

- Thank you [INSERT NAME OF ELDER WHO DELIVERED PRAYER] for the opening prayer and for ensuring that today's discussion can move forward in a good way.
- And thank you [INSERT NAME] for the warm welcome.
- I want to acknowledge the traditional territory of the Fort William First Nation on which we gather today.
- Good morning everyone.
- It's a pleasure to be here with you today for the 3rd Annual Forestry Expo and I am delighted to see Energy being included as a focus this year.
- I have a keen interest in looking at opportunities to strengthen and build Northern Ontario and Indigenous capacity for economic prosperity through the energy sector.

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- I hope you'll agree with me that the Ontario government and First Nations continue to build a up a good track record of sharing in the economic opportunities that have arisen from renewing our electricity infrastructure in supporting the wealth creation aspirations of First Nation communities.
- It was in the spirit of the Political Accord that discussions were initiated, in the fall of 2015 here in Thunder Bay, to look at ways of addressing First Nations' interests in broadening the ownership of Hydro One.
- I was pleased that on July 12, 2016, Ontario and First Nations, as represented by the Chiefs in Assembly, announced an Agreement-in-Principle that, if ratified, will provide meaningful opportunities to First Nations for collective wealth creation and to advance economic development initiatives.
- This Agreement-in-Principle demonstrates the goodwill envisioned by the Political Accord to promote stronger economic relations and is one of the many steps on Ontario's journey of healing and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

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- I want to acknowledge diligence of First Nation Leadership and the Chiefs Committee on Energy for continuing to raise the issue of the high costs of electricity affecting your communities.
- Their persistence in requesting and advancing creative solutions encouraged Ontario to look at reducing delivery charges as a solution.

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- We have heard the concerns raised by First Nation Leadership about the high electricity costs and delivery charges impacting First Nation communities.
- Last summer, I directed the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) to engage with First Nations to develop options to address the issue and provide a report back to me by January of this year.
- I was pleased to receive both the OEB's report on the matter as well as the report from the Chiefs of Ontario.
- On March 2, 2016 Premier Wynne announced Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan which includes the elimination of the delivery charge for on-reserve First Nation customers through the First Nations On-Reserve Delivery Credit.
- The resulting First Nations Delivery Credit is a reflection of your leadership on this issue and is another example of the Political Accord coming to life.
- This initiative will help address some of the unique challenges that on-reserve First Nations customers face, and recognize First Nations' contribution to the provincial electricity system.

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- It is our government's intention to move quickly to initiate any necessary legislative and regulatory changes that, if passed, would enable implementation of the First Nations Delivery Credit.
- I recognize the importance of reducing the administrative burden on individuals and of the desire to automatically enroll eligible customers to receive the credit.

- To accomplish this it is anticipated that there will need to be enhanced communication and information sharing between First Nation Governments and Local Distribution Companies.
- We will continue to work with First Nation Leadership to find ways to accomplish this and move forward.

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- At this time, only communities serviced by licensed distributors would be eligible for the First Nations Delivery Credit.
- However, this is partly because we do not have the necessary information on costs and billing practices in Independent Power Authority (IPA) serviced communities to be able to understand how this initiative would work in those circumstances.
- As you may know, the credit would function somewhat differently in communities that pay what is called a “bundled rate,” such as those serviced by Hydro One Remotes Communities Inc. In these circumstances customers would receive a credit of the service charge portion of their bill, as there is no delivery charge line.
- I would be interested to learn more about how this initiative could also provide benefits to IPA serviced communities.

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- Since the 2010 and 2013 Long Term Energy Plans, First Nation involvement in the energy sector has increased significantly which has led to enhanced economic development opportunities and advancement of the relationship between Ontario and First Nations envisioned by the Political Accord.
- I am pleased that we were able to significantly increase First Nation participation in Ontario’s energy sector through the commitments of the 2013 LTEP and will ensure that opportunities for involvement continue moving forward.
- Over the fall 2016, the Ministry of Energy held 14 First Nation engagement sessions across the province to inform the update of the LTEP.

- The First Nation sessions included participation from over 150 representatives from approximately 76 First Nation communities and organizations.
- One of the key issues raised at the First Nation LTEP sessions was the cost of electricity and the delivery charge – I am very pleased that we've proposed to move forward with the First Nations Delivery Credit and to enhance other existing electricity support programs.
- Based on the IESO's Ontario Planning Outlook (OPO) the Province is in a robust energy supply situation for the next ten years and we are not procuring additional generation in the near term.
- While renewable energy opportunities have changed due to Ontario's strong energy supply position, the government remains committed to ensuring that opportunities for First Nations in the energy sector continue, including transmission, conservation and small-scale generation.
- Anticipating the need for a more distributed energy future, Ontario will be transitioning our program offerings from the micro-FIT and FIT to an enhanced net metering regime. The micro-FIT program will end December 31, 2017 and will be replaced by an updated net metering program in 2018.
- As the next LTEP rolls out we will review the existing suite of support programs to make sure they continue to support Indigenous communities in an evolving sector as we did with the 2013 LTEP. The Ministry expects to release the next LTEP in spring 2017.

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- In closing, the energy sector is always changing and a review of the Long Term Energy Plan is upon us.
- We must embrace that change and the opportunities that it presents in the spirit of collaboration.
- Although the opportunities moving forward may change given the evolving sector, I look forward to continue building relationships with First Nation communities to find ways that take advantage of emerging opportunities.

- Working together with you as our partners, we are committed to ensuring our energy system stays strong.
- I want to thank everyone again for taking the time to be here today for this important discussion.
- I look forward to working with First Nation Leadership in the coming year as we continue to make progress on our shared priorities as envisioned by the Political Accord.