

Question Period

TBS Business Lines

April 1-April 30, 2017

Table of Contents

<u>April 27, 2017</u>	1
<u>MPP Clark to the Premier (Government's Record)</u>	1
<u>MPP Clark to Government advertising</u>	2
<u>MPP Tabuns to Energy Minister (Energy Policies)</u>	4
<u>April 26, 2017</u>	5
<u>PC Leader Brown to the Minister of Finance (Ontario Budget)</u>	5
<u>MPP Tabuns to Minister of Energy (Energy Policies)</u>	6
<u>MPP Martins to Minister of Energy (Energy Policies)</u>	7
<u>April 25, 2017</u>	9
<u>PC Leader Brown to the Premier (Government Spending)</u>	9
<u>MPP Tabuns to Minister of Energy (Executive Compensation Hydro One)</u>	10
<u>April 24, 2017</u>	11
<u>MPP Coe to Minister of Finance (Ontario Budget)</u>	11
<u>MPP Tabuns to Minister of Energy (Hydro Rates)</u>	12
<u>MPP Potts to Minister of Finance (Ontario Budget)</u>	13
<u>MPP Harris to Minister of Finance (Ontario Budget)</u>	14
<u>MPP Yurek to Minister of Finance (Ontario Budget)</u>	16
<u>MPP Coe to Minister of Finance (Ontario Budget)</u>	17
<u>April 13, 2017</u>	18
<u>PC Leader Brown to Premier (Hydro One)</u>	18
<u>MPP Sing to Premier Wynne (Hydro rates)</u>	19
<u>April 12, 2017</u>	21
<u>PC Leader Brown to Deputy Premier (Ontario Budget)</u>	21
<u>MPP Tabuns to Minister of Energy (Hydro Rates)</u>	22
<u>MPP Vernile to Minister of Environment & Climate Change (Energy Policies)</u>	24
<u>MPP Fedeli to Finance Minister (Provincial Debt)</u>	25

<u>April 11, 2017</u>	26
<u>MPP Tabuns to Energy Minister (Hydro rates)</u>	26
<u>MPP Clark to Energy Minister (Hydro One)</u>	28
<u>MPP Armstrong to the Premier (Hydro Rates)</u>	29
<u>April 10, 2017</u>	30
<u>MPP Tabuns to Finance Minister (Executive Compensation)</u>	30
<u>MPP Gates to Minister Energy Minister (Hydro rates)</u>	31
<u>MPP Potts to Minister of Infrastructure (Infrastructure program funding)</u>	32
<u>April 6, 2017</u>	33
<u>MPP Smith to Energy Minister (Hydro Rates)</u>	33
<u>MPP Tabuns to Energy Minister (Executive compensation)</u>	34
<u>MPP McNaughton to Energy Minister(Hydro charges)</u>	35
<u>April 5, 2017</u>	36
<u>PC Leader Brown to the Premier (Executive Compensation Hydro One)</u>	36
<u>NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier (Executive compensation Hydro One)</u>	38
<u>MPP Fife to Minister Thibeault (Executive compensation)</u>	39
<u>MPP Fedeli to Minister Thibeault (Hydro Rates)</u>	40
<u>MPP Hatfield to Minister Thibeault (Hydro Rates)</u>	41
<u>April 4, 2017</u>	43
<u>NDP Leader Horwath to Minister Thibeault (Executive Compensation Hydro One)</u>	43
<u>NDP Leader Horwath to Energy Minister (Executive compensation Hydro One)</u>	44
<u>April 3, 2017</u>	46
<u>PC Leader Brown to the Premier (Executive Compensation)</u>	46
<u>NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier (Executive compensation)</u>	48
<u>NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier (Executive compensation)</u>	49
<u>PC Leader Brown to the Premier (Executive compensation)</u>	51
<u>NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier (Executive compensation)</u>	52
<u>NDP Leader Horwath to Health & Energy Ministers (Executive compensation)</u>	54
<u>MPP Tabuns to the Energy Minister (Hydro Rates)</u>	55
<u>MPP Scott to Minister Leal (Hydro Rates)</u>	56
<u>MPP Hoggarth to Minister Del Duca (Transportation infrastructure)</u>	57

April 27, 2017

MPP Clark to the Premier (Government's Record)

>>MPP Clark: My question is for the Premier. There is going to be a lot of talk over the next few weeks on today's budget. And no matter what's in the budget today, I want to remind everyone that in this budget the people of Ontario will continue to pay the cost of the \$1-billion gas plant scandal. The \$1-billion scandal just so happens, Speaker, to be because the Liberals—

Thanks, Speaker. They can laugh all they want, but the \$1-billion scandal just so happened to be because the Liberals were afraid of losing a couple of seats. So you can just imagine the size of the scandal when this government is afraid of losing government.

What Liberal seat-saver program will be included in this year's budget, and how many billions of dollars will that future scandal cost Ontario taxpayers?

>>Premier Wynne: I think it is safe to say that we have had this conversation many times in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite references today's budget. It is a very important budget in Ontario. It's an important day.

Our upcoming budget this afternoon will continue to make investments in the lives of people in this province. It will be a balanced budget. From my perspective, the point of a balanced budget is to have a fiscal house that is in order and that allows us to meet the needs of the people of this province.

We are living in very uncertain global times. It is government's responsibility to understand that and to put in place the supports that people need so that the economy can keep growing. I will reference that in my supplementary.

>>MPP Clark: Back to the Premier: No matter what shiny bauble, no matter what carrot on a string the Liberals will try to dangle in front of Ontarians, I want to remind everyone today that this budget will still include a plan that forced Ontarians to overpay more than \$9.2 billion for renewable contracts—\$9.2 billion that could have gone a long way to improve health care; \$9.2 billion that could have helped with our schools; \$9.2 billion that could have made life more affordable for Ontarians.

Mr. Speaker, why is it more important for this government to overpay \$9.2 billion to Liberal-friendly firms than it is to invest that money in the people of Ontario?

>>Premier Wynne: It's interesting to me that the member opposite would characterize investment in education and investment in health care as "shiny baubles." I think that

investments in education and health care are fundamental to the lives of the people in this province.

The work that we have done over the last number of years to invest in the people of the province, to invest in infrastructure and people's retirement security, to work to make sure that everyone has access to education—what we see now, Mr. Speaker, is a province whose economic health is the top in the country. We're leading the country in economic growth. We're leading the G7 countries. That's the work that we've done, and that's why we're now in a position to invest in the people of Ontario.

>>MPP Clark: Back to the Premier: Again, this Liberal government will want to hide from the facts. They are going to claim, Speaker, that this budget is some form of Liberal renaissance, but it's going to be the same old budget from the same old tired government which cares more about their Liberal friends than the people on Main Street. How do I know that, Speaker? Because this budget will still include a plan to sell off Hydro One, a plan that makes Liberal friends rich but the average person more worse off.

Why continue the fire sale of Hydro One in this budget? Why continue to make life harder under this Liberal government?

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just speak about the impact of the decisions that we have made as a government. We're making the largest infrastructure investment in Ontario's history: \$160 billion over 12 years. That is one example. We've made this investment because we know it's good for the economy, and here are the results: Ontario's economy continues to outpace Canada and all other G7 countries when it comes to economic growth. In other words, we are leading in economic growth. This year, Moody's upgraded Ontario's credit outlook, and the other major rating agencies affirmed Ontario's credit rating. Our net debt-to-GDP has gone down to 38.3%. It's projected to continue a downward trend. Exports are trending higher. Businesses are hiring, and household incomes are rising. Those are the indicators of the health of this economy.

MPP Clark to Government advertising

>>MPP Clark: My question is back to the Premier.

Over the last few years, the Liberals have spent quite a bit of money on their self-promoting vanity ads: the ORPP, the David Suzuki ad, and, just lately, their hydro vanity ads. All of those Liberal self-promoting election ads were paid for by the taxpayers of Ontario.

So, in today's budget, how many millions of dollars will the Liberals announce for their next set of Liberal re-election commercials?

>>Premier Wynne: Today's budget is about building on the foundation that we have laid, the hard work that has been done by the people of Ontario over the last number of years—work that has meant that our economic growth is leading the country and leading the G7 countries. What we now know is that it is time to invest. Now that we are bringing the budget to balance, as we said we would, we are going to be able to invest in the people of this province. People are living with global uncertainty. It's really interesting to me that the opposition has come up with absolutely no plan, no initiatives, nothing that would relieve people in this province. It's our responsibility as government to do that. That's what you'll see in the budget today.

>>MPP Clark: Again, back to the Premier: The 2015 budget stripped the Auditor General of oversight. But a former Liberal Premier we all know used to say, "It's never too late to do the right thing," and he was right. Mr. Speaker, will the Wynne Liberals do the right thing? Will the 2017 budget restore Auditor General oversight to government advertising?

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just say to the member opposite: I agree; it's never too late to do the right thing. It's never too late for an opposition party to have a serious, thoughtful plan for the province and to engage in a debate that actually has to do with people's well-being in the province. It's never too late. We look forward to it. Back to the Premier: I know there has to be somebody on the government benches who still has their integrity. Somebody has to be on the government benches who believes in ethics. Somebody over there has to believe in responsible government. We need that person to stand up for what's right. We need them to tell the Premier she should not be campaigning on the taxpayers' dime. Liberal election ads are not government ads. They should not be paid for by the taxpayers of Ontario. So will the Premier turn around, face her caucus—and let's have that one Liberal member stand up and tell her to do what's right. I know that the member opposite knows we're the only government in the country that has laws about the partisan nature of advertising and the non-partisan nature. I know that the member opposite knows perfectly well that the legislation we put in place was in reaction to the extreme partisanship of their party. What I would say to this House and what I say to the people of the province is that we have worked very hard to bring our budget to balance. You will see a balanced budget today, Mr. Speaker, and you will see investment in the people of this province at a time of global uncertainty, when it is government's responsibility to make sure that we do everything we can to help people to thrive and to get ahead in their lives. That's what our budget will be about.

MPP Tabuns to Energy Minister (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Tabuns: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. The government seems to be happy to pay outrageous salaries to top hydro executives. In 2016, the chief financial officer of Hydro One accepted \$700,000 in long-term incentives on top of his pay of \$900,000. Now he has just quit after 22 months. That doesn't seem very long-term to me.

Why is Hydro One offering huge long-term incentives to executives who seem very interested in raking in the cash in the short term and just moving on?

>>Minister Thibeault: Yes, Hydro One has announced that its CFO will be moving from the company in May. Michael Vels has done an—
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Michael Vels has done an excellent job with the company, contributing significantly to its transition to a better-run company. He has recently accepted a new position at another organization and will be leaving Hydro One next month. A search is already under way for a replacement.

But let's talk about Hydro One. They are a better-run company. The new management at Hydro One has done an excellent job of improving the company. It seems like every day there's new evidence of just how customer-focused Hydro One has become.

>>MPP Tabuns: Back to the Premier: The sell-off of Hydro One by the Liberals has meant a company focused on investors and executives, all while asking for a 20% increase in rates. The salaries at the top reflect that focus, making a group of executives very rich while Ontario families have to deal with the fallout.

The Premier has chosen to borrow her way out of the problem we're seeing with higher hydro rates, incurring a liability to Ontario of an amount to exceed more than \$40 billion. She needs to admit that the sale of Hydro One has been a winner for executives and bad news for Ontario families. Will she stop the sale of Hydro One?

>>Minister Thibeault: This good-news story is on track to raise \$9 billion—\$4 billion for infrastructure for this province. It has improved company performance and customer service. Once again, improved customer service is good news for customers, unlike what they have on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, which is no news for customers. You know what? The opposition doesn't support our infrastructure investments; we get that. There's \$13.5 billion in the GTHA GO regional express rail; \$5.3 billion in the Eglinton Crosstown LRT; tripling the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, something that they are against; and \$173 million for Highway 69 expansion. These are things that this government is doing for this province, things that they vote against.

April 26, 2017

PC Leader Brown to the Minister of Finance (Ontario Budget)

>>MPP Brown: My question is for the Premier. Tomorrow is a big day. The Liberals are allegedly tabling their first balanced budget in many years. But I share the concerns of the Financial Accountability Officer and the Auditor General that the government's numbers don't add up. We've heard descriptions in the media: "cooking the books"; it's a "shell game"; it's "smoke and mirrors." Regardless of what you—

Regardless of the term used, the evidence that the independent officers are highlighting speaks to the fact that the government's numbers do not add up, and when things don't add up in Liberal Ontario, there's usually only one result, and that's big tax increases or severe budget cuts. If the Premier could share with the Legislature today, which is it going to be? Given the independent officers say the numbers don't add up, is it going to be a tax increase or a deep cut?

>>Premier Wynne: I know the Leader of the Opposition will be in the Legislature, will hear the budget speech tomorrow, and I would think, given his conservative outlook on life, he would be pleased that the books in the province are being brought to balance. He would see that as a positive thing.

But I will say that where we perhaps diverge is, from my perspective and from our perspective, a balanced budget means that we have the opportunity to build on the foundation that we have already put in place in this province. We've been building infrastructure. We've been building roads and schools and hospitals and bridges and transit. We've been investing in children's education and in the education of our post-secondary students.

We now, with a balanced budget, have a responsibility to make sure we tackle the needs people are confronting in this globally uncertain economy, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

>>MPP Brown: If it actually was a balanced budget, then I would be pleased, but when the independent officers of Parliament are saying that the numbers don't add up, that rings alarm bells across the province.

The Minister of Finance has been claiming that there will be a major booster shot for health care funding, but in January the Financial Accountability Officer reported that the government would need to slash its health care budget by \$2.8 billion over the next years if it was to meet their balanced budget targets.

Once again, my question to the Premier is: Who are we to believe, the Financial Accountability Officer or Chef Sousa? Please enlighten the Legislature.

