

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript - Wednesday, March 22, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
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The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro Advertising

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. By now, everyone has seen or heard the taxpayer-funded Liberal advertisement. So, Mr. Speaker, I will ask the Premier, through you, Mr. Speaker, when will the Premier stop using taxpayer dollars to advertise for the Liberal party of Ontario?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I would say to the leader of the opposition, I do understand why he's taking this particular tack in his questioning, Mr. Speaker, because he doesn't have a plan to reduce people's electricity bills. We do have a plan, Mr. Speaker. And that plan will cut people's electricity bills by 25%, Mr. Speaker, by summer. 17% on top of the 8%, Mr. Speaker. And if you are a low-income person in Ontario, Mr. Speaker, or you live in a rural or remote area under Hydro One and a number of other distribution companies, Mr. Speaker, your reduction could be 40 to 50%. Absolutely. That those -- those particular residents. Struggling with their electricity bills to an even larger extent. So we have a plan, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to move forward and implement it.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The Premier speculates why we're raising this issue. Mr. Speaker, using taxpayer dollars to advertise for the Liberal party is wrong. That's why we're bringing it up. It is wrong. The Premier knows it is wrong. The Liberals have a fascinating talking point. They say they have to run these Liberal vanity ads so they can use this information to tell people how to manage their budgets. But for 13 years, they raised hydro bills 400%, did they ever run ads saying sorry, we're raising hydro rates 400%? You need to manage your budget? Not for a second. This is about one thing and only one thing and that's selling the Liberal party using taxpayer dollars to do so. It's wrong. My question is, Speaker, to the Premier -- you know it's wrong. Do the right thing. Stop running these ads.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not speculating on why the member's asking the question. I know exactly why he's asking the question because, Mr. Speaker, if he had a plan, he'd be pushing his plan. He'd be putting his -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So the other part of our plan, which is a real plan, which we are going to move forward to implement, is that we will hold rate increases to inflation for the next four years. So this is not about putting in place a reduction and then not holding those rates. Finally we're creating a \$200 million affordability fund for people who want to make investments -- And aren't able to do that.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. Yesterday the Attorney General alleged that they had strengthened the legislation to provide clear definition of partisan advertising. What auditor general say about this? She said I quote -- we caution when the government changed the law in 2015 that it was opening the door to spending taxpayer money on ads that appear partisan. And then the auditor general said -- sure enough the government walked right through that open door that they created. Clearly the Liberals are using a loophole they created to abuse taxpayer dollars. That's what it's about. They can do all the talking points they want. They can say they strengthened the laws or about budgeting. They created a loophole. They're driving a truck through t.as' abusive of taxpayer dollars. It's wrong Mr. Speaker, will the Premier stop running these ads?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we created the legislation. We put the legislation in place in the first place because Mike Harris's face was all over advertising consistently, Mr. Speaker. But let me tell you about the other part of our plan, Mr. Speaker, which again is a real plan that is going to reduce people's electricity prices, which is the issue that we are dealing with in this province because we have made huge investments. We are in a situation where we have a clean electricity grid, Mr.

Speaker, clean air because they're shutting down the coal-fired plants but there's a cost associated with that. So the other part of our plan, Mr. Speaker, is we are removing delivery charges from all on-reserve first nation residential consumer groups, Mr. Speaker. And that is a huge issue at some of the leadership and first nations have said. This will be a huge amount to deal with electricity poverty on reserves, Mr. Speaker. It's a very important step forward.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Murray) Re: Cap-and-Trade

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Today is the first auction of the Liberals' cap and trade scheme where the Liberals hope to rake in \$1.9 billion. That's \$1.9 billion that taxpayers are going to have to foot the bill for. Maybe the worst part of this Liberal scheme is that it's going to send hard earned dollars to California. Mr. Speaker, does the Premier think it's appropriate that her government will be encouraging businesses to subsidize those businesses in California?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I know the inminister of environment and climate change will want to speak about this. This is a very important program, Mr. Speaker. You know we really believe that taking real action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it's not just in the best interests of people today, Mr. Speaker. Most importantly it's in the best interests of the future of the planet. It has to be done and it has to be real, Mr. Speaker. And so what we've done is we have settled on the most cost effective way to do that. You know the leader of the opposition has said that he would remove Ontario from the cap and trade market and put in place, Mr. Speaker, a program that would cost the people of Ontario, individuals, four times the amount that cap and trade will cost, Mr. Speaker. Four times the amount. That's irresponsible, Mr. Speaker. If we look at other jurisdictions that have done just that, the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Has not been as effective as –

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. This government simply wants to Mack up numbers. It's more Liberal fake spin. What we do know factually is that under this Liberal scheme, Ontario will be sending upwards towards \$300 million a year to California under this western climate initiative. When businesses are struggling to stay afloat in Ontario, how this Premier thinks it's appropriate to be sending \$300 million a year to California is beyond me. We don't need a government that's -- we need a government that's going to support Brantford, Toronto, Ottawa appear Timmins. Right now they'll be subsidizing Beverly hills and Hollywood. This from is the best Minister of economic development the United States has ever seen, and it has to stop. Will the Premier do the right thing and make sure we don't send hundreds of millions to California?

