

QP BRIEFING

May 25, 2017

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ARTICLES

1). *WHO'S LOBBYING FOR WHOM*

By: Sabrina Nanji

New, renewed and amended registrations

Stew Kiff of Solstice Public Affairs on behalf of Association des enseignantes et enseignants franco-ontariens

Charlotte Janssen of Janssen Law Professional Corporation on behalf of Capital Sports Holding Inc.

Abid Malik of Context Aware Strategies Inc. on behalf of G. Magnotta Foundation for Vector Borne Diseases

Yan Plante of Argyle TACT Affaires publiques on behalf of Corporation de Sécurité Garda Canada

Rebecca Grundy of Stosic & Associates on behalf of Medisys

Milton Chan of Hansell McLaughlin Advisory on behalf of Capital Sports Holdings Inc.

Paul Tye of Tye Consulting Ltd. on behalf of Ontario Alliance of Mental Health Practitioners

Latitia Scarr of Public Affairs Advisors on behalf of Blackhawk Network Canada

Daniel Moulton of Crestview Strategy on behalf of Hyr Canada Inc.

Damien O'Brien of Edelman on behalf of R.W. Tomlinson Limited

Brian Teehy of StrategyCorp Inc. on behalf of Progressive Contractors Association of Canada

Morgan McLellan of Navigator Ltd. on behalf of Association of Major Power Consumers in Ontario (AMPCO)

Lindsay Doyle of Summa Strategies Canada Inc. on behalf of Genesee & Wyoming Canada Inc.

Morgan McLellan of Navigator Ltd. on behalf of Association of Independent Assessment Centres

Ron Ross of Pathway Group Inc. on behalf of Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario (ARIDO)

Howard Mains of TACTIX Government Relations and Public Affairs Inc. on behalf of Association of Equipment Manufacturers

Daniel Bordonali of Sutherland Corporation Limited (formerly Sutherland & Associates) on behalf of Empire Communities Ltd

Aleem Kanji of Sutherland Corporation Limited (formerly Sutherland & Associates) on behalf of Empire Communities Ltd

Manny Sousa of Sutherland Corporation Limited (formerly Sutherland & Associates) on behalf of Empire Communities Ltd

Paul Sutherland of Sutherland Corporation Limited (formerly Sutherland & Associates) on behalf of Empire Communities Ltd.

Troy Ross of TRM Public Affairs on behalf of Canadian Online Gaming Alliance

Donald Gracey of CG Management & Communications Inc. on behalf of Georgian Bay Biomed Inc

Daniel Bordonali of Sutherland Corporation Limited (formerly Sutherland & Associates) on behalf of Passport Parking Inc

Manny Sousa of Sutherland Corporation Limited (formerly Sutherland & Associates) on behalf of Passport Parking Inc

Bob Lopinski of Counsel Public Affairs Inc. on behalf of Ontario Hospital Association

Paul Sutherland of Sutherland Corporation Limited (formerly Sutherland & Associates) on behalf of Force Multiplier Solutions Canada, Inc