>>Minister Sousa: We have a recipe for success, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the numbers do speak for themselves. We're increasing our revenues. We're growing our economy. We're exceeding Canada, the US and the G7, and we're balancing the books tomorrow. We're balancing the books next year. We're balancing the books the year after that, and we're investing in the people of Ontario.

>>MPP Brown: Again to the Premier: The reality is, no one believes this recipe the Minister of Finance is putting forward. No one believes this recipe. Let me share the words of the Financial Accountability Officer: "The outlook for the budget balance ... has deteriorated," and he concluded that "Ontario's budget would be expected to remain in deficit over the next five years."

Will the Liberals come clean? You've got the Financial Accountability Officer saying one thing. You've got the Minister of Finance saying something entirely different. To the Premier: Who do you expect Ontarians to believe? The independent legislative oversight or the Minister of Finance?

>>Minister Sousa: Independent agencies around the world, and here in Canada, the Conference Board of Canada, have cited that Ontario's numbers are the most transparent, with the greatest integrity of any government in Canada. Every year the opposition and naysayers say, "Ontario can never come to balance. Ontario cannot do what they say they will do." And we exceeded targets—

We've exceeded targets year over year. We've been deliberate, we've been consistent and we're balancing the budget. More importantly, the people who believe it are the people who have jobs this year, over 700,000 more jobs since the depths of the recession. It's families who have more to care for their families. Mr. Speaker, it's about them, and we're delivering for the people of Ontario.

MPP Tabuns to Minister of Energy (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. Last year, the Minister of Energy denied that there was a crisis with soaring hydro bills. Then the government ignored the NDP's demand for a moratorium on disconnections of hydro through the winter. Only when a crisis had pushed her government into a political corner did the Premier act.

Well, a new crisis is upon us. Starting May 1, Ontario families will start losing their hydro. Does the Premier know how many families will be losing their hydro on May 1?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and talk about what Hydro One is doing. Hydro One, which has millions of customers in this province, is extending their winter moratorium until the end of May. That is great news. It just shows that Hydro One is working closely with their customers who have fallen behind on their bills. The extra time will allow customers to take advantage of some of the early savings from Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan, in which all families, small businesses and farms in this province will

get up to, on average, a 25% reduction. And for those families in the rural or northern parts of our province, that rate will be between 40% and 50%. They will see significant savings—unlike nothing in their plan.

>>MPP Tabuns: So I guess the rest don't really count; they really aren't a factor anymore.

Again to the Premier: If a family heats with natural gas, they have access to up to \$1,000 in emergency relief to help pay their hydro and gas bills if they can't meet their payments. But many rural families don't have access to natural gas and must heat with hydro. Not only is hydro more expensive, the government only offers these struggling families \$600 in emergency relief, not \$1,000.

Why does the Premier think it's fair that rural Ontario families, who are paying some of the highest hydro rates in Canada, don't have access to relief the way everyone else does?

>>Minister Thibeault: First off, when it comes to the west, the east, the north and the south, this government is acting. I don't know where that member is coming from with the west.

Also, when it comes to rural, when it comes to remote and when it comes to northern, I just said in the last supplementary—and I know he hasn't been listening in the last month and a half in terms of what our plan is doing, and I know he probably didn't pay attention during the technical briefing, but let me remind him: That's 40% to 50% off for rural or remote families. On top of that, if these families qualify for the Ontario Electricity Support Program, they can get an additional 50% off their bills. So we're making sure that those in the rural and remote parts of our province are seeing significant relief on their energy bills.

We have a plan. It's already working; for example, with the OEB. It's too bad they don't have a plan that even fathoms to work.

MPP Martins to Minister of Energy (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Martins: My question is for the Minister of Energy about a concern that my constituents have raised in Davenport.

Last week, the Ontario Energy Board made an announcement regarding new electricity rates to be effective on May 1. As the independent regulator of Ontario's energy sector, the OEB is a quasi-judicial board which governs the sector with a mandate to protect ratepayers. It sets electricity rates twice a year, so Ontarians know what to expect with their bills.

As members of this House know well, our government has recognized that Ontarians want relief on electricity costs, and we have acted. Our plan is to lower electricity bills by an average of 25% by this summer. I understand that the OEB has taken early action in

beginning to put these savings on ratepayer bills. Would the minister please clarify what the impact is to all Ontarians?

>>Minister Thibeault: I also want to thank the member for that important question. I was pleased with the OEB's decision to begin lowering rates on May 1 in anticipation of our government's fair hydro plan. This is the next of several steps which Ontarians will see as we work towards bills being reduced by 25%, beginning this summer, with rates held to inflation for the next four years.

The OEB's decision means that bills will be reduced by 17%, beginning May 1. That's even earlier than expected. The rest of our plan is intended to come into effect by this summer in order to achieve the rest of the promised savings. The OEB would require to reduce rates again this summer when final legislation is passed to ensure Ontarians see the full benefit of our plan as soon as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

>>MPP Martins: Thank you to the minister for that response and for his hard work on this file, on a file that is so important to my constituents.

Our government heard from Ontarians who were struggling with the cost of electricity, and that's why we introduced the fair hydro plan. It's also why, this winter, we gave the OEB the power to ban power disconnections during the winter months. Several utilities actually already have this type of policy, including Hydro One. In fact, Hydro One had already implemented a ban on winter disconnections and introduced a winter relief program to restore power to disconnected customers as part of a broader effort to be a more customer-focused company.

I understand that, yesterday, Hydro One made an announcement where they extended their winter moratorium to provide even more support to customers. Would the minister share with this House the details of that announcement and how it is providing further relief to Ontario ratepayers?

>>Minister Thibeault: Again, thank you to the member for the question. Yesterday, as the member mentioned, Hydro One announced that they are extending their winter moratorium until the end of May. So Hydro One will be working closely with customers who have fallen behind on their bills, and this extra time will allow customers to take advantage of some of the early savings from our fair hydro plan while they work with the company to make sure they get back on the right track.

I was also pleased to see Hydro One take this step, which provides just more evidence of their new customer focus at this company. As part of yesterday's announcement, Hydro One is also eliminating requirements for security deposits from residential customers, as well as reducing deposit requirements for businesses. This removes a substantial burden for many customers and will put money back in the hands of

Ontarians. These actions from Hydro One work together with our government's fair hydro plan, bringing fair relief for everyone in this province.

April 25, 2017

PC Leader Brown to the Premier (Government Spending)

>>MPP Brown: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, a minister of the crown made a \$150-million announcement. That's no small amount of money. What was the minister's response when she was asked where the money was coming from? She said—this is a direct quote: "I'm actually not quite sure where it's coming from." Can you believe that, Mr. Speaker? She actually said she had no idea where the funds were coming from.

Can the Premier tell us where the money is coming from for that announcement?

>>Premier Wynne: First of all, let me make a shout-out to the Minister of Community and Social Services and the Minister of Housing for the announcement yesterday. The idea of a basic income has been around for a very long time. The Honourable Hugh Segal, who some members in the party opposite might know, has been talking about this and has worked with researchers. To have the opportunity as a government to put in place a pilot project on a basic income at a time when work is uncertain, when we have a global economy that is uncertain—we know that finding the data and getting the information from this basic income pilot is extremely important. Not just here in Ontario but internationally, there's a great deal of attention being paid to the outcomes of the basic income pilot.

>>MPP Brown: Again to the Premier: I didn't get an answer on the question of where the funds were going to come from. The minister of the crown had no idea. The reality is—and this might be a news flash for this government—money doesn't grow on trees. It actually has to come from somewhere. The spin afterwards by the government, saying it could come from the budget—the budget doesn't produce money. The budget doesn't pay taxes. The budget doesn't pay fees. Taxpayers pay fees. Taxpayers work hard. To have a government right now that is completely disrespectful of taxpayer funds making announcements with no idea how they're going to pay for them—

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to get an answer. The government made an announcement yesterday. They had no idea where it's coming from. Can the Premier show this Legislature the decency to tell us where that \$150 million is going to come from?

>>Premier Wynne: I look forward to Thursday, when it will be laid out very clearly how our balanced budget builds on the platform that we have put in place over the last number of years. We have been working very hard to get to the point where we could

invest in the people of this province, which we have been doing all along. To balance the budget actually gives us the opportunity to take the next step, to further invest in the people of this province and do the things that we know are necessary in order to build the inclusive economy that we know is necessary for this province and for the people who are struggling with uncertainty.

I'm not surprised that the Leader of the Opposition doesn't support the basic income pilot. I'm not surprised at all, because this is a party that has a history of cutting public services, of actually undermining the foundation of the social safety network and the services that have been delivered in this province. This is a good thing.

>>MPP Brown: Again to the Premier: If the Liberals were sincere about their announcement they would have had some idea of how they're going to pay for it. The reality is, after 14 years, Ontarians work harder, they pay more and they get less in Liberal Ontario. The cost of everything is going up, so it worries me when they make announcements with no clue of how they're going to be paid for. If there's one thing I know about this Liberal government, if there's one thing they're good at, it's raising taxes. When they make an announcement with no clue how it's going to be paid for, the reality is, it's new taxes.

Can the Premier assure us that they're not going to pay for this announcement through new taxes?

>>Premier Wynne: What I can assure the member opposite of is that we will be bringing in a balanced budget on Thursday, a balanced budget that will allow us to make investments in the lives of people in this province.

A basic income pilot is part of that, making sure that we have the evidence to demonstrate whether such an initiative would actually be able to be rolled out across the province, whether it would help with precarious employment and the realities of displacement because of technology, because of—

Because of the changing nature of work. This is a huge opportunity to get evidence that will help us to make good decisions going forward—and not just us, but internationally.

MPP Tabuns to Minister of Energy (Executive Compensation Hydro One)

>>MPP Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. Late last week, the government quietly announced that it had approved a massive increase in the salary ranges for OPG executives. The top salary of the OPG CEO is now \$3.8 million, which is double his current salary. Meanwhile, starting next week, ratepayers who have been unable to pay their hydro bills will start losing their electricity. How does the Premier explain to families who may lose their electricity why they have to pay more to give an OPG CEO a 100% increase in salary?

>>Minister Thibeault: Once again, when it comes to OPG salaries, Mr. Speaker, we do have a framework in place to ensure that they are paid comparatively and fairly. When we have people running our nuclear facilities and having a 40-year history of safety, we want to ensure that these people are paid not at the top, not at the bottom, but paid right in the middle of the pack within their sector.

When it comes to looking at rates that are happening for folks right across the province, I was pleased to hear last week that the Ontario Energy Board's decision will begin to lower rates even further on May 1, in anticipation of our government's fair hydro plan. That's going to mean that on May 1, the OEB's decision will have rates reduced by 17% by May 1.

While the opposition parties have, like, a pamphlet for their plan, we're acting.

>>MPP Tabuns: Again to the Premier: It's not surprising that a Premier who thinks ratepayers should pay twice as much for the OPG CEO also thinks ratepayers should pay twice as much for hydro. The connection between skyrocketing hydro CEO salaries and skyrocketing hydro disconnections could not be clearer. It speaks to the values of this government, which treats hydro ratepayers as cash cows for senior executives, for private financiers and for other friends of the Premier, at the same time dismissing the struggles of ordinary Ontarians—until, of course, this government is backed into a political corner.

Why does the Premier always put the interests of the executive class ahead of the needs of ordinary Ontario families? Why?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and talk about how this Premier and this government are putting the needs of Ontarians first, Mr. Speaker, not on the last page of their plan like the third party. We're making sure that First Nations' delivery charges are addressed; they don't even mention First Nations when it comes to offering help. This Premier and this government—

When it comes to the Ontario Electricity Support Program, we increased that by 50%, ensuring that families and individuals who are struggling when it comes to their electricity prices will receive more help. That is what this Premier and this government do. On that side of the House, they have no plan and they can't even make up a plan that works.

April 24, 2017

MPP Coe to Minister of Finance (Ontario Budget)

>>MPP Coe: My question is for the Minister of Finance, who I also wrote to last week. Due to this Liberal government's reckless financial policies, hard-working families in the region of Durham are struggling. Interest payments on the government's massive debt are crowding out funding for public services, particularly patient care at Lakeridge Health and the Ontario Shores mental health centre. Local businesses are closing their doors due to the excessive hydro costs, as well as the government's cap-and-trade tax-grab scheme. As well, Epsom Public School in Scugog and Thorah Central Public School in Brock are being considered for closure to balance the government's budget. Speaker, when will this minister address Ontario's massive debt and stop balancing the budget on the backs of hard-working families in the region of Durham?

>>Minister Sousa: Speaker, I think it's the last question of the day in this respect. Here is the gist of all of their letter campaigns in a nutshell. They're saying this: "Give me more money in my community. Pay for my hospital. Cut everywhere else." That is not what we're doing. We represent all of Ontario on this side of the House. We're taking a balanced approach that ensures that every community benefits from the prosperity of our—
I'll wait for the supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Martow: Our Ontario school boards are forced to make unpopular decisions because they need every dollar they can find to fund special needs. In the suburbs north of Toronto, schools such as Our Lady of Peace in Maple are being shut down, even though they are 90% full. Stornoway Crescent Public School in Thornhill is being considered for closure, even though the community is shut off from all other schools by major thoroughfares. Four out of five school boards are spending more on special needs than they are getting. This is at the expense of other programming. Will the minister please tell us what his new budget will do to help our schools properly fund special needs programming?

>>Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear: We're balancing the budget, and because we're balancing the budget, we're investing more. We're building more new schools. We're investing more front line. We're supporting more individuals, people and students, especially those with disabilities and learning disabilities. We're taking leadership in this respect. Furthermore, we are investing in and supporting rural Ontario. We've provided predictable funding throughout the past four years, more so than ever before.
We recognize the importance of all of Ontario as we move forward, not just any one particular community.