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of the environment and climate change.

>> Minister Glen Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is an auction. An auction that should be free of political interference or actions by any member of this House that would seek to interfere or disrupt -- so I am not commenting on it and I would give that strong advice to the member of the opposition. But tomorrow, when the auction is closed, I'll have lots to say to the member of the opposition about some of this behaviour, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is proposing a system that cannot achieve the reductions we're getting and would move 5 mega tonnes of leakage or see the relocation of companies. The position he faces would see gasoline prices go up at fur times the rate than they do under cap and trade. He is the best economic development leader for the United States that this legislature's ever seen.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. Enough of the Liberals' affection spin. What we know for fact is this is going to send \$300 million to California. Clearly the Minister and the Premier haven't read the auditor general's report. They're talking about emission reductions. The auditor general's report points out that these emission reductions are -- aren't going to happen in Ontario. They're going to happen in California. We want to see climate change tackled in Ontario. We want to see real emission reductions in Ontario. This is a shell game that big businesses in -- that makes businesses in Ontario less competitive. How does it make sense to take 300 million from Ontario

businesses and send it to Beverly hills? This is as bad as the clean energy act. They're signing Ontario up for another scheme that makes this province less competitive. Will the Premier at least acknowledge this hurts Ontario? There's still time to walk this back and say Ontario does not need to be part of the western climate initiative because it subsidizes California.

>> Minister Murray: Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy these conversations with the leader of the opposition. They're so enlightening. So let me explain something. The market price directly reduces 4 mega tonnes. 6 to \$8 billion in proceeds goes to nova corporation to support the reinvestment in their main or -- which is a quarter of a billion dollars -- in their major facility in Sarnia. Maybe you should talk to the member from Sarnia. Money is going into goldcorp racial net zero which will dramatically cut their operating costs because they don't need ventilation with electric vehicles. Maybe he should talk to his northern members because not only will he force out companies because it will cost \$74 a tonne under your system. You won't have any money to reinvest in industry being carbonized and you won't leave families with unaffordable energy bills --Terrible.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Investments

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of health -- and I'm addressing this to the Premier -- yesterday the Minister of health boasted that he hadn't heard from a single hospital complaining about massive hydro bills. Clearly the Premier and her Minister aren't listening. On February 2nd, 2017, the Ontario medical association said, and I quote -- hospitals like south Bruce- Grey health centre are forced to use their 1% funding increase to deal with skyrocketing hydro rates instead of patient care thanks to the Ontario government. The Premier and her party ignored Ontarians' concerns about their soaring hydro bills under political pressure forced them to acknowledge the problem. Clearly they haven't learned their lesson since they're now ignoring hospital concerns about the same issue. When will the Premier admit -- -- There's a problem in hospitals that she and her Minister of health know about it, and when will she do something to fix it?

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the third party, when they had formed government 20 odd years ago, we didn't take their approach where they closed 24% of acute hospital beds. We didn't take their approach where they closed -- We didn't close, as they did 13% of the mental health beds in the province. We didn't decrease hospital funding, as they did in their last budget, Mr. Speaker. We have consistently invested in our hospitals and in the entire health care system in this province. Last year by almost half a billion dollars to increase the operating costs for the hospitals, as the member well knows from the conversation that I had with his leader in this legislature yesterday. We know that hospitals are facing challenge. We know that energy is a component. It's roughly 1% of operating costs.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again back to the Premier. Maybe she'll answer the question. In her prebudget submission delivered directly to the government, the Ontario hospital association also made the case that skyrocketing hospital hydro bills are a huge concern in Ontario. Page 4 of their submission reads and I quote -- energy costs are putting a tremendous strain on hospitals. Hospitals are by no means immune from the same rising hydro costs that affect all Ontarians. Do the Premier or her Minister not read documents given to her by official nonpartisan and highly expert bodies like the O.H.A.?

>> Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I acknowledge that energy costs are a concern for hospitals. It represents roughly 1% of their operating budget. We have consistently increased the budgets -- the operating budgets of hospitals as well as targeted funding. We have despite what the member opposite is saying, we have consistently increased the operating budgets and targeted funding for hospitals. But I want to point out -- I want to give one good example from this week where Mackenzie health actually received an award for converting all of their lighting to L.E.D. Lighting. They are the first 100% L.E.D. Lighting that has -- and they've been financed to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Through that process, they are going to be saving \$210,000 each and every year. So I think they are excellent examples where hospitals are finding innovative and appropriate ways to work together in partnership with us to find ways to address that aspect, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. I can tell the Premier doesn't like these questions. She's not answering them. It's not just the professional associations that have been raising a red flag about hydro -- The Windsor Regional Hospital alerted the standing committee on finance and government affairs that hydro costs at his hospital were set to increase by 700,000 in just one year. He said in January 2016 -- last year, for our hydro costs at Windsor Regional Hospital, between our two campuses, we spent \$3.5 million. This year, to the end of March, we're projected to spend \$4.2 million, a \$700,000 increase. If the Premier and her Minister just ignore the experts and say that no one is worried -- How can she expect Ontarians to trust that her phantom hydro plan is a genuine attempt to provide relief to Ontarians and not just a support grabbing --