Daniel Bordonali of Sutherland Corporation Limited (formerly Sutherland & Associates) on behalf of Force Multiplier Solutions Canada, Inc
John Moonen of John Moonen & Associates Ltd. on behalf of Geo. Bezdan Sales Ltd.
Aleem Kanji of Sutherland Corporation Limited (formerly Sutherland & Associates) on behalf of Force Multiplier Solutions Canada, Inc
Ron Ross of Pathway Group Inc. on behalf of Geo. Bezdan Sales Ltd.
Noah Niznick of Public Affairs Advisors on behalf of Blackhawk Network Canada
Daniel Matthew Boudreau of Hill+Knowlton Strategies Canada on behalf of DelShen Therapeutics
Melisa Foster of Global Public Affairs Inc. on behalf of Merrco
Andrew Retfalvi of Global Public Affairs Inc. on behalf of Merrco
Donald Gracey of CG Management & Communications Inc. on behalf of Ontario Opticians Association
Donald Gracey of CG Management & Communications Inc. on behalf of Ontario Opticians Association
Paul Brown of Campbell Strategies on behalf of Home Capital Group Inc.
Sarah Domino of Leonard Domino & Associates Inc. on behalf of The Ontario Association of Consultants, Counsellors, Psychometrists and Psychotherapists (OACCPP)
Lindsay Doyle of Summa Strategies Canada Inc. on behalf of SAP Canada Inc.
Katlyn Harrison of Summa Strategies Canada Inc. on behalf of Heat and Frost Insulators and Allied Workers
Thomas McLaren of Stakeholder Strategies Inc. on behalf of Ontario Pork Producers Marketing Board
Ryan Singh of Temple Scott Associates Inc. on behalf of Board of Canadian Registered Safety Professionals
Chris McCluskey of Environics Communications Inc. on behalf of StubHub
Steve McCauley on behalf of The Pollution Probe Foundation
Derek May on behalf of The Pollution Probe Foundation
Melissa De Young on behalf of The Pollution Probe Foundation
Ingrid E. Thompson on behalf of The Pollution Probe Foundation
Katie Ungard on behalf of The Pollution Probe Foundation
Noemie De Vuyst on behalf of The Pollution Probe Foundation
Frank Wood on behalf of Ontario Pork Producers Marketing Board
Ken Ovington on behalf of Ontario Pork Producers Marketing Board
Stacey Ash on behalf of Ontario Pork Producers Marketing Board
Eric Schwindt on behalf of Ontario Pork Producers Marketing Board
Jim Weir on behalf of Ontario Pork Producers Marketing Board
Oliver Haan on behalf of Ontario Pork Producers Marketing Board
John de Bruyn on behalf of Ontario Pork Producers Marketing Board
Stefan Larrass on behalf of Ontario Pork Producers Marketing Board
Sam Bradshaw on behalf of Ontario Pork Producers Marketing Board
Jennifer Buccino on behalf of Dietitians of Canada (Ontario)
Leslie Whittington-Carter on behalf of Dietitians of Canada (Ontario)
Garry Clark on behalf of Ontario Prospectors Association
William Robert Wood on behalf of Pool & Hot Tub Council of Canada
Sharon O'Halloran on behalf of Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario
Vivian McCaffrey on behalf of Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario
John Morala on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
Don Forgeron on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
Barbara Taylor on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
Randy Bundus on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada

Ryan Stein on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
Todd Jerry on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
David McGown on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
Kim Donaldson on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
Liam McGuinty on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
Trevor Foster on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
Craig Stewart on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
Sally Turney on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
Pete Karageorgos on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
Rana Shamoon on behalf of Insurance Bureau of Canada
Shelagh Paterson on behalf of Ontario Library Association
Patrick Searle on behalf of Council of Canadian Innovators
Dana O'Born on behalf of Council of Canadian Innovators
Ben Bergen on behalf of Council of Canadian Innovators
Alimamy Bangura on behalf of Muslim Educational Network, Training and Outreach Service
Jamila Butt on behalf of Muslim Educational Network, Training and Outreach Service
Amy Mushinski on behalf of Canadian Opera Company
Robert Lamb on behalf of Canadian Opera Company
Alexander Neef on behalf of Canadian Opera Company
Gideon Forman on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Alaya Boisvert on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Corrigan Hammond on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Rachel Plotkin on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Dr. Peter Robinson on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Jode Roberts on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Lisa Gue on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Dr. Faisal Moola on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Don Moore on behalf of Canadian Transportation Equipment Association
Jeremy Harrower on behalf of Canadian Transportation Equipment Association
Cathy Taylor on behalf of Ontario Nonprofit Network
Liz Sutherland on behalf of Ontario Nonprofit Network
Sarah Matsushita on behalf of Ontario Nonprofit Network
Valerie Carter on behalf of Ontario Chiropractic Association
Robert D. Haig on behalf of Ontario Chiropractic Association
Emily Sully on behalf of Ontario Chiropractic Association
Marg Harrington on behalf of Ontario Chiropractic Association
Moez Rajwani on behalf of Ontario Chiropractic Association
Sarah Petrean on behalf of Clean Energy Canada
Darren Praznik on behalf of Canadian Cosmetic, Toiletry & Fragrance Association
Richard Parcels on behalf of Canadian Cosmetic, Toiletry & Fragrance Association
Susan Nieuwhof on behalf of Canadian Cosmetic, Toiletry & Fragrance Association
Beta Montemayor on behalf of Canadian Cosmetic, Toiletry & Fragrance Association
Mike Terpstra on behalf of Association of Ontario Chicken Processors
Laurie Marcil on behalf of Northern Ontario Tourist Outfitters Association (NOTO) o/a Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario
Doug DeRabbie on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Dr. Jeff Goodhew on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Dr. Jeffrey Guthrie on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Dr. Naeem Abdulla on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Dr. Rajvinder Pabla on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Dr. Angela Yoon on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists

Dr. Ken Mandadakis on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Dr. Paul Savioli on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Dr. Radhika Chawla on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Dr. Shawn Charland on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Dr. Wesdon McCann on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Beth Witney on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Dr. Sheldon Salaba on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Dr. Brian Paul on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Dr. Joshua Smith on behalf of Ontario Association of Optometrists
Connie Campbell on behalf of Ontario College of Pharmacists
Susan James on behalf of Ontario College of Pharmacists
Nancy Lum-Wilson on behalf of Ontario College of Pharmacists
Anne Resnick on behalf of Ontario College of Pharmacists
Peter MacPhail on behalf of Alamos Gold Inc.
Colin Webster on behalf of Alamos Gold Inc.
Nils Engelstad on behalf of Alamos Gold Inc.
Jeff Spurrell on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Kirk Bradley on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Tina Kalopisis on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Anuradha Boucher-Sharma on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Brian Jackson on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Matt Pepe on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Mojdeh Poul on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Jeff Barrie on behalf of 3M Canada Company
John Stasiuk on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Julie Peters on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Frank Brandys on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Dan Curts on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Marina McGlenen on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Andrew Bowles on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Bob Salvarakis on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Christine MacLean on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Elise Maheu on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Brenda Irwin on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Bruce Coull on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Laurie Sproule on behalf of 3M Canada Company
Terry Bowman on behalf of 3M Canada Company
William Lamb on behalf of Brookfield BRP Canada Corp.
Maxime Lanctôt on behalf of Brookfield Energy Marketing Inc.
Jack Burkom on behalf of Brookfield Energy Marketing Inc.
Paul J. Lirette on behalf of GlaxoSmithKline Inc.
Rip Ballou on behalf of GlaxoSmithKline Inc.
Ryan W. Lock on behalf of GlaxoSmithKline Inc.
Stefan Raos on behalf of GlaxoSmithKline Inc.
Catherine Keogh on behalf of GlaxoSmithKline Inc.
Patricia Gauthier on behalf of GlaxoSmithKline Inc.
Chris Schafer on behalf of Uber Canada, Inc.
Bryan Watts on behalf of Uber Canada, Inc.
Adam Blinick on behalf of Uber Canada, Inc.
Jeremy Millard on behalf of Uber Canada, Inc.
Susie Heath on behalf of Uber Canada, Inc.

Brett Chang on behalf of Uber Canada, Inc.
Diane Bigras on behalf of Gilead Sciences Canada Inc.
Kennet Brysting on behalf of Gilead Sciences Canada Inc.
Linnea Doyle on behalf of Gilead Sciences Canada Inc.
Karen Chow on behalf of Gilead Sciences Canada Inc.