MPP Tabuns to Minister of Energy (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Tabuns: My question is to the Acting Premier. Hydro bills at the Sault Area Hospital have jumped nearly \$1 million in recent years. It's become clear that the hospital, along with manufacturers and other medium-sized businesses, will not see any bill reductions, despite the Premier's promises. Late last Friday, the Ontario Energy Board revealed that no one will see the full reductions that the Premier promised would be in place this summer. The summer hydro rates that were just posted by the Ontario Energy Board do not include all of the reductions promised by the Premier.
Why do the Premier's hydro promises keep falling short?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise to talk about the 25% reduction that everyone will see come this summer. The OEB rate that was announced last week is an additional 9%, so everyone, on May 1, will see a 17% reduction. When you take the 8% that started in January plus the 9% that's coming, that's 17% with more to come. That's great news for all families right across the province.

I know it's very hard to understand that when it comes from a party that has no plan, no real substance, when it comes to reducing rates. They've got pie-in-the-sky ideas. They want to form a committee and maybe have that committee someday come up with a solution.

Our solution is working, so much so that the OEB already brought forward a 9% reduction on top of the 8%. We're going to see a 25% reduction by summer. That's good for all families, for farms and for 500,000 small businesses right across our province.

>>MPP Tabuns: Back to the Acting Premier: Starting May 1, hydro disconnections will resume. Thousands of Ontario families will lose their power because they can't afford their soaring hydro bills.

The Premier could bring Hydro One back into public hands so that ratepayers don't have to pay the 20% increase that Hydro One's private investors are demanding. The Premier could renegotiate her overpriced, privatized power contracts. Instead, she's spending up to \$40 billion to get herself out of a political jam while doing nothing to rein in the underlying costs of hydro.

Why won't the Premier put families and businesses first in Ontario instead of the political needs of the Liberal Party?

>>Minister Thibeault: It's families, small businesses and farms that have been put first in this, giving them an average of a 25% reduction come summer—that's putting them first.

For low-income individuals, we've increased the OESP program by 50%, including more families and more individuals who qualify, putting them first. You know where they were in their plan, Mr. Speaker? The last page.

Not even mentioning First Nations—we are making sure we're helping First Nations. We're helping small businesses. We're helping farms.

When it comes to putting families first, when it comes to putting small businesses first and farms first, that is something we do. On the other side of the House, they put them on the last page and forget about them. We have no time to look at pie-in-the-sky ideas like they do. That's why we're acting by summer with 25%.

MPP Potts to Minister of Finance (Ontario Budget)

>>MPP Potts: My question is to the Minister of Finance. A couple of weeks ago, the minister, in a speech to the Empire Club, confirmed that Ontario is one of the fastest-growing provinces in Canada and that our economy continues to outpace Canada and all other G7 nations. We have created almost 700,000 new jobs since the recession, and unemployment is at a 10-year low.

Speaker, these numbers are important. They show that we're on the right track. They show that we are prudent fiscal managers of Ontario's economy. Our government has taken a responsible approach to eliminating the deficit while continuing to invest in key public services. In my own riding of Beaches–East York, we are continuing to invest in critical new investments that will strengthen our community and other parts of Ontario. Could the minister provide an update on our fiscal plan in advance of the 2017-18 budget?

>>Minister Sousa: I'd like to thank the member from Beaches–East York for the question. I am happy to formally announce that this Thursday, April 27, I will deliver the 2017-18 Ontario budget, and it will be a balanced budget.

When the global recession hit, we made a choice to invest in our economy while protecting vital public services like health care and education. Ontario met this challenge head-on. We made a decision to put Ontario first. Our government set a realistic and responsible approach to return to balance by 2017-18 and, this week, our government will deliver on that commitment.

>>MPP Potts: That is incredibly great news, and I want to thank the Minister of Finance for his continuing excellent stewardship of our province's economy.

I know I speak for everyone when I say that we are anxiously awaiting the budget this Thursday because we know that a balanced budget means the government will no longer need to borrow to pay for its ongoing operating costs. It means that an important commitment we made in the 2014 election is being delivered on. It means a promise made has been a promise kept. We know that a strong economy, together with a balanced budget, is positioning Ontario for long-term fiscal sustainability.

In my own riding of Beaches–East York, we are already seeing the benefits of our government's increased fiscal flexibility. Would the minister then explain exactly what a balanced budget will mean for the province of Ontario and, particularly, what it will mean for my constituents in Beaches–East York?

>>Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, it's simple. The member from Beaches–East York noted a balanced budget means more money to invest in health care, education and things that matter most to the people of Ontario. We're no longer working to eliminate the deficit, but our principle remain

s the same: build Ontario up in a balanced way, to protect our economy, to promote jobs and security.

Because of our balanced budget, there will be new investments in public education, in child care, in transit and in business support. Because of our balanced approach, there will be more investments in health care as well.

The people of Ontario have worked hard to achieve a balanced budget and build a stronger Ontario. We're working with the people of Ontario.

MPP Harris to Minister of Finance (Ontario Budget)

>>MPP Harris: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Over a decade of Liberal budgets have meant that Waterloo region residents are working harder, but getting less, as provincial debt interest crowds out services and promised vital infrastructure improvements we all depend on. Patients in Waterloo region are waiting longer for vital procedures. All-day, two-way GO is now not the promised five, but another 10 years away, and promised high-speed rail has hit a speed bump.

From what I heard around the region last week, Liberal caucus members aren't the only ones airing frustrations about lacking Liberal leadership.

Speaker, I wrote the Minister of Finance to tell him that we can't afford to be left behind by yet another Liberal budget. Will the minister commit today to immediately pay down the province's debt in his upcoming budget to move forward on service and infrastructure investments we require, or will he continue down a budget path that leaves us stuck in reverse?

>>Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear what the member is asking. What the member and the Leader of the Opposition are asking, and what all of them are alluding to: They're asking us to invest more in education, invest more in public transit and invest more in hospitals. But they're asking us to actually do the opposite. They want us to cut our borrowings, all of which is going to do exactly what is going to make us competitive in the long term.

Our debt-to-GDP is strong, and it's improving over time. It actually outpaces—we are leading Canada, we're leading the United States and we're leading the G7 in our economic growth because of the investments that we're making.

The member opposite is asking us to actually make cuts to the very things that he's wanting us to invest in.

>>MPP Scott: My question is also to the Minister of Finance. Last week, I wrote to the minister, calling on him to address the real concerns of Ontarians in his budget and not his government's self-serving political priorities.

In my area, the cost of servicing the province's massive debt is hurting hard-working people. We've seen reduced access to health care, including overcrowded hospitals and wait-lists for long-term care that have grown to 4,500. Our communities have been hit by unwanted school closures like that of Lakefield secondary school. Businesses like Cedarvilla Holsteins have seen their hydro bills triple due to the ongoing hydro crisis. The government's 2017 budget needs to address these failures in management that are making life harder for families in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and Peterborough. Can we expect the government to stop focusing on their own political pet projects and address the real concerns of Ontarians?

>>Minister Sousa: It astounds me that the member opposite is asking a question about investing in health care in her community, when we did. We increased it by 10% in her very community. It astounds me that the member opposite belongs to a party where their interest on debt represented 15% of their budget. Today, it's 8.9%. We've locked in a rate for 30 and 40 years so that we can minimize the volatility of interest rates and invest in the very things that they're asking for.

Mr. Speaker, they're sucking and blowing on this one.

MPP Yurek to Minister of Finance (Ontario Budget)

>>MPP Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Finance. I, too, wrote to the minister last week. People across London and southwestern Ontario are struggling. They're working harder and paying more, but falling further behind.

The province's debt continues to cause staffing and service cuts to London Health Sciences Centre and St. Joseph's Hospital. The hydro crisis has caused businesses like North Star Ice to see their hydro bills increase by 50% in two years. And, after 14 years

of scandal, waste and mismanagement, we've created a fast-tracking of school closures, which is gutting rural Ontario, in the Thames Valley District School Board region.

We need a firm commitment from this Liberal government, not pre-election propaganda such as the high-speed rail project promised in 2014, which they have since backtracked on.

Will the Minister of Finance commit to the people of London and southwestern Ontario and include their needs, that I have outlined, in this year's budget?

>>Minister Sousa: This budget will speak to the needs of London, Ontario. It will speak to the needs of the people in Windsor, and from Windsor all the way to Kenora, all the way to Cornwall, all the way to Kapuskasing, Thunder Bay, North Bay and everywhere in between.

It's about investing in the people of Ontario. It's about investing in hospitals, investing in education and investing in schools. It's not about cutting, as has been proposed by the member opposite in the past. This is about investing to stimulate growth.

We have over 700,000 net new jobs in the depths of the recession. That's not by accident; that's because we invested.

We believe in Ontarians, and we will continue to support them.

>>MPP Nicholls: My question is to the Minister of Finance. I have written to the minister as well.

Massive cap-and-trade costs are causing havoc in the greenhouse industry that is so vital to my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Gerry Mastronardi, owner of TG and G Mastronardi greenhouses, has said that his family business will be lucky to survive, after their natural gas bills were doubled by the Wynne government.

Matt Marchand, president of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, noted that the result of this scheme is that we're going to export jobs into other jurisdictions, like Ohio, and import their pollution.

Minister, your government's cap-and-trade scheme is ludicrous. To prove this, Carl Mastronardi of Sunrite Greenhouses said that he would have paid less in government fees, had he not installed \$2-million worth of energy-saving curtains in his greenhouses. His company could have qualified for savings that are available to larger natural gas users. He said there's no incentive to save energy.

The only green this government is concerned about is money, not the environment. Will the Liberals stop the cash grab and make cap-and-trade revenue-neutral?

>>Minister Sousa: Despite the challenges that we've had in our economy as we have got out of and recovered from the recession, we have invested.

The agri-food industry and agri-food processing—we are proud in this country for the tremendous amount of GDP that agriculture brings to Ontario. We invested \$19 million just in the greenhouse industry.

We know we lead in foreign direct investment in this province, among all other jurisdictions. Again, it's not by accident; it's because of our encouragement for that economic activity. We'll continue to support, and we'll continue to invest.

The member opposite makes reference to the fact that jobs are important. They're critically important. That's why we have to embrace the new economy. He's turning his back on that new economy. He doesn't want to go to clean tech. He wants to actually turn around and put his head in the sand.

As the rest of the world leads, Ontario will always lead, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

MPP Coe to Minister of Finance (Ontario Budget)

>>MPP Coe: My question is for the Minister of Finance, who I also wrote to last week. Thank you, Speaker. Due to this Liberal government's reckless financial policies, hard-working families in the region of Durham are struggling. Interest payments on the government's massive debt are crowding out funding for public services, particularly patient care at Lakeridge Health and the Ontario Shores mental health centre. Local businesses are closing their doors due to the excessive hydro costs, as well as the government's cap-and-trade tax-grab scheme. As well, Epsom Public School in Scugog and Thorah Central Public School in Brock are being considered for closure to balance the government's budget.

Speaker, when will this minister address Ontario's massive debt and stop balancing the budget on the backs of hard-working families in the region of Durham?

>>Minister Sousa: Speaker, I think it's the last question of the day in this respect. Here is the gist of all of their letter campaigns in a nutshell. They're saying this: "Give me more money in my community. Pay for my hospital. Cut everywhere else." That is not what we're doing. We represent all of Ontario on this side of the House. We're taking a balanced approach that ensures that every community benefits from the prosperity of our—

I'll wait for the supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Martow: Our Ontario school boards are forced to make unpopular decisions because they need every dollar they can find to fund special needs. In the suburbs north of Toronto, schools such as Our Lady of Peace in Maple are being shut down, even though they are 90% full. Stornoway Crescent Public School in Thornhill is being considered for closure, even though the community is shut off from all other schools by major thoroughfares.

Four out of five school boards are spending more on special needs than they are getting. This is at the expense of other programming. Will the minister please tell us what his new budget will do to help our schools properly fund special needs programming?

>>Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear: We're balancing the budget, and because we're balancing the budget, we're investing more. We're building more new schools. We're investing more front line. We're supporting more individuals, people and students, especially those with disabilities and learning disabilities. We're taking leadership in this respect. Furthermore, we are investing in and supporting rural Ontario. We've provided predictable funding throughout the past four years, more so than ever before.

We recognize the importance of all of Ontario as we move forward, not just any one particular community.

April 13, 2017

PC Leader Brown to Premier (Hydro One)

>>PC Leader Brown: My question is for the Premier. Did the Premier order the Minister of Energy and Hydro One to keep the ombudsman's departure a secret?

>>Premier Wynne: No.

>>PC Leader Brown: Back to the Premier: Hydro One is a company notorious for terrible customer service. The former ombudsman ended their investigation into Hydro One after—hear this, Mr. Speaker—10,000 complaints. And how did the Liberals respond to this? They want to get rid of oversight. They take away oversight that was under the purview of the ombudsman's office and replace it with an office that is a shell of itself. Now, what is unbelievable is, the Liberals want to keep secret that shell of an office they created for oversight, and that ombudsman is now gone. Here we have Hydro, where we know there are 10,000 complaints, and this government wants no oversight? How can they allow this to happen? Mr. Speaker, can we please get a justification from the Premier why they believe it's appropriate to have no oversight at Hydro?

>>Premier Wynne: Minister of Energy.

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and talk about the continued work that the ombudsman's office is doing at Hydro One. They're doing some great work addressing the issues and the complaints that are coming forward from the millions of customers that Hydro One has.

Ombudsperson Fiona Crean did an excellent job with Hydro One, contributing to the company's ongoing transition to a better-run, customer-focused company. She recently accepted a new position at another organization, and has stepped down from that role as ombudsperson. A search is under way for an appropriate replacement.

In the meantime, staff member Sophie Petrillo has been named the interim ombudsperson. She'll continue to do the work of the ombudsperson for Hydro One, and we'll continue to work forward on a hydro plan that works for everyone in this province.