>> Minister Hoskins: So, Mr. Speaker, we provided Windsor Regional Hospital with an increase in their operating budget of \$9.9 million last year. Significantly, astro nom,ly more than the numbers that have been quoted over a period of time by the member opposite. It's a 3.2% increase in their operating budget. Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge that our hospitals are facing a number of pressures, and electricity, I have to reiterate, is roughly 1% of the total operating budget. I think there are hospitals around the province that can look, for example Mackenzie health, that received -- their distribution network received a cheque for \$125,000 to assist them in that conversion to 100% L.E.D. Lighting. It's a great innovation but it's an innovation. Nearly a quarter of a million of dollars a year on their electricity costs. The combination of investments we make and innovations out there help address this particular issue, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Investment

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again back to the Premier. Things are not all rosy out there. Hospitals income Sault Ste. Marie, London, Windsor and Toronto are all facing massive increases to their hydro bills. At the same time the Premier and her Liberal government are the chronically underfunding frontline health care and promising that their phantom hydro plan will include just 2% hydro relief per hospital. Will the Premier tell people, in any of these communities, how a measly 2% savings on their hospital's hydro bill will ensure good-quality care in their community?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we went through this, I think as we remember, yesterday where various examples were given. Hamilton was an example that was provided, where I referenced that we gave Hamilton health sciences last year a 3.6% increase in their operating budget. 29.5 million additional dollars to that corporation to assist them in not only providing and maintaining a sustainable operating budget, but also many new and important advancements...

[captioning cut out for rest of response]

>> MPP Tabuns: Back to the Premier. This problem is widespread. Access to information documents reveal health sciences north in Sudbury and Peterborough's regional health centre both saw their hydro con um shun rates redue d over the same period of time as their hydro bills went up. That just doesn't make any sense. Can the Premier tell us if her 2% savings at least give hospitals enough hydro relief to stop their bills from going up while the amount of energy they use goes down?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, here we go again, Mr. Speaker. Well, ok. Health sciences north. You mentioned it. I'm going to respond to that issue. Health sciences north. We provided them last year, in a budget that they voted against, Mr. Speaker, we provided them with a 3.2% -- Health sciences north received \$8.8 million new dollars last year for their operating budget. Mr. Speaker, Peterborough regional health centre, a 4.3% increase in their operating budget last year. 9.4 million

new dollars provided to them in a budget last year -- In a budget that they voted against, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Tabuns: Again, Speaker, to the Premier. This is a widespread problem. The people of niagara are worried about their hospitals, too. The niagara health system saw a 96% increase in their hydro bills over six years. That translates to \$2.8 million that could have been used to invest in more nursing hours or in potentially lifesaving equipment. Why won't the Premier just come clean and tell people in niagara, in Peterborough, in Sudbury and across the province that her 2% hydro relief for hospitals is just part of her phantom plan? A not-so thinly veiled attempt to buy support before the next election?

>> Minister Hoskins: So, Mr. Speaker, again the electricity costs for hospitals average approximately 1% of their total budget. That means that 99% approximately goes to all of the other expenditures. But to specifically, as was referenced, niagara health system, Mr. Speaker, last year received a 2.5% increase in their operating budget amounting to \$9.4 million. That was more than enough to cover their increase in electricity costs last year but substantially increase their operating budget for all of those other elements. The other 99% of the activities that take place in the hospitals, Mr. Speaker, that are so important to delivering high-quality care there and around the province.

MPP Yurek to Minister Hoskins Re: Federal Health Transfer

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Speaker, my question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Speaker, this government has a long history of putting their own interests ahead of Ontarians. Prior to the March break it was announced the province had come to agreement on the health transfers with the federal government, even though the offer was less than what the government originally demanded and less than what the federal government offered three months ago. Speaker, the previous Conservative government announced similar terms of the current Liberal government. The Ontario government then feigned outrage. Minister Charles Sousa said Prime Minister Harper's Conservatives have launched an attack of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, where is the outrage from the Minister and this government today? Why is the deal now acceptable that the federal Liberals are now in power?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of important differences in the agreement that we struck with the federal government compared to what was on offer by the Harper government, Mr. Speaker. But at the end of the day, do we wish it had have been more closer to what we had suggested? Of course we do. We had very strong third party evidence to demonstrate that what we were asking was appropriate to not only maintain the federal contribution but also sustain our health care system effectively. That being said, Mr. Speaker, we reached an agreement, which importantly not only provides for that annual escalator but importantly it applies additional targeted funding to two areas, which are incredibly important to this province and this government and Ontarians to home care and to mental health, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Yurek: Speaker, back to the Minister. Speaker, the former health Minister Deb Matthews said Flaherty's announcement was extremely bad news for the province. In fact she said this is devastating news for us. It means less money to reduce wait times and less money to hire nurses. Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question to ask the Minister. Now that he's accepted the cuts from Justin Trudeau and the federal Liberals, can he tell the House how many nurses he's going to fire and how long the wait lists will grow? Or simply previous Minister of health misleading the public?