2). YET ANOTHER LIBERAL GOVERNMENT AD PANNED BY PROVINCE'S AUDITOR GENERAL

By: Geoff Zochodne

Another admiring Ontario government advertisement, which would have been left on the cutting room floor a few years ago, has hit the airwaves.

The radio ad in question touts "new investments" that can be made because of the Liberal government's recently balanced budget, such as the coming OHIP+ program that will offer free prescription drugs for Ontarians under the age of 25. However, the commercial would not have been approved by the province's auditor general prior to changes the Grit government made to the legislative officer's oversight back in 2015, the watchdog's office told QP Briefing.

The ad, provided by the PC leader's office at QP Briefing's request:

<https://soundcloud.com/qpbriefing>

"The messages in the ad led us to conclude that a primary objective is to foster a positive impression of the government," said Christine Peditas, a spokesperson for Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk, in an email. "As well, the ad began airing in market prior to the Budget having been passed. Descriptions of initiatives should have been qualified to indicate that they are only proposed at this time."

Peditas said the ad submission arrived at the AG's office on May 8, prior to the government's budget motion passing on May 16, and before the Liberals' budget bill received Royal Assent on May 17. Peditas also noted there were additional political concerns about the commercial, which mentions Wawa, Petawawa, Owen Sound and Parry Sound.

"Lastly, we noticed that the four cities mentioned in the ad are in opposition-held ridings," she said. "This could suggest that these areas were targeted for that reason."

A spokesperson for Finance Minister Charles Sousa said the ad and its French counterpart were approved on May 15, and will air for two weeks to let people know about OHIP+.

"The concept for the radio ad campaign was to pick small towns that are rarely mentioned in mainstream media to pique listeners' interest," said Jessica Martin in a statement. "The featured cities were selected based on rhyming or thematic schemes. The English version uses Wawa and Petawawa/Parry Sound to Owen Sound, while the French version uses Wawa and Petawawa/Kapuskasing and Nipissing."

But the ad is also the latest in a string of promotional spots the auditor general says wouldn't have made the cut before the Liberals made changes to the Government Advertising Act in 2015. The government has estimated it could purchase \$56.7 million in media buys this fiscal year.

Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown raised the new spot during question period last week. "How much more money will the Liberals be spending on these clearly partisan budget advertisements?" Brown asked.

Premier Kathleen Wynne fired back by saying Ontario is the only province in Canada that bans partisan ads. "We think it's important that the four million children and young people in this province know that on Jan. 1, 2018, they will receive free medication."

The PCs have said they would restore the AG's former level of oversight, as part of an eight-point ethics and accountability plan. Tory finance critic Vic Fedeli told QP Briefing on Thursday that they would continue raising the issue.

"Everything this government does is to benefit the Liberal Party," Fedeli said. "It's never really to assist the people of Ontario."

Lysyk reviews paid government advertising and must sign off on a commercial before it airs. The Government Advertising Act allows for the promotion of new programs or taxes, for touting Ontario as a good place to live or to encourage social behaviour that's in the public interest, among other things.

However, the auditor general has said the government "weakened" the advertising legislation by narrowing the definition of what the watchdog can consider partisan, and therefore reject, limiting that label to commercials using the name, voice or image of a politician, among other specific criteria. The previous version of the Government Advertising Act allowed the auditor general to use her discretion and determine if "a primary objective of the item is to promote the partisan political interests of the governing party."

"Since [the changes], our Office has had to approve advertising in the areas of pensions, the environment, infrastructure, health and education that we believe had as their primary purpose to promote the government's partisan political interests or give the government credit for its accomplishments, rather than to inform citizens," wrote Lysyk in her 2016 annual report.

Lysyk also wrote that the government spent almost \$50 million in ads in 2015-16, up from about \$30 million in the previous year.

