are acting on right now. I do recognize that the Honourable member talked about the oesp program and that they don't qualify. So we are looking at that program and seeing ways we can enhance it. One of the things they'll get is that 8% rebate. That's one of the things I know they'll get right now. But we are working actively to try to find other ways to bring forward rate mitigation to help not only that family because there are other families across the province that need help. We recognize that. We're going to make sure that we act on that.

>> MPP Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure the Minister of energy fully understands the gravity of the situation. Their hydro bill was 289 dollars in 2014. Today it was 623 dollars. That is cost that can't be absorbed by an elderly couple living on a pension income, a fixed income. As I pointed out, 24 hours a day oxygen is not optional for them to use your peak times. What this family should be focussed on is keeping Ken healthy and focussing on his health. Instead their primary concern, their number 1 point of stress in their lives is their hydro bill. Premier, I ask you again today, do you have a plan that can help

Liz and Kenneth cope with the skyrocketing hydro cost in the province of Ontario.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2003 that family wouldn't have been able to use their oxygen because the power would have been out on a regular basis. We made sure we invested in a system that will ensure the power is there. We'll making sure, Mr. Speaker, that we'll continue to find ways to reduce rates. We're working on. That we'll make sure we can have rate mitigation in the very new future.