>> Minister Hoskins: Make important investments in our health care system. As we did last year, as we did the year before and I have to say that the party opposite consistently voted against those health care investments. But what we won't do in the area of home care is what they did when they were in government in 2001, where they cut home care, slashed our home care so that ccacs were left with \$175 million shortfall. As a result in Hamilton, they had to cut the patient load by 32%. In Timiskaming home care hours were reduced by 20%. In Pembroke they cut service for 50 persons of their 3,000 clients. In Algoma 25% of clients lost services. In North Bay, 20% of all visits were eliminated, and workers were fired and lost their jobs across the board. We won't repeat their

mistakes. We invest in home care, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Private Health Care

>> MPP France Gelinas: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [End of Translation] People shouldn't have to pay up or wait longer for the care that they need. For that's exactly what's happening under this Premier. Companies are charging people to jump to the front of the line. They're doing this unchecked under the Premier's watch. Right now in Ontario, for-profit companies like maple are charging people for services like a doctor's diagnosis, writing a prescription. Does the Premier believe it is ok for companies to charge Ontarians to see a doctor or get a prescription?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: I said yesterday and I believe the day before as well that we, as a government, this party, this government is absolutely committed to the Canada health act, to the principles behind medicare. 50 years ago those important decisions that were made to provide universal health care to this province and to this country, Mr. Speaker. And that's why no government before us -- it took our government in 2004 to actually put in place legislatively to make it the law of this province, Mr. Speaker, that what the member opposite is implying or suggesting is not permitted, that those -- those activities and services, programs and services that are part of ohip, that are publicly funded that come underneath the Canada health care act -- or the Canada health act, Mr. Speaker, that they are not permitted to take place in this province. There are activities that we are monitoring. I spoke to that yesterday and the day before.

>> MPP Gelinas: Why is it that if it's not allowed that it is happening right here right now in Ontario? This is wrong. If your child is sick, you should not have to reach for your credit card to buy answerment but companies like maple are charging people to see a doctor, to get a diagnostic, asking families to rack up those credit card bills. That's wrong. That means with the Liberal government in charge, parents of a sick child are basically given the choice of paying up or waiting and waiting. And watching those who pay up leapfrog ahead of them. Maple actually said it charges fees for services like doctors' visits and getting a prescription because those services are, and I quote from their website, not covered by ohip. So when did the Premier decide that people have to choose between paying up. Or waiting longer to get their family the care that they need?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important for the legislature to understand what the member opposite is talking about when she references these interactions. These are digital. These are online interactions that are taking place online interactions are not ohip insured. But certainly it is something that I'm well aware of. In fact I have had a conversation with the member opposite about this particular issue. I know it affects the community of Sudbury, as it does in other parts of the province. I've asked my ministry to look at it specifically. It's very important that the principles that were laid out in the act in 2004 that they be followed in terms of no payments for activities and services that are covered by ohip. Virtual visits are not ohip-insured activities but as I mentioned my ministry. And partly as a result of the member having a conversation with me about it, my ministry is looking into this issue, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Murray Re: Great Lakes Protection

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of environment and climate change. Mr. Speaker, today marks world water day. It is a day not only to be grateful for Ontario's vital resources but a day to also confirm our commitment to protect and restore our waters. My riding of Kingston and the islands, Lake Ontario is an integral part of our economy, our community, and it brings together members of my community as well. Ontario relies on the great Lakes for our strength and success and I am pleased to see our government take continued action to

protect our Lakes and restore them to environmental --, Mr. Speaker, we know that 99% of Ontarians live around the great Lakes, making it even more critical that the health of our waters and ecosystem are looked after. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister. Please explain to the House the efforts our government has made to protect the great Lakes?

>> Minister Glen Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no surprise that the environment questions come from this side of the House. I want to thank the Premier for reaching out to our governors. I've been hearing in my conversations with my counterparts that she's been recognized for stepping up and taking a leadership role on this important issue. So thank you very much, premie. \$300 million is at stake, which has huge consequences. We passed great Lakes protection act. We have source water protection in our conservation authorities under the leadership of the Minister of natural resources are kicked into action. I also want to say what the opposition criticized, which was the guardian council, as being bureaucratic, totally volunteer. That organization co-chaired by mattamy works with mayors, farmers, business leaders, local environmentalists. Action to protect the great lacks and engage Americans. We're very, very, very concerned about this, Mr. Speaker, and acting quickly.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that response. It's very encouraging to hear that our province takes the health of our great Lakes very seriously. It is also promising that Ontario has worked so collaboratively with varying levels of government, including our partners in the US, to restore the health of the great Lakes. Shared waters absolutely requires a shared responsibility to conserve and protect. Recently proposed funding reductions in the great Lakes restoration initiative will seriously impact the progress that we've made so far. For more than 40 years, Ontario has worked with our state partners through various great Lakes agreements, and given that the great Lakes is an economic engine for Kingston and the Islands and our province, it is critical that we continue to collaborate with our existing partners. Account Minister please explain to the House -- How our government plans to move forward to keep our great Lakes well protected? Thank you.