3). WYNNE VOWS TO FIGHT BACK AGAINST 'BUY AMERICAN' BILL IN TEXAS

By: Geoff Zochodne

Premier Kathleen Wynne is going to mess with Texas.

Wynne sent out a statement Thursday afternoon warning that her government is "prepared to respond strongly" to "Buy American" legislation that's progressing through the Texas legislature.

"I am disappointed and concerned that Bill 1289 to extend Buy American provisions to virtually all state agencies is now proceeding to a final review," said the statement. "Protectionist actions like those in this bill have the potential to severely hinder our trade partnership and put jobs, workers and businesses both here and in the U.S. at risk. This bill will force suppliers to buy iron and steel only from American sources, which could compromise that growing partnership."

If the bill passes, which Wynne said could happen as early as this weekend, Ontario will seek an exemption. The Premier also said the Texas legislation could take effect this September.

Wynne added that trade between Ontario and Texas hit \$12 billion last year, including goods tied to the tech, auto and construction sectors.

The fight isn't the first one the Premier has picked over proposed "Buy American" policies. The Wynne government took action after New York State flirted with the protectionist policy, and celebrated the defeat of that legislation last month as a win for Ontario.

The Premier says the province's representative in Washington, Monique Smith, "has been working with Texas officials to ensure ongoing awareness of Ontario's close relationship and solicit support." Wynne said the government has also hired a lobbying firm, Texas Strategy Group, "to ensure our position remains top of mind during these discussions."

Wynne also pointed out that her cabinet has already given itself permission to bring forward legislation that would allow Ontario to get some payback against Buy American measures.

"That response could include giving Ontario the ability to restrict its own procurement policies and processes for firms that are located in a U.S. state with discriminatory Buy American policies," said the premier's statement.

4). COMMITTEE STUDYING ANTI-RACISM BILL URGED TO INCLUDE HEALTH CARE DATA

By: Sabrina Nanji

Community advocates poked several holes in Ontario's anti-racism legislation last week that they say would weaken government efforts to combat systemic discrimination.

MPPs on the all-party legislative committee studying Bill 114, the Anti-Racism Act, will have an opportunity to close those gaps during clause-by-clause consideration Monday.

During public hearings last week, stakeholders and community advocates told the general government committee that Bill 114 is a significant step to addressing institutional racism, but fails to tackle many factors, such as the collection of health care and employment data. MPPs also heard the bill, as drafted, could diminish the powers of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, and leave out certain marginalized communities.

Bill 114 enshrines the Liberals' three-year anti-racism strategy, which centers heavily on data collection, "to eliminate systemic racism and advance racial equity."

However, the bill exempts "health information custodians" from collecting that race-based data, a clause the Association of Ontario Health Centres wants deleted. (Under the Personal Health Information Protection Act, a hospital, long-term care home, pharmacy or mental health facility would be considered a custodian.)

"We know that racism is one of the determinants of health. It's well-documented that indigenous populations, as well as black communities, experience the worst health outcomes in Ontario. This is entrenched through systemic racism, but it is virtually impossible to address systemic racism ... without collecting race-based data," Jacquie Maund, AOHC's policy and government relations lead, told the committee.

"Excluding health service providers from the requirement to collect data, including race-based data, is inconsistent with the province's own health equity mandate and indeed works to ensure ongoing inequity and entrenchment of systemic racism," she said.

Liberal MPP John Fraser, also parliamentary assistant to the Health Minister, explained to the committee there are privacy concerns when it comes to health data, but said nothing in the legislation would preclude an organization from gathering information.

The anti-racism directorate says it is working on that.

"The ARD is working with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to examine ways to align the data collection rules of the proposed legislation within the provisions of [the Personal Health Information Protection Act] and other legislative frameworks," added a statement from the office of the minister responsible for anti-racism, Michael Coteau.

Maund was backed up by Avvy Go, director of the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, who pointed out the Toronto Local Health Integration Network has already begun collecting data based on race and gender that is easy enough to anonymize in order to isolate the needs of a population.

