

FW: Premier Wynne vows more hydro relief before spring budget...

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Premier Wynne vows more hydro relief before spring budget (Ont-Hydro-Relief) By Allison Jones

THE CANADIAN PRESS

TORONTO More hydro relief for Ontario ratepayers will be announced before the spring budget, Premier Kathleen Wynne said Wednesday as she met with a Windsor-area resident.

Libby Keenan, who has a farm with several horses in Amherstburg, Ont., wrote a Facebook post complaining about hydro rates that was shared more than 21,000 times. Though there's no machinery in her stable area, Keenan said her most recent bill was for nearly \$600.

"How much do I have to pay for the privilege of shovelling manure seven days a week?" she said.

The issue is top of mind for the Liberal government as anger among Ontarians over the rising rates shows no signs of abating, and as the party _ Wynne in particular _ sags in the polls with an election looming next year.

A government-commissioned survey last year found that 94 per cent of Ontarians were eager for electricity price relief.

Wynne met Wednesday with Keenan, and during a part of the meeting was open to the media, Wynne said she wouldn't wait for the budget to announce more relief measures.

Keenan said Wynne told her she is specifically looking at rural customers' delivery charges.

The government brought in an eight-per-cent rebate on electricity bills as of Jan. 1, but Keenan called that a drop in the bucket.

Wynne has said high electricity prices are her "mistake" and has vowed to find more ways to lower rates and reduce the burden on consumers.

Auditor general Bonnie Lysyk has said the electricity portion of hydro bills for homes and small businesses rose 70 per cent between 2006 and 2014.

Before the meeting, Keenan said she wanted the government to stop the sell-off of **>Hydro One<** _ 30 per cent has been sold but the government intends to sell 60 _ and have the CEO take a pay cut, _ when so many of the company's customers are struggling with bills.

"Do we not have any ability to say, 'I don't care who you are, I don't care if you're the pope, you don't deserve \$4M a year?'"

Keenan said. ``He's not working as hard as I am. Send him to me for a week and I'll show him."

After the meeting, Keenan said it was a productive conversation.

``I was not being patted on the hand and being told, 'Too bad for you.'"

Also at the legislature Wednesday, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business presented a survey of 2,965 of its small business members and half said their electricity bills had risen more than 20 per cent in the past three years. More than half said those increases had led them to increase the prices of their products or services.

The vast majority _ 86 per cent _ said that it wasn't possible for them to move their electricity consumption away from on-peak periods, when the cost is the highest.

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