>> Minister Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to working with my counterparts in the eight great Lakes states, we have a very strong relationship with Québec.

[Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Our relation with Québec is very important and we work also with other Colleagues in Québec. And also with the ministry of intergovernmental efforts because for us it's a challenge for the economy of the great Lakes. The success of our partnership have contributed with investments in -- all over communities -- and also on the American side. Exist also for us because the small communities around the great Lakes have to -- are challenged. It's very important for the economy because the result resulting from the cuts in the United States will have a great impact.

[End of Translation]

MPP Munro to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Julia Munro: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Premier, ten years ago a local restaurant in my riding, fork and plate, had a hydro bill of \$600 per month. Today their bill is at least \$2,200. And in the summer, it climbs to \$3,500. So your 25% figure includes the H.S.T. Rebate you have already announced. So it's really 17%. In the last ten years, you have more than tripled the hydro bill. This is your legacy. Now you offer them a fraction in return. To top it all off, power is asking for a retroactive rate increase. Premier, when will you do the right thing and provide real and lasting relief to families and...

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to let the legislature know -- and I know some people are seeing it on the social media that news is breaking that there's been an incident near the U.K. Parliament. Dozens of people on the Westminster bridge have been injured. Parliament is in lockdown and I just wanted to folks to know -- and I think all of our thoughts are with the people and their families and parliamentarians in England. We have a plan.

The business that the member opposite is talking about will see if it's true. An additional 17% reduction. 17 plus 8 is 25%, Mr. Speaker. It's very important to us that those local businesses are able to thrive and that's exactly why we're bringing a plan forward and, you know, I know that the opposition doesn't have a plan. To reduce electricity bills. We do. We're going number of ahead just so businesses like this will see that reduction, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Munro: That's not -- that just doesn't cut it for the people in my riding or across Ontario. E all know margins are slim in the restaurant business. Businesses provide jobs that in turn provide for families. Fork and plate proudly employs 22 of my constituents. Restaurants like fork and plate across Ontario look at their hydro bills and question how they can stay afloat. Premier, enough is enough. Why are you threatening jobs in my riding and across the province?

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of energy.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'm pleased to rise and talk about the fair hydro plan and the 25% reduction that all families, small businesses and farms will be receiving across the province, and I not Honourable member mention innu power in their rate application, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to mention as part of our fair hydro plan and bringing down electricity costs, our government is also providing additional support to those facing the highest delivery costs in the province, Mr. Speaker. When introduced, Mr. Speaker, regarding the distribution charges levied, there will be eight utilities with the highest rates, which will be lowering their distribution rates to protect ratepayers in those areas, Mr. Speaker. Innu power is one of those utilities whose distribution charges will be reduced, Mr. Speaker. And as we said, that 25% reduction -- With the rrrp reduction they're going to be seeing through innu power, Mr. Speaker, they can see anywhere up to 40 to 50% reduction.

MPP Vanthof to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Like to tell a little tale about Henry fiset and sons limited in elk lake. Pillars in that community. They run a machine shop. Their hydro usage in January 2011 was 391 kilowatt hours per day. They made huge changes in their business. And in January 2017 their kilowatts per day were 220. So that was a 43% decrease. They have done their part. Yet the bill, the overall bill went up. It went up. Actually the cost per kilowatt hour went up by 66%. Will you finally admit that your hydro plan for people like Henry fist and sons has been a disaster for the last --

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of energy.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased again to rise and talk about Ontario's fair hydro plan that is specifically looking after folks that live in the rural and remote parts of our province, Mr. Speaker, because we have heard over the last nine months that I've been in this portfolio and even longer, Mr. Speaker, that there were concerns by businesses, by families that we're in the ruling in northern parts of our province. And so, Mr. Speaker, we brought forward rebates at those times but they were very targeted in source, Mr. Speaker, and didn't necessarily provide the necessary relief that they were looking for. That's why the Ontario fair hydro plan actually reduces those bills by 25%. And for businesses, Mr. Speaker, if they're time of use businesses they will qualify for this. There are also other programs out there that actually help businesses lower their rates. I know the member talked about some of the programs that they were using. Lowering their bills which is great, Mr. Speaker. Because that actually helps everyone across the province lower their energy consumption which allows us not to build generation, Mr. Speaker, and lowers our costs.