Go said she raised the matter with the Premier, who seemed keen on the idea.

“They won’t be able to say, for instance, whether women are more susceptible to certain diseases, or whether there are other treatments or services that are required for specific racialized groups or specific people within disability groups. All of that requires planning, and that is based on data and science,” she said.

How that data winds up being managed is tantamount to combating hate, the committee heard. To “make the bill do what it’s supposed to do,” Ontario Human Rights Commissioner Renu Mandhane said she wants an independent agency in charge.

Mandhane – among the most vocal calling for race-based data collection – suggested a body with enforcement powers, like hers, would be well-suited for the job.

“Data collection will only be an effective tool if it is analyzed and interpreted by an independent agency that understands the lives experience of racialized people and has the power to enforce their rights” through the Human Rights Code, Mandhane said.

“Obviously, the purpose here would be to insulate the requirements of the legislation from being diluted because of the political realities of that particular moment.”

But the way the bill is written could temper the commission’s mandate to enforce the code and carry out investigations, Mandhane warned. Therefore, the OHRC should be on par with the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

“We request that the proposed legislation explicitly confirm that, in addition to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, a public sector organization may disclose collected public information to the commission.”

Coteau’s office said they plan to table amendments that will ensure the bill doesn’t prevent the commission from doing its job.

“The organizations themselves would be required to publish the collected de-identified, disaggregated data so the public and researchers can openly identify and monitor racial disparities and disproportionalities, promoting transparency and accountability,” Coteau’s office added.

There was also a call to strengthen the legislation’s language (for instance, swapping out “may” for “shall” for provisions concerning information gathering) and to focus on employment outcomes by collecting relevant labour market information.

Trawling for better employment data is something the government is considering as part of recommendations that came out of this week’s Changing Workplaces review. The Ontario Federation of Labour submitted the Ministry of Labour and anti-racism directorate collaborate to quantify how precarious work impacts certain demographics.

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia were two other fixtures missing from the text in the anti-racism legislation, according to B’nai Brith Canada, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, the human rights commissioner, and the Progressive Conservatives, among others. Most want to see Jewish and Muslim groups explicitly mentioned, in addition to indigenous and black communities already included. They cited a recent B’nai Brith report that showed anti-Semitic hate crimes in Canada have soared.

PC MPP and anti-racism critic Lisa MacLeod hinted her party would introduce an amendment to fix what she called a “glaring omission.” PC Leader Patrick Brown has previously raised the concern in Question Period, too, – prompting Premier Kathleen Wynne to literally point to the passage in Budget 2017 that refers to Islamophobia and anti-Semitism as part of the strategy, even if they’re not mentioned by name in the bill.

5). COMMITTEE HEARS MORE COMPLAINTS ON HYDRO BILL FROM ORGANIZED LABOUR AND LANDOWNERS

By: Christopher Reynold

Interest groups, businesses and private citizens zapped the government on electricity costs from both the right and left Thursday, adding a jolt of criticism to committee hearings on the Liberals' hydro legislation.

The hearings marked the third day in a row for the justice policy standing committee, which had its proceedings condensed as part of a Liberal procedural manoeuvre to punt legislation into passage before the summer recess on June 1.

Bill 132, the Fair Hydro Act, aims to lower electricity bills by 25 per cent on average for residential ratepayers, which will ultimately cost Ontarians \$21 billion over three decades, according to the Financial Accountability Office.

The Ontario Landowners Association highlighted costly contracts for wind and solar projects signed under former premier Dalton McGuinty.

"I am not a dirty coal lover ... but Ontario has taken this ideology and mantra of green energy to a degree not seen in any other jurisdiction on this planet," said Guy Annable, a spokesperson for the association, during his testimony to the committee.

Annable said some of his northern neighbours have incurred increases of more than 300 per cent on their bills since 2009, when the Green Energy Act was passed.

