

Hansard: Horwath to Premier on Hydro One and electricity bills

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INSTANT HANSARD

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the **Premier**. Yesterday I asked the **Premier** about people I met across Ontario who are struggling to pay their hydro bills. They have student loans that they can barely afford. They're paying for child care and it's only getting more and more expensive in this province. They're having to stop saving for their kids' education because their bills are simply too high, Speaker. The **Premier** said she has an enormous amount of sympathy. People don't need sympathy, Speaker. They need action. Will this **Premier** stop the privatization of Hydro One at all local utility companies?

>> **Premier Wynne:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the reason that I talked about the sympathy is because we have taken action and we are taking action to deal with the problems that people are facing in their lives every single day. The leader of the third party began by talking about tuition. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly why we believe tuition should be free for students from low-income families, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the third party talked about child care. That's exactly why, Mr. Speaker, we think there needs to be more child care particularly for the 0 to 4 years which is why 100,000 new spaces over five years is critical, Mr. Speaker. And the fact that we are moving to take the provincial portion of the H.S.T. off electricity bills, to further reduce bills for people in rural communities, Mr. Speaker, and to work with small businesses so that they will have access to conservation initiatives so they can save money. All of that comes out of that, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, whether this **Premier** chooses to admit it or not, life is becoming more and more unaffordable for the people of this province, all across Ontario. People are already struggling to pay for child care, pay off student loans that they've been paying for a decade, and on top of that the hydro bill keeps climbing and climbing and climbing. People don't know what to do, Speaker. They didn't vote to turn Hydro One or their local utility into private for-profit companies and they cannot afford for that to happen. Will this **Premier** stop the sell-off of our hydro system in the province of Ontario?

>> **Premier Wynne:** Mr. Speaker, underlying this question, as has been the case for many months now, is an ideological position that argues that we should not build new transit. We should not make investments in new infrastructure by leveraging assets that have been owned by the people of the province for many years. Mr. Speaker -- **Premier Wynne:** That we shouldn't make those investments, that we shouldn't invest in new assets for the people of Ontario that are needed in 2016, Mr. Speaker. So we categorically reject that notion. We believe that investing in roads and - and bridges and transit across the province is necessary. We're demonstrating, Mr. Speaker, that those investments are creating economic growth, and we are going to continue to foster economic growth across the province.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, even the financial accountability officer says the **Premier's** got it wrong. You don't sell off a revenue-generating asset to pay for infrastructure. It's the wrong thing to do, Speaker. And that's not -- at all. That's just a fact. What I really think the **Premier** needs to know is that all the families in Ontario that I've been talking to are telling us that they cannot afford their hydro bills. They're alone, Speaker. The people I met in Kitchener and in Hamilton, in Niagara Falls, they're not alone. It's happening everywhere. They're seeing their bills go up and their pay cheques are staying the same. They can't afford private power generation. They can't afford private power transmission. They can't afford private local utilities, Speaker.

The **Premier** is not an innocent bystander in this mess. She can take action, and she needs to take action. Will she stop the sell-off of our electricity system in the province of Ontario?

>> **Premier Wynne:** So, Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the third party continues to try to inflate these issues I talked about the need for us to try to make investments in infrastructure and that's the asset discussion. If she wants to have the conversation about the electricity price increases, Mr. Speaker, we are very aware that the investments that have been made in order to upgrade the system, in order to have a 90% clean emissions-free grid in this province by shutting down the coal-fired plants, by jump starting a renewable industry, Mr. Speaker, that there's costs associated with that and investments that we've made. So, Mr. Speaker, we have put in place programs to address those challenges. So we've removed the debt retirement charge, Mr. Speaker, from people's bills. We've put in place the Ontario energy and property tax credit low income energy assistance program, Mr. Speaker. Northern Ontario energy credit. Most recently we've announced we're going to be removing another 8% the provincial portion of H.S.T. From people's bills. We understand we need to take action and we are.

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