>> MPP Vanthof: Speaker, this government has been in power for 15 years and now they're in danger their numbers are going down, their poll numbers, so now they implement the fair hydro plan. Where were they thinking about the people like Jerome and Terry and all the other business people and all the other residents all these years with their long-term energy plans? They never took the actual people who were paying the bills into account. Plau it's a little too late now.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We took action, Mr. Speaker, when we took over as government rebuilding a system, Mr. Speaker, that was left in Tatters by previous governments that cancelled programs, froze rates and never invested in a system. We made sure that folks in northern Ontario had access to power, Mr. Speaker, because before we were having an unreliable system that were never invested in by the previous governments and they know it, Mr. Speaker. So as we rebuild the system, as we eliminated coal, we invested \$50 billion, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we have a clean system, a reliable system and now, Mr. Speaker, we're working to make it as affordable as possible. The Ontario fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, will bring forward a 25% reduction for all families. Even more in rural areas, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Wong to Minister Hoskins Re: Registered Practical Nurses

>> MPP Soo Wong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Registered practical nurses play a vital role in Ontario's health care system. As a former nurse and nursing professor and their Minister's in long-term care facilities I know nurses are the largest group of health care professionals who provide quality care in my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt and across the province. In hospitals, communities, correctional facilities, local schools, long-term care homes and retirement homes. The influence and influence nurses have on our patients and families in this province -- Vince can't be quantified or measured, Mr. Speaker, because they are educated, dedicated, hard working knowledgeable care group of individuals who give so much of themselves and work in our community every day. And I want to recognize hundreds of R.P. N.s working in my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt, Mr. Speaker. They include Scarborough hospital Bertrand campus, St. Paul centre, tender care, Sheppard village. Trans care and care first. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister. What message does the Minister want to say to the R.P. N.s -- Queen's park today?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost I want to say thank you to our nurses, and particularly to those nurses, the R.P. N.s who are here today with rpnao on their queen's park day. They are absolutely outstanding and they do outstanding work. Mr. Speaker, we value the work of all our nurses. Since 2003, we have increased the number of nurses employed in this province by 26,000. And specific to R.P. N.s, Mr. Speaker, we have increased the number of R.P. N.s working in this province by 15,700 since we came into office in 2003. That is a growth of 61%. We value the work that each and every one of those R.P. N.s does in this province. Mr. Speaker, we continue to make those investments in all our nurses, including in R.P. N.s. Just since 2015 alone, there are -- 2,400 more R.P. N.s employed. That's a growth rate of 6.1% just in that period alone.

>> MPP Wong: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the Minister of health for his dedication to the nurses in this province. Rpnao, who is here today at queen's park, represent the voice of over 46,000 R.P. N.s in Ontario, Mr. Speaker. And our province continues to be proud to stand alongside with these nurses since we came into office. Since 2003, as the Minister said, there are 15,000 more R.P. N.s employed in this province. I want to remind the member opposite about this. As growth of more than 60%, including nearly 10,000 new R.P. N.s since 2012. Mr. Speaker, we have more R.P. N.s working across the province providing high-quality care to Ontarians in hospitals, in public Health and Long-Term Care homes, family health -- Community health care centres. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can he please inform the House what our government's commitment to continue working with R.P. N.s in Ontario?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, she's absolutely right that our government is proud of the track record we have working with nurses in this province. Together with nurses and associations like the rpnao, we've made great progress not only ensuring there's a stable R.P. N. work force but also ensuring Ontarians are receiving the best possible care. But we also know, Mr. Speaker, there is more work to be done. That's why I want to reiterate this government's commitment to continue to work with Ontario's nurses, not only to support them and their work force but also to grow their practice and their scope, to provide high quality care to even more Ontarians. R.P. N.A.O. Has been clear scope of practice changes would help address certain Barriers and ensure patients receive faster

access to the right care, and our government agrees. We know that by working together on increasing R.P. N.'s scope, we can further improve access to -- Ontarians and reduce wait times even further. We're committed to working with rpnsoon on this important --

MPP Hillier to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Randy Hillier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Speaker, many constituents are sending me their hydro bills and letters expressing their outrage and their concern. The calberrys are a retired couple on a fixed income in hardington. They followed every S P laid out by this government to help conserve energy. They schedule their lives by their time of use meter. A 17% reduction is not enough for them and many others in my riding. In the words of the calaberries, these so-called reductions being rolled out are nothing but a case of giving with one hand but taking with two. Speaker, when will this government stop giving with one hand and hurting so much with the other two?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of energy.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm pleased that the member knows about the fair hydro plan and the 25% reduction that is coming to the seniors, Mr. Speaker, and it is important to know, Mr. Speaker, that I'm assuming that these individuals are Hydro One customers, Mr. Speaker. That means that they're also going to see a significant reduction from the rrrp. That will actually reduce their bills between 40 and 50%, and on top of that, Mr. Speaker, on top of that, they can also apply for the Ontario electricity support program which, through the Ontario fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, is actually going to give them an additional reduction on top of that, Mr. Speaker. So you know what? We need to ensure that couples like the seniors that have been mentioned by the Honourable member ensure they know about the fair hydro plan and know about the reductions that are coming, Mr. Speaker. Because we actually have a plan like that party, they do not, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Hillier: I'll try again to the Premier, Speaker. The taylors are another retired couple in my riding in Carleton place who have to spend their retirement living by the schedule of the time of use meet. They do all their chores on the weekend. They make it in the dark during the week. The taylors believe retired people should not have to go to such extremes, and I fully agree. The fact is that no matter how hard people try, hydro is just too expensive. Their last bill was over \$400. Speaker, I'm going to send these letters over to the Premier. Her responses have not been adequate. Will the Premier commit to reading these letters so that she fully understands the hurt she has caused and respond directly to the calaberries and the taylors?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're more than happy to continue to respond to the needs of Ontarians. That's why we acted, Mr. Speaker, with the fair hydro plan. Something that we have brought forward, Mr. Speaker, to help every family in the province with a 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker. That also goes to family farms and to small businesses, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we have the Ontario electricity support program which actually will help many, many families as well, Mr. Speaker. We want to ensure more families, more individuals that actually would qualify for this program get on it, Mr. Speaker, because they can actually see their bills reduced even more. And to help families even further, Mr. Speaker, we brought forward the affordability fund. It is a trust that will be in place, Mr. Speaker, to allow families to access dollars to actually increase their installation reduce them even more. The fair hydro plan is the single largest reduction in electricity bills in Ontario's history and it's a plan we're very proud of.