>>MPP Clark: Back to the Premier: It's more than a coincidence that just as the hydro scheme ad blitz hits the airwaves that the Hydro One ombudsman is MIA. The former ombudsman used to hold town hall meetings where customers could speak publicly about the nightmare high rates and inaccurate bills continue to cause. But that doesn't fit this government's narrative. In my riding, instead of a town hall, Hydro One is planning an open house that sounds more like an opportunity to spin for this government.

Will the Premier order Hydro One to stop wasting money on these travelling road shows to promote the government scheme and get back to the public meetings that actually fix the problems?

Interjections.

>>Minister Thibeault: Hydro One goes out to talk to their customers, and the opposition doesn't like it. It makes no sense. They have no plan for hydro. It's been 42 days since the Leader of the Opposition said they'd have a plan for how to deal with electricity, and they do nothing.

Hydro One has an acting ombudsperson— The ombudsman office continues to operate as normal, with a full staffing complement while the search for a—

As I mentioned, the ombudsman office continues to operate as normal with a full complement of staff while the search for a new ombudsperson continues. We have full faith that they'll continue to operate with an ombudsperson in the acting role and with a full office contingent to address all the concerns.

MPP Sing to Premier Wynne (Hydro rates)

>>MPP Singh: My question is to the Premier. The NDP recently received a letter from Lynn Ohanian in Burlington. In January, Lynn got a hydro bill for her trailer in Burk's Falls with a nearly \$500 delivery charge. She wrote to us because she was concerned. She received at the same time the delivery charge for her home in Burlington, which was just \$135.

Out-of-control rural delivery charges mean that Lynn could lose her trailer, the place where she spends time with her partner to relax in the summer. Why has the Premier done nothing to address the outrageous delivery charges, the outrageous prices when it comes to hydro bills? Why is she leaving people like Lynn wondering if she can keep her trailer?

>>Premier Wynne: I know the Minister of Energy is going to want to comment in the supplementary. I hope that when the member opposite got the letter from Lynn, he responded to her and let her know that she will see a 25% reduction, come the summer: 17% on top of the 8% that she already has.

I don't know the specifics, but I imagine from the location of her home, the trailer, that she may also be eligible for up to a 40% or 50% reduction, because the distribution charges will be reduced.

So I hope that the member opposite—and if he didn't have all that information, we would certainly be happy to provide it to him so that he can get back to this constituent and give her the good news about the reductions that she's going to see.

>>MPP Singh: The Canadian Transportation Museum in Kingsville has also reached out to the NDP, specifically through my colleague the member from Essex. The museum is facing bills so high that staff don't know if they can keep the museum afloat—they're not sure if they can keep a community museum afloat. They cannot hire the needed staff, they can't grow their children's education program, and they're putting exhibition design and capital projects on hold because they don't have the resources.

The museum needs help now—not months from now, not years from now. Why has the Premier done nothing?

>>Premier Wynne: Minister of Energy.

>>Minister Thibeault: That organization can call their local utility and get one of the many programs through the saveONenergy program that will help them save their money now.

On top of the many programs we already have in place that help thousands of businesses across the province, we're also bringing forward Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan. Our fair hydro plan will help many businesses—500,000 of them, small businesses and farms in this province—see a 25% reduction or more. On top of that, if these businesses are larger, they can qualify for the ICI program.

When it comes to our museums, there are numerous programs in place that will help them. We have done that before the fair hydro plan. And when you take that into consideration, many of these places will see significant reductions in their bill come summer.

>>MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, families like Lynn's, small community museums, hospitals, municipalities—Ontarians—everyone is waiting for the Premier to actually act. PR, press releases, paid government ads are not a plan; they are a desperate attempt to salvage the Premier's dismal approval numbers. That's all they are.

Why is the Premier prioritizing her political career over the people of Ontario? Interjections.

>>Minister Thibeault: Families, individuals, small businesses, farms, large manufacturing, greenhouse growers—they will all be seeing significant reductions on their electricity bill by summer.

We have made sure that everyone is going to see significant relief that's going to last, to ensure that they can plan.

On that side of the House, we've got one party that has no plan, that has no idea on what to do with electricity, and another one that makes a pamphlet that relies on some pie-in-the-sky negotiations with some committee, some day to be determined. I know this expert panel hasn't really reported back anything yet. They also want to have negotiations with the federal government. Well, when he's touring around Ottawa, maybe he can have a conversation with them and see if they'll actually help.

April 12, 2017

PC Leader Brown to Deputy Premier (Ontario Budget)

>>MPP Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Premier. While we don't have a budget date yet, we expect the budget to come sometime soon. The PC caucus is expecting to see some key planks in this budget, so I will lay them out. The government's mismanagement of its finances has resulted in two credit downgrades and debt-servicing costs of over \$11 billion annually. The province now spends more on interest than on post-secondary education, community safety and five other ministries combined.

Mr. Speaker, because of this mismanagement, the government must take action. Will this budget begin the process of paying down debt and include a long-term plan to get Ontario's debt under control?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's important people understand that when the recession hit in 2008-09, we—

Speaker, we made a very deliberate decision that we were not going to slash and burn. We were not going to fire 100,000 workers. We were going to support the continued growth of this province. We made a deliberate choice to invest in infrastructure, and we are seeing the consequences of that very deliberate decision.

Some people advocated that we cut our way to balance. Our decision was to invest and grow our way to balance, and that's exactly what we've done.

>>MPP Brown: Again to the Deputy Premier: Clearly no answer on getting Ontario's out-of-control debt—they seem to be satisfied with the fact we're the most indebted subnational government in the world.

Another budget ask we have of the government is—and I'm sure the government appreciates that millions of Ontarians are struggling with their hydro bills, from unaffordable hydro rates. This government's proposed hydro scheme does nothing but add billions of dollars to the debt, more in future costs on Ontarians' backs for hydro. The budget must take action. Rather than just borrowing, we'd actually like to see some structural changes.

Mr. Speaker, will this budget include an announcement that the Liberals will stop signing bad contracts for energy we do not need, and stop the fire sale of Hydro One?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise and talk about Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan and what we've done to take costs out of the system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the very first things that I was able to do as Minister of Energy was put a suspension on the LRP II, which was something that saved ratepayers billions of dollars.

Again, we brought forward the fair hydro plan that is going to save ratepayers up to, on average, 25%, which is something that all families across the province are looking forward to.

>>MPP Brown: Again to the Deputy Premier: The question was on stopping the signing of these bad contracts. There was no response.

No matter how many times the minister repeats himself, borrowing \$25 billion to pay in interest is not a real plan if you don't deal with the structural issues.

Since I can't get an answer on debt or hydro, I'll try a third budget ask, and that's on the housing affordability crisis that this government has created. They decided to sit on their hands and collect the taxes and reap the benefits of an out-of-control housing market. Their careless decision to wait until the last moment has resulted in an unprecedented inability for families in Toronto and the GTA and Ontario to afford homes. This budget must take action.

My question to the Deputy Premier—hopefully I can get an answer this time—is: Will this budget slash red tape to increase the housing supply in Ontario?

>>Minister Thibeault: To the Minister of Housing.

>>Minister Ballard: Thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for the question about housing affordability, which of course is on the tip of everyone's tongue these days. We certainly understand the growing concern across the GTHA regarding the booming housing market, which I can say is feeling pressured in part because of the fantastic economy that this province has created. There are about 100,000 people flocking to the GTHA every year because they're coming here for jobs and a wonderful quality of life. That has put pressure on the economy.

Later today, we'll be meeting with mayors from across the GTHA to understand and continue the dialogue with them about what tools they need to address housing affordability.

MPP Tabuns to Minister of Energy (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Tabuns: The Premier is out of touch with what the people of Ontario need. Gail, a single—

To the Acting Premier. Thank you, Speaker.

Gail, a single mom from Muskoka, wrote to the NDP to tell us she'd lost her home because her hydro bills were so high. She got behind; she just couldn't catch up. Does the Acting Premier think that someone like Gail should be punished for not being able to afford the soaring hydro bills that have come with 14 years of Liberal rule?

>>Minister Thibeault: Once again, I'm pleased to rise and talk about our fair hydro plan, because it is concerning when we do hear about individuals in this province, Mr. Speaker, that did have a hard time and are having a hard time paying their electricity bill. That's why we acted, like we did with the fair hydro plan. We did bring forward the 8% reduction and the changes to the RRRP back in the fall economic statement. We recognized that, while that did help many, there were others that actually needed more support.

That's what the fair hydro plan will do, Mr. Speaker. It's going to provide 25% reduction, on average, to families right across the province. If individuals are Hydro One R1 or R2 customers, they can see a 40% to 50% reduction, and if they're in any of the low-income brackets, there are many programs in place that will continue to help them, and I hope that they actually apply for these.

>>MPP Tabuns: Again to the Acting Premier: Gail's home in Muskoka was 1,600 square feet. She and her kids now live with her sister in Halton Hills, in a bigger home. But Gail's sister's hydro bills, at her sister's home, are lower than Gail's were because Gail had to pay rural delivery charges.

When will the Liberal government finally bring forward this plan they talk about, talk about, talk about? When will they finally bring it forward to deal with the mess in the hydro system, to deal with unfair rural hydro delivery rates?

>>Minister Thibeault: I hope the honourable member listened to my last answer because I said we're actually bringing down distribution costs for six utilities plus all Hydro One customers in R1 and R2 designations, Mr. Speaker. They're going to see a 40% to 50% reduction. That's dramatic. That is part of our fair hydro plan. It is something that we're acting on, unlike their plan that doesn't even talk about low-income individuals until the last page.

We're making sure that we're acting. We're helping all families in this province, with a special emphasis: We are putting special emphasis on helping those families that are in the rural or northern parts of our province because we recognize that they were paying a higher share of the bill, especially when it came to distribution costs. That's why we're seeing reductions of 40% to 50% on their bills.

Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, when that bill comes forward, they will vote for it.

>>MPP Tabuns: Well, you can talk about a bill forever, but you're not introducing it and we aren't seeing the action.

Gail wants to know from the Liberals: "How will rural Ontario promote business development and population growth," with hydro costs being difficult or impossible to afford?

I'd like to know what the Premier's plan is, too, since her press releases and the publicly funded radio ads are pretty short on specifics.

When, when, when will the Premier and her party deal with the unfair delivery charges that Ontario rural families and businesses are dealing with just because they're outside of cities?

>>Minister Thibeault: The summer, summer, summer is the time we will actually have that in place, Mr. Speaker.

But let's talk about being short on details—and that's their pamphlet on dealing with electricity. They rely on vague principles and this yet-to-be-determined expert panel that will sit down and actually find some savings. Apparently they're basing these on calculations that are pie-in-the-sky, with negotiations with the federal government. I asked before how those negotiations are going. They actually have no idea on how to take off one cent from bills.

We are actually making sure we're taking off 25%, and when it comes to rural and northern Ontario, we're acting with a 40% to 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker. We take no lessons from that party.

MPP Vernile to Minister of Environment & Climate Change (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Vernile: My question is for the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

This weekend, Ontario is going to celebrate its three-year anniversary of the phase-out of coal-fired power plants. This move was the single largest greenhouse gas reduction initiative completed in North America.

The elimination of coal plants has been a major factor in improving the quality of the air that we breathe. Thanks to clean air and clean energy, Ontario has saved more than \$4 billion in annual health and environmental costs. The 2016 Toronto's Vital Signs report shows premature deaths and hospitalizations as a result of air pollution have dropped by 23% and 41% respectively since 2004. We've also seen the number of smog days drop from 53 in 2005 to zero in 2015.

Speaker, could the minister please explain how the elimination of coal-fired plants puts Ontario in a competitive position?

>>Minister Murray: It's really nice—at least I know I'll get a supplemental on this one.

The electricity we consume every day is already largely carbon-free thanks in part to the early action that was taken by my friends at the Ministry of Energy. To put that into terms, that's a drop from 35 million tonnes in 2005 to only seven million tonnes in 2015, making it the largest greenhouse gas reduction ever in North American history. We, as Ontarians, should be very proud of that.

Finally, the other thing is, our coal plants were our largest source of methylmercury and a number of other contaminants. The overall health of the environment and ecosystems and the restorative impact of those closures continue to benefit Ontarians today.

>>MPP Vernile: I'd like to thank the minister for his answer. The impact of Ontario's leadership on our environment and our health is remarkable.

As the minister mentioned, eliminating coal as a source of generating electricity was a bold step. Such a large-scale shift away from pollution generation is unprecedented, and so Ontario had to carve its own path to build a cleaner generation. Today, the province's electricity generation is 90% emissions-free.

Along the way, Ontario has built a strong industry in nuclear and renewable energy.

Speaker, could the minister please give us an update on the state of electricity generation in the province since we eliminated coal?

>>Minister Murray: To the Minister of Energy.

>>Minister Thibeault: I would like to thank both the minister for his previous answer and, of course, the member for that question.

I know we've recognized that the transition off of coal and the rebuilding of our electricity system over the last decade put a strain on Ontarians' electricity costs. The fair hydro plan is addressing this by providing 25% off, on average, from electricity bills.

Meanwhile, as the member noted, we can be proud that our commitment to eliminating dirty coal has created new industries in our province, renewable industries that we know the official opposition doesn't support—and, of course, the nuclear industry, which supports tens of thousands of jobs in our province. Refurbishment of our nuclear plants will support even more. Right now, I'm happy to report that OPG's refurbishment of Darlington is both ahead of schedule and under budget.

