

Hansard: Horvath to Premier (Thibeault) (Hoskins)--Hospitals and Hydro Costs

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INSTANT HANSARD

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Premier. After 15 years of skyrocketing hydro costs, the Premier told Ontarians she finally understood. But last week, the Minister of health turned that right around and said hydro costs were no big deal. There was only a few million dollars to a hospital budget. Only a few percent. Maybe to the Premier and her Minister s, Speaker, \$1 million might not be a big deal. But in a hospital budget, that's a big number. Did the Minister of health not see the Premier's polling? Or did he not get the memo that this is all about politics for the Premier and her Liberal party?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the leader of the third party knows that what this is about is making sure that people in the province can pay their electricity bills. We've been very clear about that. As I said to the leader of the opposition, we actually start today look for ways to reduce electricity costs in 2013, which is the year that I became Premier, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, I believe and I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is going to want to comment on this, but I believe the context in which he was putting his comments was that there is about a 1% cost associated with electricity for hospitals and, Mr. Speaker, the operating dollars that we have put into hospitals have actually far surpassed that, and so I think the point that was being made is that is there is more money going into hospitals. We recognize that there's more to be done, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that hospitals. Have been working under some constraints. But that's exactly why we've been putting funding into hospitals..At a greater rate than the member was –

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker in fact this Premier and her government froze hospital operating budgets for four years straight. Speaker. The Premier and her Minister of health have ignored concerns from hospitals about their skyrocketing hydro bills, telling this House that we haven't heard any. That's just not the case. Officials at Hamilton health sciences talked about the problem publicly just last week. They said and I quote -- it's not like you can just shut the lights off when you've got patients in the building. We've got less money to do other things because we're spending more money on electricity, end quote. How can the Premier and her Minister seriously hear statements like this one and yet offer no real concrete solution for hospitals whose bills are skyrocketing because of the Liberals' hydro mess?

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of energy.

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise and respond in relation to what we're doing for specifically hospitals when it comes to electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. On top of the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, which is going to help every family, small business and farm in Ontario by reducing their bills 25%, there is going to be a modest decrease between 2 and 4% for hospitals. But on top of that, Mr. Speaker, on top of that is the save on energy program, Mr. Speaker. The save on energy program has helped many, many, many hospitals in this province, Mr. Speaker. So much so, Mr. Speaker, the independent electricity system operator has phoned us up and has told us to make sure that we let everyone know that these hospitals have actually seen \$20 million invested, Mr. Speaker, by the IESO, to make sure they can reduce their consumption and at the same time -- excuse me, Mr. Speaker. At the same time save their bills. Sudbury for example is saving \$275,000 to \$500,000 a year, Mr. Speaker

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>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, hospitals like everybody else are doing everything they can to reduce their consumption, but the bills keep going up. That's the problem with this government has not figured out after a number of years messing up our electricity system. Look, municipalities are also stepping up to the plate, Speaker, to try to get this government to understand the magnitude of the problem. Last week North Bay city council actually passed a motion, a resolution. They voted to ask the Premier to help their hospital because they said Ontario hospitals are not currently eligible for any hydro relief, and the government is quote-unquote creating a situation where rising hydro costs can potentially impact health care. That is what the hospital said. They're -- their back of the napkin response is a phantom plan that lines the bankers and denies hospitals the funding they need. When will they finally admit that there's a problem?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we increased the budget of North Bay regional health centre by almost \$4 million or 2.1% last year. We increased the budget of Hamilton health sciences by 3.6% last year. Almost 30 million new dollars. But I can understand the challenge that the member opposite -- the leader of the opposition is facing because every time she mentioned the hospital, that hospital comes out and either explains the innovations that they've adopted. In fact the member, my Colleague from Sudbury had referenced some of those programs that resulted in reduced consumption or in the case of Sault Ste. Marie where the C.E.O. had to publicly rebuke and refute the claims made by the leader of the third party saying those increases in electricity have not result under layoffs at the hospital. The hospital has not made decisions directly tied to the increase of electricity rates and there are no planned layoffs of frontline staff. There are challenges with our hospitals, Mr. Speaker. But as you can see from -- and I did this last week. I'm prepared to do it. Increase after increase.

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