MPP French to Minister Flynn Re: Changing Workplaces Review

>> MPP Jennifer French: Thank you, Speaker. And my question's to the Premier. Hardworking Ontarians are stressed and they are becoming sick over unpredictable work schedules. These are the

findings of a recent survey done by the Ontario federation of labour. Job prospects are getting worse. Wages are down and the cost of living keeps going up but the Liberals aren't willing to alleviate this stress and raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Does the Premier have the final report of the changing workplaces review? And if she does, what is she waiting for? When can -- I'm not finished. When can hard working Ontarians expect changes to dangerously outdated labour standards? Now I'm finished.

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of labour.

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to answer that question. Thank you to the member for that question. It is important, Speaker. We know in the province of Ontario that the nature of work in this province is changing, and it's affecting people in ways we'd sooner not see, Speaker. We're determined to do something about it. As a result of that, Speaker, less than two years ago we started the changing workplaces review. We got two esteemed gentlemen to do that work, Speaker. Somebody from the -- somebody who's been associated with employers in the province of Ontario, somebody that's been associated with employees and organized labour in the province of Ontario, Speaker. I'm expecting to get the best advice from these people after they've been out speaking to Ontarians all around this province, Speaker. We're determined to bring forward a report that stands up for working families in the province of Ontario.

>> MPP French: Thank you. Again to the Premier. Ontarians are working two and three part-time and piecemeal jobs without knowing when they'll be scheduled next. While they are struggling to pay rent and hydro bills that keep going up even when their pay doesn't. They deserve wages they can count on. They deserve hours that they can rely on, and they deserve schedules they can plan around. They deserve better jobs. Does the Premier have a copy yet of the final changing workplaces review? This government has said spring of 2007 and it's spring. So these problems aren't going away. They're still dragging their feet and I'd like to know what does the Premier have to say to Ontarians that simply can't wait any longer?

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you for that supplementary question. Speaker, we're gone out to the people in the province. We've asked for their advice. We've talked to business, Speaker. We've talked to employers. We've talked to organized labour. We've talked to advocacy groups. All that advice is being compiled, Speaker. We had an interim report in the spring and we're asking the advisors to bring us forward their best recommendation, Speaker. That will be done in a timely manner, Speaker. I'm expecting it within days or weeks. It will be translated, Speaker. It will be made accessible, Speaker. And a discussion will take place that involves everybody in the province of Ontario to make sure that this province remains an excellent place in which to work, Speaker.

MPP Potts to Minister Zimmer Re: Aboriginal Economic Development Fund

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation. Now, Speaker, as you know our government provides funding to support critical infrastructure and provides training to create better opportunities for indigenous people. And this helps them gain meaningful employment and assists them with business development across various sectors. Investing in the economic development of our urban and rural indigenous communities benefits all of Ontario by offering students, entrepreneurs, workers and businesses critical tools for success through partnerships with various indigenous agencies. Speaker, will the Minister please provide this House with an example of the good work that one of these agencies is doing that the Aboriginal economic development fund have supported?

>> Minister David Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker. And I thank the member for that question. The Aboriginal economic development fund is an important investment tool for indigenous peoples across Ontario. This year the anishinabe employment training services received \$250,000 through this fund for its construction craft worker training program. Upon completion of the program's first component, students begin the seven-week construction craft worker training program followed by a further week of resumé building and interview preparedness. The training offered in partnership

with northstar training facility provides prosperity for indigenous people, which in turn helps all of Ontario and all of first nations prosper. This is good news for the indigenous people of Ontario and for all Ontarians.

>> MPP Potts: Well, thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the Minister. I'm delighted. I know constituents in Beaches- East York also delighted to know the government is supporting an indigenous LED program to provide economic opportunities to help build a stronger and more prosperous Ontario. I'm also proud to see our government is living up to the commitments it has made to create and prove economic outcomes for indigenous people. By providing the necessary supports, we are partnering with indigenous communities to develop long-term strategies and to diversify local economies while collaborating on region-wide projects. Speaker, in Beaches- East York, I have numerous representatives in the Aboriginal community who come to me on a regular basis looking for opportunity which can be assisted by these agencies. Speaker, will the Minister please elaborate on the impact this has had on our community members who have been involved with this program?