MPP Fedeli to Finance Minister (Provincial Debt)

>>MPP Fedeli: My question is for the Minister of Finance. The government's mismanagement has resulted in the debt climbing to over \$308 billion. That leaves taxpayers on the hook for over \$11 billion in interest each year. The Auditor General tells us this debt is crowding out the services people need. We see this government closing schools and hospital beds, firing front-line health care workers and nurses. The finance minister says he will present a balanced budget. Sadly, this will only be an artificially balanced budget using the fire sale of assets and reserve funds. My question for the minister: Does he really think the people of Ontario will be fooled into thinking the budget is actually balanced?

>>Minister Sousa: The member opposite made some interesting points, and I want to reiterate them. We did choose to invest in the people of Ontario. We did choose to invest in infrastructure. We did choose to stimulate our economy and grow. And yes, we are balancing the budget this year, next year and the year after that. When he talks about debt, he misses the point completely. We have an accumulating deficit to GDP the same today as it was 25 years ago. His leader made and agreed and voted for the largest deficit in Canada's history of \$55 billion. They raised debt and doubled it in the national—well, by \$144 billion in accumulated deficits. That's what he put forward for Canada. Our debt to GDP is falling. It's improving and we are coming into balance. We're working for the people of Ontario.

>>MPP Fedeli: Back to the minister: I think he missed some of the points that I made, so let me expand on them. In my hometown of North Bay, you fired 350 front-line health care workers, including 100 nurses; 30 to 40 more will be fired this month. You closed 60 beds at our brand new hospital. It's because of your constant waste, mismanagement and scandal that—

>>MPP Fedeli: Their constant waste, mismanagement and scandals have resulted in the people of Ontario paying more and getting less. Whether you're a family or a business, life in Ontario has increasingly become unaffordable. Businesses continue to flee the province, unable to keep up with the hydro rates, the cap-and-trade grab and the red tape.

Does the minister truly believe an artificially balanced budget is going to help anyone?

>>Minister Sousa: They know a lot about artificial balances, Mr. Speaker. I think they only balanced four times all the time the Harris government was in power. The last one was bogus. It wasn't even balanced.

Furthermore, he makes reference to the cost of debt. During their time, it cost 15.4 cents for every revenue dollar raised to cover their debt. Today it's 8.4 cents because we're locking in low interest rates and we're investing. He and his party wanted to make across-the-board cuts as a solution to battling the deficit. We chose otherwise. We chose to invest in the things that matter to people. We chose not to put anybody in harm's way. We chose to grow the economy. It's working. We're balancing this year. We're balancing next year and the year after that.

April 11, 2017

MPP Tabuns to Energy Minister (Hydro rates)

>>MPP Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. Last week, Krysta wrote to the NDP to tell us about her soaring hydro bills. She lives in Nipissing, and she's on a fixed income of \$800 per month. The hydro bill she sent us was for \$450.51.

How does the Premier expect Krysta to live and pay hydro at the same time when her bills are so high?

>>Minister Thibeault: Once again, I'm very pleased to rise and talk about Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan that is coming. That's going to help individuals like the individual the honourable member mentioned.

Come this summer, once we get the legislation through this House, we could see up to 25% in reductions for families like that, for individuals like was mentioned. On top of that, if this person is a Hydro One customer or another customer of one of the other six utilities that we've identified, their distribution costs are going to come down significantly, bringing forward their rate of reduction to anywhere between 40% and 50%. That is huge relief for these types of families.

On top of that, we expanded the Ontario Electricity Support Program, adding another 50% and actually loosening the rules so more people will qualify. That is a significant saving of about \$554 on top of that.

>>MPP Tabuns: Again to the Premier: Krysta already takes advantage of the Ontario Electricity Support Program, the rural rate protection program and is exempt from being

charged for debt retirement. She still has to choose between paying her hydro bills and buying food. Clearly the Premier and her Liberal government aren't doing enough for people like Krysta.

When will the Premier stop with the partisan posturing and actually present a detailed plan in the Legislature to fix the mess she has helped to create in our hydro system?

>>Minister Thibeault: Once again, as I mentioned earlier, the Ontario Electricity Support Program that the member mentioned, which this individual has been able to take advantage of, has increased by 50%. That will be a significant savings for this family, and with the RRRP, if you put that together, these are significant savings that families are going to see and that individuals are going to see, come summer. That is when, of course, our system peaks in terms of our cost and generation, so we're going to make sure that we're helping these families.

There are other programs in place through the Ontario fair hydro plan that are actually going to help families and individuals. On top of the 25% every small business and farm is going to qualify for, we're bringing forward an affordability fund that they will be able to access that will actually help them drop their bills even further.

>>MPP Tabuns: Again to the Premier: The Premier has not tabled legislation in this House so that Ontario families and businesses know when or if relief is coming. The only thing the Premier has done to deal with exorbitant hydro rates in the province is announce that maybe, sometime in the vague future, she will burden our kids and grandkids with an additional \$40 billion in debt that they will have to pay off.

When will the Premier do something to help people like Krysta and thousands of families and businesses that are suffering under the crushing weight of their hydro bills?

>>Minister Thibeault: Once again, I'm very pleased to come and talk about what we are going to do for families and individuals like Krysta: 25% off their bills, on average, by summer; if they are RRRP customers, between 40% and 50% by summer; enhanced OESP, 50%; affordability fund, bringing that forward, up to \$200 million; on-reserve First Nation individuals seeing their distribution costs waived, an \$85 a month savings for these families—

That is very clear relief that is coming for families right across the province.

I know the honourable member used the term "vague." The only party that has a vague plan is the third party. It's a vague plan with pie-in-the-sky thinking, nothing to do to help families or low-income individuals—

MPP Clark to Energy Minister (Hydro One)

>>MPP Clark: My question is to the Premier. I have a very straightforward question for the Premier this morning: Can she tell the House who is the ombudsman at Hydro One?

>>Minister Thibeault: I know that recently there has been a change within the ombudsman department and the ombudsperson at Hydro One. One thing that Hydro One has been working very hard at is working on getting a replacement. The important thing to know is that the ombudsman office is still there, doing the job that it's supposed to be doing and ensuring that if people have concerns, they can bring those concerns forward to the ombudsman.

I had several meetings with the previous ombudsman from Hydro One, Fiona Crean. She was talking about how great this company has evolved to. Those were her words. We're going to continue to work with Hydro One, and Hydro One is going to continue to work with the ombudsman to make sure that that office plays an important role within the company.

>>MPP Clark: Back to the Premier: I've got some advice for the Premier and her minister—

A transparent and open government would never answer a question about who is the ombudsman with, "I'll get back to you," especially at a company whose track record of customer service is one horror story after another.

The former Hydro One ombudsman left over a month ago, yet her name and her picture are still on the government website, and there's no media release about her replacement. Who is this government trying to fool?

This government shamefully rewrote the Electricity Act to strip independent provincial watchdogs of their power over Hydro One, but section 48.3 of the act requires the board to have an ombudsman in place. When will the Premier and this government obey their own law?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm very pleased to once again talk about the ombudsman office at Hydro One. They have an acting ombudsman who is doing great work with the company, making sure that the office is still there doing the job it's supposed to do. The former ombudsman took another job, just like other people do. We wish her well. She did great work while she was working for Hydro One for the last year. In my last meeting with her, do you know what she said? That this company has really turned around. It is now customer-focused; it is making sure it's doing a better job in meeting the needs of its customers. They would never have acted on the winter reconnection piece that they did in the past.

That's what happens when you don't have a plan for Ontario, or if you don't have a plan on what to do—

MPP Armstrong to the Premier (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. Constituents are calling my London office to tell me that they can't afford their hydro bills. They are shocked at the rates that they're being charged, and they are desperate for relief.

One particularly heartbreaking story was from a young couple with a baby only a few months old. Because they can't afford their hydro bill, this young mom spends her days at her parents' house to save on time-of-use charges. But that hasn't worked. Their bills haven't changed.

Premier, can you imagine the frustration and the anger these young parents are feeling because they are forced to choose between paying for your government's hydro schemes or providing for their family?

>>Premier Wynne: I know that the Minister of Energy will want to speak to the specifics of our fair hydro plan, but it is exactly because of situations like the one the member opposite has articulated that we knew that even with the measures we had taken—the 8% reduction that was in place as of January 1—we needed to do more. We knew that we needed to do more, so another 17% reduction will mean that that young family will see a 25% reduction on their electricity bill come the summer. It was exactly those situations where families—people were carrying too much of a burden for investments and upgrading of a system that is going to last for generations. We were asking those people to pay now, and a disproportionate amount. We're spreading those costs over a longer period of time, and that's how a 25% reduction will be seen on those bills come September.

>>MPP Armstrong: Speaker, there is no comfort in passing on debt to the next generation.

Premier, this young family lives in a semi-detached—nothing large. They don't have electric heat, nor do they live in their own house during the day. Despite taking drastic measures, like not living in their home during the day, their hydro bills are still way too high.

Premier, you have failed young families like my constituents, and worse, you have put their ability to provide for their child at risk. When will this government take responsibility for their failed energy policies that you are forcing young families to pay for, and when will we see your new Liberal plan?

>>Minister Thibeault: It's good news for families, like what the honourable member mentioned in relation to our fair hydro plan. Up to 25%, or on average 25% will be coming to actually help families just like them, Mr. Speaker. That's good news for every family right across the province. On top of that, if this family qualifies, if they're low income, we'll make sure that they can get access to the Ontario Electricity Support

Program where they will actually see an additional 50% to help them. That's what we're making sure that we're doing: helping every single family, small business and farm in this province through the Ontario fair hydro plan.

On that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, one party has no plan, the other has a plan—vague context, Mr. Speaker—that doesn't take one cent off of anybody's bills. We're doing more than that. We're taking—

April 10, 2017

MPP Tabuns to Finance Minister (Executive Compensation)

>>MPP Tabuns: My question to the Acting Premier: People living on the minimum wage will see their paycheques increase by 1.7% this year under the Premier's pegged-to-inflation minimum wage. However, if you happen to be the CEO of Hydro One, you'll have seen your salary go up by 500%. The people who need the raise the least are getting the most, and the people who are struggling are getting the least. Does the Acting Premier see anything wrong with that?

>>Minister Sousa: In Ontario, we've had the largest job growth in the past 10 years. We now have more people working in the private sector than ever before. These are high-paying jobs, good-paying jobs. Many of the workers that the member makes reference to in a relative number of sectors in our economy are now receiving more than they ever have before.

Mr. Speaker, it was this Minister of Labour, within this caucus, who put forward an index on wages. Now, minimum wage is forever going to be increased as a function of CPI, something that that side did not support and wasn't even part of their official plans.

>>MPP Tabuns: Okay, so you're fine with that. Let's go on to the next question. It's not just the million-dollar raises that are unfair. After 14 years of letting hydro rates reach a crisis point, the Premier promised relief, but she didn't mean for everyone. Their plan doesn't apply to hospitals, large businesses or even municipalities. Why is the Premier only interested in helping some people, not everyone?

>>Minister Sousa: Ontario's prosperity, its growth, has increased. We're now leading Canada. We lead the G7. We're taking a number of steps to diversify our economy so as not to be reliant on anyone or any one commodity to ensure we advance in the new-age economy. That's high-paying jobs, good-paying jobs, stable jobs.

The member opposite seems to want to go back to the days of assembly lines and smokestacks. We can't compete in low wages, which he's trying to propose, that we're losing to other economies around the world.

We are going to support our young people, we're going to invest in our young people, we're going to invest in jobs, and we're going to invest in positions that create those jobs—unlike that member, who wants to increase our taxes and push them away.

>>MPP Tabuns: Again to the Acting Premier: The Premier's priorities don't make sense. She rubber-stamps multi-million-dollar raises for Hydro executives who don't need them and leaves people living on the minimum wage, struggling. She's promising

hydro relief, but schools and hospitals could actually see their hydro delivery charges increase under her privatized Hydro One.

She could take a step toward ending the runaway Hydro salaries and runaway bills by stopping the sell-off of Hydro One. Will she do that?

>>Minister Sousa: We're balancing the books so that we can afford to pay for and invest more in education. We're balancing the books so that we can invest more in hospitals. We're balancing the books so we can invest more in our young people, so we can create those jobs. We're balancing the books so we can ensure that businesses invest and come to Ontario—and they are, Mr. Speaker. They're creating jobs, good-paying jobs.

Stop talking down Ontario and the people of Ontario who are delivering for our province.

MPP Gates to Minister Energy Minister (Hydro rates)

>>MPP Gates: My question is to the Acting Premier. I stood up in this House many times before to try and explain to you what your hydro crisis is doing to Ontario. Manor Cleaners has 30 employees, with locations in Niagara Falls and St. Catharines. They're another example of a business struggling to afford their hydro rates. Their hydro bills in 2017 have doubled. They tell me that dry cleaners across Ontario can't raise their prices fast enough to keep up with their hydro bills. And if they do, they can't hold on to their customers, who are struggling to pay their own hydro bills.

My question to the Acting Premier: Will the government commit today to make real changes to our hydro system, to ensure that businesses in Ontario have the ability to stay open and, equally important, keep their workers employed?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you to the member for—

I'm very pleased to stand and rise and talk about how Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan is going to help 500,000 small businesses and farms right across the province.

Not knowing the specifics of the business that the honourable member mentioned, if they're a general-service business, as the 500,000 businesses right across the province are, they'll be receiving a 25% rate reduction. That is significant for small businesses right across the province.

I know we've been working with the Minister of Economic Development and Growth to also continue to have a very prosperous business climate in this province, and that's something that we're going to continue to see here in this province. Our businesses are going to grow, hire more people and create more jobs, and that's something we should all be proud of.

>>MPP Gates: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, to the minister—both ministers—that Manor Cleaners called me; I didn't call them about their hydro bill. It's absolutely disgusting that the minister would stand up and laugh at a question I'm asking about hydro when hydro in this province is a crisis. Make no mistake about it: It's disgusting and shameful that you do that. I didn't call the employer; they called me. There's a real and serious problem in the hydro system in this province.

Interjection.