"The damage has already been done and rural Ontario has been the biggest casualty," he said via teleconference, noting the heftier delivery charges for residents in communities categorized as medium- and low-density.

The legislation under scrutiny includes measures to lower hydro bills by up to 50 per cent for rural and low-income ratepayers, noted Liberal MPP Arthur Potts. The Fair Hydro Act, if passed next week, will effectively subsidize those ratepayers, using tax dollars, under a new Ontario Electricity Support Program and Rural or Remote Rate Protection.

Annable responded that he opposed financial support for low-income ratepayers, but supported state intervention when it came to rural consumers by spreading the high delivery cost among all ratepayers.

"I think that it's also unfair that we also negate delivery charges for certain ethnic sections in this province, i.e., aboriginal people," he said. Bill 132 nixes the delivery charge for on-reserve First Nations consumers.

On the left, the Ontario Federation of Labour framed its opposition to Liberal energy policy around debt and privatization.

"[W]e cannot support a bill that will cause electricity bills to rise over the long run and that does not address the fundamental issues facing Ontario's electricity system – including the privatization of Hydro One," stated a letter submitted to the committee by the federation, which represents one million workers across the province.

Ontario has been privatizing Hydro One since 2015, with more than 50 per cent of the power grid operator already sold off – a process the federation urged the Liberals to reverse. It slammed the government for trading full control of a utility “mandated to act in the best interest of the public” to private interests for one-time sale profits to the tune of \$9 billion.

Some small businesses which, like farms, will see big rate drops on their hydro bills over the next four years, remain unmoved by the legislation.

“This is nothing but a payday loan,” said Kim Egan, vice-president of Belleville-based packaging company GH Manufacturing.

Egan told the committee her company’s monthly bill has shot up from \$5,000 in 2010, to as much as \$14,000 this year. On her most recent bill of \$11,000, the global adjustment made up 50 per cent of the cost, with the price of electricity accounting for just \$1,200, she said.

“The less energy we use, the more our global adjustment factor increases,” she said.

The global adjustment charge is a fee consumers pay for above-market rates for power producers. Ontario’s auditor general has estimated the global adjustment charge cost \$50 billion between 2006 and 2015, and increased by 1,200 per cent between 2006 and 2013 — meanwhile, the average electricity market price dropped by 46 per cent.

“A lot of the conservation has been so successful that there’s been a lot of stranded generation, which does drive up the global adjustment,” Potts told Egan. “Part of the medium-term plan would be to rectify some of those shortcomings.”

Thursday marked day three of committee hearings on Bill 132, currently being rushed through the house in a procedural manoeuvre along with the Liberal budget bill. Committee members had until 6 p.m. Thursday to submit amendments to the Fair Hydro Act. It will undergo a clause-by-clause consideration Monday, before continuing on to the legislature for third reading by Tuesday, with the Liberals hoping for passage before summer recess June 1.

Potts saw no problem with the double-time pace.

“People who said they were coming didn’t even show up,” he told QP Briefing. “When you have real anger about something, they show up.”

He said criticism came largely from outside the “mainstream” or from “organized groups” with vested interests.

“What really surprised me is that there wasn’t a single amendment proposed by anybody,” he added.

Progressive Conservative MPP John Yakubuski, who also sits on the committee, repeated Tory jabs that the hydro plan is a “shell game.”

“Does it not look like taking a rusty car and putting a paint job on it? It’s going to look good for a while, but when it really starts to rust out you’re going to be paying through the teeth.”

While the PCs have no hydro plan to date, NDP energy critic Peter Tabuns pointed to his party's proposal to reduce bills by up to 30 per cent and reverse the privatization of Hydro One.

"Starting to deal with the profound structural issues, that's really what we're going to have to do if we're going to bring bills down," he told QP Briefing.

"We're going to have to figure out a way of getting out of that onerous debt program without giving people a tough time."