>> Minister Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, here is an example. I recently had the pleasure of hearing from sage, a member of the anishinabe nation. After living many years in Thunder Bay, sage found secured employment -- finding secure employment a real challenge. He heard about the Aboriginal employment and training services apprenticeship program and he seized the opportunity to become involved. In regards to the program, sage said personally he described it as a rewarding and positive experience that put him on another road, another path in life. Sage successfully completed the seven-week construction craft training program. He tells me that the experience has left him with the desire to pursue his apprenticeship to completion with the ultimate goal of receiving his journeyman certification. That is good news for sage. Again that is good news for everyone in Ontario. It's good news for the union movement -- plau.

MPP Yakabuski to Minister Del Duca Re: Twinning of Highway 17

>> MPP John Yakabuski: The question is for the Minister of transportation. Last year the Minister joined me in Renfrew county officials to go over the ongoing issue of the continued twinning of highway 17. And to see the roadway for himself. While the project reached shield drive last year the next phase still is yet to make it into the ministry's five-year plan. Highway 17 connects Canadian nuclear laboratories and garrison, petawawa to the nation's capital. It is also a major artery for commercial truck traffic. Moreover, this project is vital to the economic development of eastern Ontario because the roadway is an east/west transportation corridor. Given how crucially important this roadway is, will the Minister finally commit today to putting the twinning of highway 17 into his ministry's five-year plan?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Renfrew-Nipissing- Pembroke for the question. He is right. In December of last year, I had the opportunity, with his help frankly, Speaker, and with help from municipal leaders from ordinary residents, representatives from garrison petawawa, representatives from the nuclear industry, Speaker. I heard loud and clear in that forum from all of those participants about the critical need for our government to continue to invest in highway infrastructure, like this particular project, Speaker. I understand that that member knows that we have over the last number of years continued to make progress on the four-laning of this highway. I certainly know that more work needs to be done. They made a compelling case, Speaker. I'm quite happy to continue to work with that member, to work with his community and to be in a stronger position to provide more updates in the coming weeks and months. Thanks very much, Speaker .

>> MPP Yakabuski: Back to the Minister. Speaker, the Minister has heard the county government's case for the continued twinning of highway 17. They have done their due diligence. It's now up to the Minister. Last year the Minister saw for himself the heavy volume of private and commercial traffic on highway 17. As he said himself and he saw the examples, he heard from garrison petawawa. He heard from Canadian nuclear laboratories. Presentations from both of them as well as

presentations from the county and the town of Renfrew. In the Minister's own words, about the day in the county we said and he repeated it today -- all of you Collectively are making a compelling case. I've heard the message loud and clear. Speaker, since the case has been made, the Minister agrees that it's a good case. I will ask the Minister yet again if he will commit today to putting the next phase of the twinning of highway 17 into his ministry's next five-year capital plan.

>> Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the member again for his follow-up question. He was kind enough to quote me from that public forum that was -- that took place in December in his community and he is right. Those are the words that I used. In fact they match the words that I use under response to the member's first question today. There has been and there continues to be a compelling case that that community is making. I listened very closely, Speaker. We had a chance. We haven't talked about that so far today, Speaker. We had a chance to take a tour of the highway to see the difference frankly, Speaker, between where the four-laning has already occurred and where it has not yet occurred and so I've seen it, Speaker. The ministry, we were joined that day by the ministry of transportation's regional director, who understands the issue as well. So I thank the member for continuing to advocate. As I said in the response to the first question, I expect over the next number of weeks or months there will be additional updates that we can provide. And I thank the member for bringing it not only to the floor of this House but for continuing to talk to me and my ministry about the importance of continuing to invest in critical transportation infrastructure.

MPP Mantha to Premier Wynne Re: Reserves and Clean Drinking Water

>> MPP Michael Mantha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to you. My question is to the Premier. Today is world water day. I want to take a moment to remind this government that in a wealthy province like Ontario, many first nations communities are still struggling to get clean drinking water. Our province has more boil water advisories than any other province in this country. How can we tolerate this happening today? That some communities up north are living without clean drinking water while they boil water advisory in southern Ontario wouldn't last more than 48 hours? Why is this government not acting to provide clean drinking water to first nations and stopping this crisis? How is not making sure every community in Ontario has access to clean drinking water, and why is it not a priority for this government? Let's remember, water is life.

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Speaker, this is -- I completely agree. I completely agree. Completely agree with the member opposite that this is an issue of highest priority, Mr. Speaker. Both the Minister of environment and climate change and Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation have been working with first nations and with the federal government, Mr. Speaker. I believe the last I saw, I think there were 47 communities where there were boil water. 20 boil water orders. 20 of them, Mr. Speaker. There was work under way. Another 27 there was work that had not yet begun. So, Mr. Speaker, this is a very high priority. We want to see those communities taken off boiled water orders and, more than that, Mr. Speaker, we want sustainable plans so that, going forward there is -- Capacity to troubleshoot. To make sure when a water system is put in place on a reserve, that water system can be maintained, Mr. Speaker.