>>MPP Gates: After setting the building on fire, this government wants to hand business a pail of water to put out the flames. It's not putting out the fire, and it's not stopping the closures of businesses right across the province of Ontario. I ask the Acting Premier again, will you commit to take immediate action to help small businesses in Ontario with their crushing hydro bills by stopping the sale of Hydro One and taking real action to lower hydro bills?
Interjection.

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm pleased once again to be able to rise and stand and talk about how all businesses will be getting a 25% reduction when we bring forward Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan. That is actually relief that is coming for businesses right across the province, unlike that party that puts forward a plan that's pie-in-the-sky. Many of their proposals rely on vague, yet-to-be-determined.

MPP Potts to Minister of Infrastructure (Infrastructure program funding)

>>MPP Potts: My question today is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Our government recognizes that making smart investments in public infrastructure is one of the best ways to stimulate growth in our economy, create jobs and enhance quality of life. For decades, previous governments, including both opposition parties, have failed to keep our infrastructure up to date.

We want people in every corner of the province to share in the stronger communities that we are building, whether they live in big cities or small towns. I am so proud to be a member of a government that is investing directly in communities through programs like the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, which supports priority projects in ridings across the province.

I know that our government is making an exciting announcement today regarding this year's OCIF funding. Speaker, through you to the minister, will he share the details of today's announcement with the House?

>>Minister Chiarelli: My thanks to the member from Beaches–East York. Yes, our government created the \$100-million OCIF fund to provide all communities in Ontario with a population of 100,000 or less with funding for critical projects. Every eligible municipality's allocation is reliable, formula-based funding, but they can also all apply for additional supports through OCIF's top-up component.

Today, our government is pleased to announce the approval of 55 OCIF projects worth \$60 million, bringing the number of top-up projects funded by our government to 200 since 2015.

After listening closely to stakeholders like AMO, we are also tripling the size of the program from \$100 million to \$300 million.

OCIF supports smaller municipalities in a bigger way and makes a real difference for their residents.

>>MPP Potts: My thanks to the minister for the great work he is doing building Ontario up, because addressing this infrastructure deficit is a major priority of our Premier and this side of the House.

I know that the \$60 million will go a long way to addressing municipal infrastructure needs. I also know that the changes to the structure of OCIF will maintain the program's role as a major support for Ontario's small communities. Our infrastructure investments are being made on a truly province-wide scale, with every riding benefiting from the \$160 billion this government is investing over 12 years.

While we invest in our communities, the opposition seems focused on taking down the largest infrastructure investment in Ontario. We fear, and the people of Ontario fear, that they will cancel the OCIF program should either party opposite form the next government. Speaker, through you to the minister: Would you please outline exactly what the infrastructure programs mean for Ontario's residents?

>>Minister Chiarelli: The difference between our government and the parties opposite is that we have a plan and they don't. Our plan is making a positive difference for their constituents.

The leader of the third party should know that Hamilton is eligible to receive nearly \$33 million in clean water and waste water funding, to say nothing of the \$1 billion we have committed to their LRT.

The Leader of the Opposition should know that in his riding of Simcoe North, communities will benefit from \$8 million in OCIF and clean water funding, to say nothing of the \$474 million we invested in a mental health centre in his riding.

Communities in NDP-held Timmins—James Bay will benefit from \$5 million in combined OCIF and clean water funding.

Communities in PC-held Simcoe—Grey will benefit from over \$12 million.

Our government is working extremely hard to support all of our residents in every part of this province.

April 6, 2017

MPP Smith to Energy Minister (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Smith: Speaker, good morning, and happy birthday.

My question is for the Deputy Premier this morning. Big trouble for a GTA employer: Kisko Freezies has more than 200 employees here in Toronto and saw their hydro bill go up \$100,000 last year—\$100,000. According to their president, they don't qualify for the government's hydro scheme. He said, "We get nothing back—we pay and pay." Speaker, how many more jobs is this Liberal government going to chase out of Ontario before they do something for our job creators?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and talk about our plan, the one that's actually going to help 500,000 small businesses and farms right across the province. Let's not forget, too, that the Minister of Economic Development and I were in Brampton just this morning talking about how another company is going to be saving 20%, or \$2 million, on their electricity bill. All of this is part of our Ontario fair hydro plan, a plan that is actually going to be put into effect by this summer to make sure that we can help everyone right across the province.

Unlike the party opposite, that has no plan—we heard that they once had a five-point plan and then a three-point plan. And now, Mr. Speaker, they have no plan—no plan for hydro; no plan for Ontario. We are the government that acts and helps businesses.

>>MPP Smith: Speaker, this is the government that has bungled this file like no other file that we have ever seen. And they have the audacity to stand here and expect us to clean it up for them. Their plan has so many holes in it, it's like Swiss cheese. Speaker, Kisko Freezies creates jobs here in Ontario. They actually go out there and create jobs at their suppliers as well. They source their corrugated containers, their plastic and most of their supplies right here in Ontario. But their CEO told Global News this week that “more and more businesses are going to pack up and move to the United States....”

We know there is a coalition of concerned manufacturers in Ontario hanging on by a thread, so why doesn't your latest scheme help fix that for those employers here in Ontario?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and talk about that specific company. They qualify now, Mr. Speaker, thanks to our program, because they actually have 600 kilowatts of power. We confirmed with Alectra, their electric company, that they qualify for the ICI program.

So we have a plan that's helping businesses. They have no plan. They're too busy writing hockey policy and not worrying about the people of Ontario. We are worrying about the people of Ontario. We are making sure that we are addressing this issue and helping these businesses.

We're building infrastructure—the 427. The MPP from Vaughan, the Minister of Transportation, is working hard so that this business will see access to this. We're making sure that they got access to the ICI program.

They can keep talking about hockey policy. We'll keep working for the people of Ontario.

MPP Tabuns to Energy Minister (Executive compensation)

>>MPP Tabuns: Speaker, for the second time in about a week, the Minister of Energy has defended outrageous salaries for hydro executives.

The CEO of the privatized Hydro One now makes six times the salary of his predecessor. The CEO of OPG made over \$2 million last year, even though the CEO of Hydro-Québec somehow makes do with less than a third of that.

But the Minister of Energy thinks it's okay for CEOs to extract these outrageous salaries from their customers. Is this why the minister thinks it's okay for private investors to drive up hydro bills so they can extract outrageous profits from the ratepayers of Ontario?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise and comment once again on recognizing that—yes, Mr. Speaker, we've all acknowledged that these are high salaries. But when it comes to OPG, the one individual that the honourable member mentioned is the individual who is actually running our nuclear facilities. We want to ensure that we have the best in the world to make sure that our nuclear facilities stay safe. We also want to

ensure that our nuclear facilities in refurbishment right now at Darlington are on time and on budget. The work that our executive team at OPG is doing is keeping them ahead of schedule and under budget. That's fantastic news because all of those savings go back to ratepayers.

When we're talking about salaries, we're not even talking about a cent that would be on anybody's bills. We're looking at making sure that we're taking 25% off all bills, and we're going to do that, come summer.

>>MPP Tabuns: Back to the Minister of Energy: The values of those who think these outrageous CEO salaries are acceptable are the same values of those who think it's acceptable to drive hydro bills up to the point where people have difficulty paying them. Ontario used to have a hydro system that reflected our public values, but the PCs and the Liberals have replaced this with a system based on different values: a system based on private profit, not public good.

Will the minister restore the public values of Ontario's hydro system and stop the sell-off of Hydro One?

>>Minister Thibeault: The system that he's talking about, Mr. Speaker, when they were in power and when the Conservatives were in power—their system—they let it actually disintegrate. They let it fall apart. We had to invest \$50 billion—let me say that again, \$50 billion—to ensure that we have a reliable system. Now they want to go back to the way it was. It's like they want to be like the PCs and bring back coal.

We actually eliminated coal. That is like taking seven million cars off the road, investing—

This government is not looking back. This government is looking forward. We're creating jobs. We're building Ontario up. We're lowering electricity bills for everyone. We won't look to the past, like our opposition parties.

MPP McNaughton to Energy Minister(Hydro charges)

>>MPP McNaughton: My question this morning is to the energy minister. A very sad story from my riding: A constituent in the town of Glencoe lost their house to a fire on January 8 of this year. But what followed in February was salt in the wound: a hydro bill for delivery of absolutely no energy after the removal of the hydro meter in the amount of \$35.

But Speaker, what really set off alarm bells was the following month, when this constituent received yet another bill, this time for \$193.55, which stated that Hydro One read the meter on February 28, 2017. To be clear, Hydro One claimed to have read a meter that was not there and presented a bill on the basis of this fictitious reading.

Speaker, does the Liberal government think it's right to charge someone for hydro whose house was burned down and no longer exists?

>>Minister Thibeault: As I was saying, that's awful for that family. I know it must be difficult for them to be going through that. One of the things that I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, is that they follow up with Hydro One, because Hydro One has been correcting those issues. That's the one thing that they've been doing—

That's the one thing they have been doing, Mr. Speaker: enhancing their customer service. When you hear things like this, of course no one agrees with it. That's why Hydro One has been acting quickly to ensure that they can fix and correct issues like this.

>>MPP McNaughton: Back to the energy minister: The bill that followed the fake meter reading isn't just an issue for this constituent; it actually has costs for all taxpayers in Ontario as well. Through the Ontario Electricity Support Program, taxpayers were on the hook for almost \$100 on top of the almost \$200 the ratepayer was charged.

How can this Liberal government expect people to trust that energy prices are fair for families and businesses when people are being told that their distributor is reading a meter that no longer exists, executive salaries are through the roof, and the cost of cap-and-trade is hidden?

Once again, we feel for that family and, of course, hope everything is working well for that family.

Again, as I'll say, Hydro One's new management team recognized in the past that their customer service needed improvement. The Ombudsman actually brought forward many recommendations that the Hydro One management team and Hydro One staff have been acting upon.

I again would encourage my friend opposite to have that family call Hydro One immediately. That is something that will be rectified as quickly as possible because it is one of the important things that Hydro One is doing. The team there is very proud to say that they're working to change that dynamic, and I would hope that he tells them to follow up on that.

April 5, 2017

PC Leader Brown to the Premier (Executive Compensation Hydro One)

>>PC Leader Brown: My question is for the Premier. From April 29, 2015: "Any decision of that ... magnitude would require a two-thirds majority of the Hydro One board of directors, which means that having 40% ownership protects us." Who said that? The current Premier of Ontario.

October 20, 2015: "With 40% ownership of the board, that would require that the people of Ontario have a say." Who said that? The Premier.

October 28, 2015: "Will there be the ability of the government to retain control over major decisions because of that 40% ownership? Yes." That's the Premier again.

All of these were said by the Premier.

So, Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is very clear. The Premier has always maintained that with this share, the government will have control of Hydro One's big decisions. These are the Premier's words. Is that still the case today?

>>Premier Wynne: Yes, it is.

>>MPP Brown: Again to the Premier: The Premier is saying that we have control of Hydro One. She's on the record numerous times saying that. Yet when we ask about

the Hydro One executive salaries, the government's response is, "We have no control. We have no say. This is a private company."

You can't have it both ways. The Premier is on record saying that we'll retain control. She pitched that to Ontarians under her fire sale of Hydro One, and now we have salaries that, frankly, are offensive. We have multi-million dollar salaries, we've got a millionaires' club of senior executives at Hydro One, and the government is saying they have nothing to do with it.

They are speaking out of both sides of their mouth. They can't have it both ways. My question is—yes or no—given the fact that you've said you have control, will you rein in these offensive executive salaries?

>>Minister Sousa: As the member opposite probably knows, when we put the prospectus out, it was very clear as to what those salaries would be. We were very transparent and open as to what would occur going forward. We recognized that we wanted the company to be more responsive to consumers, ensuring that they relate better to the customers and the rate base.

They've been doing so. The company has now improved dramatically since its inception. They attracted some of the brightest and the smartest out there to enable us to attract greater value for this company, which ultimately benefits all Ontarians going forward—including our ability now to reduce rates by 25%.

The salaries were fully disclosed last year—before today.

>>MPP Brown: Again to the Premier, I did not get an answer. The Premier is on the record that "the people of Ontario will retain de facto control of Hydro One."

The Premier promised Ontarians that we'd have control over Hydro One. Yet here we are seeing offensive salaries—\$4.5 million as a salary is appropriate? Give me a break. It's not. This government is trying to hide from it. They promised us control. They're walking away from that.

It's not too late to do the right thing. You still have a majority of the shares. You still have control, if you actually meant what you said.

My question is this: Yes or no, will you rein in these offensive executive salaries that are completely out of context with the rest of the country, completely out of context with what people make? It's too much. It's wrong. The Premier needs to clean this up.

>>Minister Sousa: It's critical that this corporation do its utmost to provide greater value for the ratepayers and for the people of Ontario. That is what is occurring, because a net value to the ratepayers and the shareholders, which, as the member opposite has rightly noted, is the province of Ontario—it will always be the majority shareholder, will always have the largest say. We do have the ability of gaining more value from this corporation and to allow the operator to do its job effectively and in a competitive manner.

Now we have an opportunity to foster consolidations around the industry. There are 72 competitors in Ontario distributing hydro. We need them all to do better. This corporation is doing just that.

NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier (Executive compensation Hydro One)

>>MPP Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Does the Premier believe it's fair for Hydro One to jack up delivery rates by 20% at the same time as hydro executives get a multi-million dollar raise?

>>Premier Wynne: We are reducing people's hydro bills around this province by 25%. There is already an 8% reduction in place, and on top of that, another 17%. We recognize that people across the province need help with their electricity bills. We recognize that with the 8%, that was not enough; there needed to be more. We also recognize that people outside of dense urban areas, so in more remote and rural areas, need more support. So they will see not a 25% reduction, but in some instances, a 40% or 50% reduction. That is going to happen this summer. Those are real impacts of the plan that we've brought forward that will help people in their lives to make sure they can pay their bills and look after their families. That's the step that we are taking.

