

Letter to the Editor re: “The forced death of a rural business”
Glenn Thibeault

I was troubled to read the story of Karen Swan and her store in Athens. Small businesses are vital to our economy and crucial to our communities.

Affordable electricity is something we are striving to maintain for our small businesses. That’s why we made sure small business was included in Ontario’s Fair Hydro Plan, announced on March 2nd. The plan, which will give an average 25 per cent break on electricity bills for every household in Ontario, will also apply to half a million farms and small businesses, including many variety stores. If you pay an electricity bill that includes Time Of Use pricing, you will receive the 25 per cent on average reduction – no matter what kind of ratepayer you are.

Reliable electricity is critical to the survival of small businesses across the province. That’s why we rebuilt our system, including investing more than \$50 billion in clean generation and new transmission infrastructure. Those investments mean we no longer have brownouts and blackouts, and we haven’t had a smog day in Ontario since 2014. But the costs had simply become too large a burden on all of our electricity bills, and so we’ve taken action.

Given that Athens is a rural community served by Hydro One, many local residents and businesses will actually see more than the a 25 per cent on average reduction on their electricity bills, as we’re expanding the Rural and Remote Rate Protection program. Through this program, we’re bringing the higher distribution costs of rural customers more in line with the rest of the province. As a result, rural ratepayers will see even greater reductions on their bills through the Fair Hydro Plan – some by as much as 40 to 50 per cent.

We are committed to bringing electricity rates down, and keeping them down, and will be introducing legislation this session, in time for public hearings and debate, so rate cuts can take effect this summer.

In the meantime, local utilities, like Hydro One, have payment plans available for customers who are having trouble keeping up with their bills. Utilities also support rebates and incentives that can help people to improve their energy efficiency, lowering their bills. I encourage anyone struggling with their bills to contact their utility to learn about these programs and how they can help.