>> MPP Horwath: Yesterday, the Premier and her Minister of Energy defended the Hydro One CEO's 500% salary increase, saying it was because they introduced e-billing. I'm not sure if that was a joke or not, Speaker, because—let's be honest—the biggest news coming out of Hydro One is that they want to have an increase of delivery rates by 20%. That's the biggest news coming out of Hydro One. Will the Premier tell Ontario families whether she thinks Hydro One's CEO should be getting a 500% raise?

>>Premier Wynne: As I have said many times, I know that these are high salaries; I understand that. The focus of our initiative has been on reducing people's hydro bills, giving them a break, because we recognize that the building that we have done, the investments that had to be made because the electricity system was in shambles, that there's a cost associated with those. So we've been removing costs from the electricity system. We recognize that wasn't enough, and so this summer, people will see a 25% reduction on their electricity bills, and outside of the urban areas in more remote and rural areas, a 40% to 50% reduction. We understand that that's what people need. That's the plan that we've brought forward, and that's what we're implementing.

>>MPP Horwath: Speaker, there is no plan, but it sounds like a bouncing ball. First it was 17%, then 25%, now it's 40% or 50%. I don't think a single Ontarian believes this government.

Hydro One has applied to jack up delivery rates by 20% at the same time that hydro executives get multi-million dollar raises. The Premier and her Minister of Energy don't seem to have a problem with this at all.

When will the Premier stop advocating for the 1% and start advocating for the 99%?

>>Premier Wynne: The 99% are exactly who are going to see a 25% reduction. If you add 17% and 8%, you get 25%. If you look at distribution charges that are going to be brought down in the remote and rural areas, you get that 25% up to 40% or 50%. That's how those numbers have been calculated, because those are the reductions that people are going to see on their electricity bills.

The reality is that we recognize that the costs of the investments that we have made in an electricity system that was in shambles, was not reliable and was not clean—that there was a cost associated with that. That's why people will see those reductions, come summer.

MPP Fife to Minister Thibeault (Executive compensation)

>>MPP Fife: My question is to the Premier. The CEO of OPG earned more than \$2 million in total compensation last year, not the \$1.2 million that was stated on the sunshine list. The government's gradual thawing of public sector executive pay allowed the CEO to walk away with over \$2 million in salary, bonuses and pension money, and almost \$40,000 in other pay. That \$40,000 is what most young people in this province would be thrilled to earn. They face stagnant wages. How can this Premier justify these executive salaries to the struggling young people of this province?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm pleased once again to rise and speak to the great work that OPG is doing in our province, making sure that we have affordable power that's also clean. I know that on paper those salaries do look very large, but let's not forget that these individuals are nuclear technical experts. The comparators that are used make sure that they're not the highest-paid in this sector, but they're also not the lowest-paid in this sector.

We also want to ensure that our nuclear facilities are run by the best—that our nuclear facilities are run by the best people to ensure the safety and health of everyone in the province. That's what the executive is doing at OPG.

>>MPP Fife: Again to the Premier: These high salaries, bonuses and pension perks are indefensible. They are not just high on paper; they're high in the real world, which is the province of Ontario.

Does the Premier understand that a whole generation in this province is struggling with part-time, contract and unstable work? They're not getting ahead; they are barely treading water.

A new report out today shows that Ontario has the second-worst economy for young people in the country. In fact, “No province reports a decline in full-time earnings since 2003 except Ontario.” This means young Ontarians are working for less money than their parents, at a time of skyrocketing rents and hydro costs.

When is this government actually going to do something and make life more affordable for the people of this province?

>>Minister Thibeault: Once again, I do acknowledge that these salaries are high, but these are our nuclear technical experts who are keeping our facilities operating at high safety standards, making sure that all health and safety standards are being met, and making sure that we have power right across this province.

But when it comes to making sure that people have affordable lifestyles, that’s what we’ve done with our fair hydro plan. Bringing forward a plan with a 25% reduction—we worked with the experts at OPG to ensure we can find ways to bring down our rates. A 25% reduction for all families, small businesses and farms right across the province is extremely—

It is something that we’re very proud to bring forward, our Ontario fair hydro plan, which is helping families and businesses right across the province.

MPP Fedeli to Minister Thibeault (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Fedeli: My question is for the Minister of Energy. On the weekend, I spoke with the executives of Legion Branch 23 in North Bay. Their hydro bill had climbed from \$38,000 to over \$48,000. That’s despite converting to LEDs, changing the ballasts, and doing everything else they were advised to do.

Preston Quirt, Bill Wilkins and Jim Thompson told me that “hydro has broken our backs.” They told me they were “forced into bankruptcy because of their hydro bills.” Eventually, the Legion was forced to sell their building. They’re a prime example of how this government’s failed energy policies are hurting communities across Ontario and creating hydro horror stories.

I ask the minister: Will the government put a stop to their costly vanity ads and address the real hydro crisis they created in Ontario?

>>Minister Thibeault: I want to thank the member for the question and for highlighting some of the organizations in this province that are having a difficult time. That’s why we acted with the Ontario fair hydro plan. Organizations like Legions and many other institutions that we all have in our ridings will see this 25% reduction. That’s why we brought forward this plan, to actually help those organizations.

I’m hoping that the member actually talked about what they would do as a party if they ever had the opportunity to bring forward a plan. But, Mr. Speaker, they have no plan. They have no idea on the system. All they did was allow the system to deteriorate for

decades. Under our government, we've rebuilt the system to make sure that we have power in northern Ontario, that we now have an affordable plan that will help Legions right across the province.

>>MPP Fedeli: Back to the minister: He obviously missed the point that the Legion was forced to sell their building. They're gone.

Preston, Billy and Jim told me, "This hurts us; we had to lay off staff ... and it's hydro that did it." They can no longer support their pipe band. They can no longer support their track and field grants that helped so many area men and women to make it to the Olympics. They can no longer have a hall to give out for charity events. They can no longer properly take care of their vets, and they told me that's what hurts them the most. They want to "lay the blame where it lies—and that's with their hydro bill." Proud ownership of the Legion Branch 23 building is nothing but a distant memory today.

Our party has been sharing these tragic hydro stories at question period—mostly to heckling. How many more Legions, rinks and restaurants need to close before this minister takes any action?

>>Minister Thibeault: Long before my arrival in this ministry this government took action on building a system to ensure that we have a clean system and a reliable system, something that they didn't do when they were in power. They actually froze rates to make sure that there was no investment in the system. We invested \$50 billion to make sure that we have a clean system, a green system and a reliable system.

The fair hydro plan coming forward will help Legions. It will help curling clubs. It will help 500,000 small businesses and families. What we are doing is making sure our fair hydro plan will actually benefit everyone in this province.

They don't have a plan. They don't even have time to consider one. The only thing that leader can do is pen a letter about saving the NHL and the Olympics.

MPP Hatfield to Minister Thibeault (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Hatfield: My question this morning is for the Premier. Good morning, Premier. I have a sad and an unbelievable story for you. My constituent Larry Bruner is on Ontario Works. He gets the max, \$706 a month. His rent is \$406. He has to pay back \$35.30 as part of an overpayment, so that leaves him with \$264.70 a month to live on. But his hydro bill has gone up to \$273.40, so he's \$8.70 in the hole before he even thinks about how he's going to get anything to eat or pay any other bills.

Speaker, does this government still believe their flawed energy policies are going to make life easier for everyone in Ontario?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'd like to thank the member for bringing forward that question. I would like to maybe talk with the MPP afterwards to see if there's anything we can do to try and help this individual, because I don't know all of the circumstances that relate to

that. But there are programs that are in place to actually help individuals like that. That's why we brought forward the Ontario Electricity Support Program, to help individuals like that.

We are working with the Ministry of Community and Social Services to ensure that all OW clients get that reimbursement right away. And we're actually working with the CRA to ensure that there is no requirement for a wet signature, because we do want to see those rebates go to those individuals as quickly as they can. It is in place to help individuals, just like what the member opposite was talking about.

>>MPP Hatfield: The rising cost of hydro is fast outpacing any increases people may get on Ontario Works or the ODSP. Even with a 17% cut to hydro bills that's coming sometime next summer, it would leave Larry \$37.78 to live on for the month. That's \$1.26 a day—\$1.26 a day to live on after your 17% cut that you say is coming sometime next summer.

Speaker, what's it going to take to get this government to take better care of people like Larry Bruner, people who need their help the most?

>>Minister Thibeault: Once again, I thank the member for the question and for highlighting these issues.

That's why we acted with the fair hydro plan. The fair hydro plan is going to be that 25% reduction by this summer. We're going to make sure that individuals who are on OW and are most vulnerable actually will see that OESP program, the Ontario Electricity Support Program that I talked about in my previous answer—we've increased that by 50%.

Then on top of that, we're actually allowing more individuals to qualify for this program, to ensure that they can get these savings back into their pockets.

We had to, as I said before, invest in our system, and we recognize that that cost money. That's why we're now making sure that the fair hydro plan will bring forward a 25% reduction for everybody across the province.

April 4, 2017

NDP Leader Horwath to Minister Thibeault (Executive Compensation Hydro One)

>>NDP Leader Horwath: My question is for the Acting Premier. Hydro One is applying to increase the cost of delivery by nearly 20% at the same time as they give senior executives massive raises, including a 500% increase for the CEO. Does the Acting Premier think this is right?

>>Minister Thibeault: When it comes to the Hydro One rate application, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that we're going to be holding all of our increases to the rate of inflation. When we have our fair hydro plan coming into effect, our government is lowering those bills by 25%. We will ensure that we achieve this reduction no matter the outcome of this application.

In fact, Hydro One's rural customers will be seeing even greater reductions from our fair hydro plan. We will be expanding the support to those customers facing some of the highest delivery costs in the province, including Hydro One's rural customers. They will be seeing a reduction between 40% and 50% on their bills, Mr. Speaker. That is significant for those families. We will achieve this, as we said, no matter the outcome of this application.

>>MPP Horwath: Hydro One is applying for a nearly 20% increase while they give their senior executives multi-million-dollar raises. The Liberals promised that privatizing Hydro One would mean lower bills, Speaker. That promise was total nonsense. Hydro bills are sky-high and still rising. Hydro One is applying for delivery cost increases of nearly 20%.

Will the Liberal government do what is right, stop the sell-off of Hydro One today and stop rewarding executives for jacking up hydro bills?

>>Minister Thibeault: Again, let's talk about what this executive has done with Hydro One over the last year. They've actually saved \$60 million, and that leads directly back to ratepayers, by lowering bills. They've also given customers choice with billing cycles, helping them to better manage their bills, and they've introduced e-billing, working towards mobile billing as well. They ended the practice of security deposits for new customers and, of course, introduced a voluntary ban on winter disconnections. That is something that they've done as they have become a customer-focused business.

We've also seen, through our fair hydro plan and working with Hydro One, a 40% to 50% reduction that will be seen for all of our rural and northern communities, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Horwath: Anyone can see that the privatization of Hydro One has been a disaster. According to the FAO, it's increasing the province's debt. It means bills are much higher and delivery cost increases are going to go up by 20%, all to pay for bigger executive paycheques and shareholder profits. This is exactly why 80% of the people of Ontario want to keep Hydro One public.

Will the government admit that this has been a huge mistake, and stop the privatization before it's too late?

>>MPP Thibeault: The criticism of the NDP's position with Hydro One doesn't just come from us. There are also many others out there. Tim Kiladze of the Globe and Mail calls the belief that ownership of utilities in Ontario affects rates as one of the biggest

misconceptions about electricity. Martin Regg Cohn agrees that “Hydro One can only charge what the OEB deems reasonable.” Even Brady Yauch, an economist at the Consumer Policy Institute and a frequent government critic, calls the idea that privatization increases rates “a straw man.”

One of the things that we will continue to do on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, is invest in this province by building infrastructure, by building roads, by building bridges, something that they would not do because they have no idea how to pay for it. Just like their plan on electricity, it's pie in the sky. We have a plan that works. We have a system that's working and we're building infrastructure in Ontario.

NDP Leader Horwath to Energy Minister (Executive compensation Hydro One)

>>NDP Leader Horwath: My next question is also for the Acting Premier. The Premier and the Liberal government took no time at all to sign off on a nearly \$5-million salary for the CEO of Hydro One, but the government has spent two years trying to figure out if a working mom should be able to take a sick day without losing a day's pay—or worse, being fired.

Can the government explain why the CEO of Hydro One gets a 500% raise, but people in Ontario could still be fired for getting sick?

>>Minister Thibeault: When it comes to our agency executive compensation, our government strongly believes in ensuring that public salaries are fair to employees but also reasonable to the public purse. This isn't just talk. We've demonstrated this commitment time and again. That's why we froze all salaries across the broader public sector in 2012, and that's why we've implemented a new framework designed to test the fairness of public salaries.

Ontario is now approaching the end of the planned salary freeze, but we're continuing to keep a strict eye on our agencies. Salaries will remain frozen until agencies comply with our framework. Just like we did with the colleges, we're going to send agencies back to the drawing board if we're not satisfied. This includes agencies within my ministry. Work is under way to ensure that these frameworks and the remaining agencies—

>>MPP Horwath: There is no reason a woman should take home less pay than a man doing the same work. People should be able to have their work schedule so that they can plan their lives. People who are employees should be recognized as employees, with the rights that come along with that. And after two years of study, nobody knows where the Liberals stand. It's a stark contrast to a 500% raise for the Hydro One CEO and \$11 million in pay for just five well-heeled executives at the new privatized Hydro One.

Can the Acting Premier explain to people why her and her government's priority is million-dollar raises for the bosses at Hydro One while everyone else is still waiting for action on minimum wage and decent jobs?

>>Minister Thibeault: Minister of Labour.

>>Minister Flynn: Thank you to the honourable member for the question. Certainly, there are a number of issues that are facing the workplaces in Ontario today, and this government is meeting them head-on. Never in the history of this province has anybody ever looked at the Employment Standards Act and the Labour Relations Act at the same time. We've gone out and done that.

We've talked with organized labour. We've talked with business. We've talked with advocates. We've talked with employees themselves. We've talked with people as to how we should close the gender wage gap. I don't think there's a person in this House, Speaker, who doesn't realize that the gender wage gap unfairly disadvantages women across Ontario and across every other jurisdiction. This applies to government agencies, this applies to government itself, and it applies to the private sector and non-profits.

We're prepared to take these issues head-on. We've got a group that's advising us on the gender wage gap—

There are people who like to talk about this issue; this government is going to do something about it.

>>MPP Horwath: Speaker, for 14 years the quality of work has steadily eroded under this government's watch—steadily. Temp agencies have proliferated under this government's watch here in Ontario.

You know what, Speaker? Governing is about priorities. Ontarians are concerned to see that the Liberal priority, once again, is a few powerful people at the top. And regular families are waiting for answers, and waiting for answers again. Will the government start getting the basics right, stop the raises for Hydro One executives, and raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour?

>>Minister Flynn: The minimum wage in the province of Ontario has been pegged to inflation for a number of years now. We went out and we talked to people. We talked to the people in the province of Ontario. We talked to business. We talked to labour. We talked to poverty advocates. We talked to those people who represent people who are living at the lower income level. We asked them, "What is the best process to put in place to ensure that the minimum wage in the province of Ontario keeps pace with inflation?"

They gave us advice. They said, "Set the minimum wage rate in April of the year and introduce it in October." Advocates wanted certainty. They wanted security. Business wanted flexibility.

We stood up for people who earn minimum wage in the province of Ontario. At a time when they were needed the most, the NDP sat on their hands and did nothing for the people of the province of Ontario.

April 3, 2017

PC Leader Brown to the Premier (Executive Compensation)

>>PC Leader Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Over 123,000 people were on the sunshine list, but there were untold thousands more missing, and some would have been at the very top of that list.

Why did this government choose to hide the salaries of Hydro One's highly paid executives? Are there any more members of this millionaires' club? I'm sure there are. We've seen that in the top five salaries that were required to be released. How many more millionaires from Hydro One did this government hide?

>>Premier Wynne: If the Leader of the Opposition is asking how many and how much people are earning in the private sector, in every publicly traded company and every corporation around the province—if that's what he's asking, and he thinks there should be legislation that would go beyond what is already required in terms of disclosure, I think he should say that. I think he knows that Hydro One has moved into being a publicly traded company.

I know that these salaries are high. I know that they're much higher than the vast majority of Ontarians'. I also know that people are struggling with their electricity bills. That's why we have a plan. That's why we are going to reduce people's electricity bills by 25%. We're actually taking action because we recognize that people are challenged across the province.

>>MPP Brown: The Premier can't have it both ways. The government still has the majority of shares of Hydro One. What they have allowed to happen with these out-of-control salaries is wrong. The Premier knows it's wrong: \$4.5 million for the CEO; \$2.9 million for the executive vice-president; \$1.7 million paid to the chief financial officer; \$1.4 million paid to the chief operating officer; and \$1.2 million to another executive vice-president. This millionaires' club at Hydro One that the Premier has created is wrong.

Everyone in Ontario knows these paycheques are too much. Mr. Speaker, through you, I'm asking the Premier to do the right thing while they still have the majority of the shares and rein in these offensive executive salaries.

>>Premier Wynne: I really do understand why the Leader of the Opposition is taking this track: because he has no plan and no idea how he would reduce electricity bills. As I said, I know these salaries are high. We know that people are struggling with electricity bills. That's why we are going to reduce people's hydro bills. We remain committed to continued regulation of Hydro One. We made that quite clear from the outset. Hydro One has now transitioned into a publicly traded company. It's not a government agency. I would think that the Leader of the Opposition would understand that.

Hydro One has made changes. In fact, in the first year of their going public, they've actually found \$60 million in savings. What's happening is that Hydro One is becoming a better company. We knew that that was going to happen. They are publicly traded and they are regulated by the rules for publicly traded companies.

>>MPP Brown: Again to the Premier: In the entire sunshine list, with 123,000 names on it, only two people topped \$1 million. Hydro One has five senior executives making \$1 million, and that is only the ones we know about, the ones that the government hasn't hidden. There could be untold others in this millionaires' club.

And we have the Premier, who still has majority control, trying to have it both ways. She has allowed these salaries. The Premier knows that she could rein this in, but instead of actually taking responsibility, she's blaming others. We heard one minister blame GO train riders who couldn't understand, and now the Premier is trying to blame the opposition for salaries that she handed out, for salaries that she approved. They're the government. They've created this mess. Do the right thing and rein in these offensive executive salaries.

>>Premier Wynne: Minister of Energy.

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and address this subject. As the Premier mentioned, and as the opposition doesn't seem to know, Hydro One is now a publicly traded company. The decisions over compensation are not made by the government. But let's put some context into this, Mr. Speaker. The executive salaries at Hydro One—
Interjections.

>>Minister Thibeault: Let's have some context here. The executive salaries—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I can get up and down. I'm still healthy enough. Finish, please.

>>Minister Thibeault: The executive salaries at Hydro One make about 0.1% of their total budget. Even if the member opposite cut these salaries in half, that wouldn't take one cent off of a single customer's bill.

That just shows that they have absolutely no plan and no idea on what to do in the electricity sector. Our 25% reduction, on average, will make sure we help every small business, family and farm—

NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier (Executive compensation)

>>MPP Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The sunshine list was released on Friday, and there was one very notable company name that was not on it. That was Hydro One. We know that the Hydro One CEO raked in a salary of \$4.5 million in 2016, a 500% increase from the last time the CEO's salary appeared on the sunshine list. Can the Premier tell Ontarians why her priority seems to be protecting the salaries and anonymity of the people at the top, instead of regular Ontario families and businesses that are struggling just to get by?

>>Premier Wynne: My priority is to make sure that everyone in this province gets relief on their hydro bills: a 25% reduction for every family in this province who pay electricity bills in their homes, relief for those small mom-and-pop shops on main streets in communities, relief for farmers. We recognize—

We recognize that there are people across the province who need that relief, which is exactly why we're putting a plan in place that actually will reduce people's electricity bills. People will see those reductions come the summer. That is in direct response to people's concerns about their ability to pay their electricity bills.

>>MPP Horwath: By privatizing Hydro One, Premier Wynne ensured three things: that those at the top can make massive salaries, that the rest of us will pay massive electricity bills and that she could throw a blanket of secrecy over the whole mess. What does the Premier have to say to Ontarians who are struggling to keep up with their hydro bills and are outraged by her continued insistence on selling off Hydro One, while hiding how much top executives are being paid?

>>Premier Wynne: Let me once again be very, very clear. I know that the leader of the third party loves to conflate these issues, but changing the direction on broadening the ownership of Hydro One would not take one cent off one electricity bill anywhere in this province, as much as the leader of the third party would like to pretend that that was the case—not one cent, not off one electricity bill.

We have brought forward a strategy, a plan, that is going to take people's bills down—a 25% reduction across the province—because we recognize that people need that support. The investments that we have made in the electricity system to make it clean, to make it reliable, have a cost associated with them.

We are going to reduce people's bills, on top of the 8% that people have already seen, by another 17%, because we know that they need that support.

>>MPP Horwath: It is disgusting that while people are suffering and some can't even pay their hydro bills, we have executives at public utilities raking in millions. The CEO of OPG was the highest-paid public employee last year, and the CEO of Hydro One made over \$4 million.

In Montreal, Bombardier, a private company, listened to public pressure and is holding off on massive pay increases for the company's top staff after hundreds of Quebecers rallied outside the company's headquarters.

Here in Ontario, people are equally outraged by the planned pay hikes for Hydro One's CEO, especially amid soaring hydro bills. Why won't the Premier do the right thing and rein in the salaries of the executives at Hydro One?

>>Premier Wynne: Let me just say again that I recognize that people across the province are struggling with their electricity bills, which is exactly why the fair hydro plan will reduce people's electricity bills by 25%. That is the context within which we are having this conversation.

We have a plan that we have brought forward that will reduce people's bills substantially. In more rural and remote communities, people will see a reduction of 40%

to 50%. We know that people need that support. We know that they need those reductions.

At the same time, the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One is directly related to our ability to invest in infrastructure—transit and transportation infrastructure—that the leader of the third party does not support but which is necessary to the well-being of this province.

We are going to continue on that path. Hydro One has found \$60 million in efficiencies. They are a better-run company, and people will see reductions on their electricity bills this summer.

NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier (Executive compensation)

>>MPP Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. The problem the Premier has is that nobody believes her anymore. Nobody believes anything this Premier says anymore.

The Wynne government's priorities are backwards. It's not just in the energy sector; it's health care too. Six of the top 10 highest-paid public employees in 2016 were hospital CEOs. Health care dollars should make it to bedsides, not stop at the corner offices. Ontarians need health care that they can count on, and they won't get it if the Premier continues to allow these exorbitant salaries while also allowing hospital hydro bills to soar.

When will she finally put patients' needs first, stop her ridiculous, unwanted sell-off of Hydro One, and cap hospital CEO salaries so that public money actually goes to patient care?

>>Minister Hoskins: I think all of us appreciate, in the first instance, that hospitals are independent corporations. But we expect, as we do across government, that when they make decisions with regard to allocation of public funds, they take into consideration the opportunity and responsibility to allocate as much as possible towards front-line care, that high quality of care that they provide.

It's no different than in our hospitals. That's why I'm particularly proud that we also, as a government, passed the Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act. It sets out certain parameters and expectations that we do have.

But we need to recognize that we need to provide our hospitals with the ability, as independent corporations, to manage their affairs so that they are able to truly provide the highest quality of care and allocate resources responsibly to that effect.

>>MPP Horwath: The sunshine list also grew yet again this year, but because of her wrong-headed decision to sell off Hydro One, the salaries of the executives are hidden from the public. Thanks to the Premier's meddling, we don't have any idea how much public money was spent on salaries at Hydro One.

How can the Premier claim to care about the mess that she has created in our public hydro system if she won't even open the books at Hydro One? What is this Premier afraid of?

>>Minister Thibeault: I know, as the Premier said, our government strongly believes in ensuring that public salaries are fair to employees but also reasonable to the public purse.

When it comes to Hydro One and OPG, following the process that is laid out in our government's framework, OPG sought appropriate comparators set for compensation at a level that is restrained but competitive for that industry.

I understand that the salaries at OPG can seem surprising. It is important to remember some key facts, Mr. Speaker: These are experts—technical, nuclear experts—and we want these operators in our plants to be the best in the world.

The most recent compensation frameworks for OPG's nuclear leadership team reflect performance initiatives paid out only if the company attains certain goals during refurbishment, which, I'd like to say right now, is ahead of schedule and under budget because of the dynamic team that we have at OPG.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

>>MPP Horwath: Speaker, only a Liberal cabinet minister would say million-dollar salaries are "restrained." Only a Liberal cabinet minister would have the gall to say that. The sunshine list this year reminds Ontarians that this Premier and her government are only out for themselves and those at the top. She has refused to disclose salaries at Hydro One, even though the government has yet to finish its sell-off. She's allowing millions to be funnelled to top hospital executives while Ontarians get less and less front-line health care.

Will the Premier wake up and realize that the people of Ontario need a leader who will fight for them, not just allow those at the top to rake in millions while protected by a veil of secrecy that she has thrown over her unpopular decisions?

>>Minister Thibeault: Again, we recognize that we brought forward a framework to help keep salaries restrained, Mr. Speaker.

Talking about Hydro One, in that time since we've broadened the ownership of Hydro One, they have become a better-run company—they sure have. It's providing better service and better value, both to its customers and to the province. Just a few of the customer initiatives they've taken out in the last few months:

—introduced more active customer communication, calling customers directly with issues;

—introducing a voluntary ban on winter disconnections;

—giving customers choice with their billing cycles, helping them to manage their bills better;

—introducing e-billing and working towards mobile billing; and

—ending the practice of security deposits for new customers.

Last year, that executive group saved \$60 million.

PC Leader Brown to the Premier (Executive compensation)

>>MPP Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Over 123,000 people were on the sunshine list, but there were untold thousands more missing, and some would have been at the very top of that list.

Why did this government choose to hide the salaries of Hydro One's highly paid executives? Are there any more members of this millionaires' club? I'm sure there are. We've seen that in the top five salaries that were required to be released. How many more millionaires from Hydro One did this government hide?

>>Premier Wynne: If the Leader of the Opposition is asking how many and how much people are earning in the private sector, in every publicly traded company and every corporation around the province—if that's what he's asking, and he thinks there should be legislation that would go beyond what is already required in terms of disclosure, I think he should say that. I think he knows that Hydro One has moved into being a publicly traded company.

I know that these salaries are high. I know that they're much higher than the vast majority of Ontarians'. I also know that people are struggling with their electricity bills. That's why we have a plan. That's why we are going to reduce people's electricity bills by 25%. We're actually taking action because we recognize that people are challenged across the province.

>>MPP Brown: The Premier can't have it both ways. The government still has the majority of shares of Hydro One. What they have allowed to happen with these out-of-control salaries is wrong. The Premier knows it's wrong: \$4.5 million for the CEO; \$2.9 million for the executive vice-president; \$1.7 million paid to the chief financial officer; \$1.4 million paid to the chief operating officer; and \$1.2 million to another executive vice-president. This millionaires' club at Hydro One that the Premier has created is wrong.

Everyone in Ontario knows these paycheques are too much. Mr. Speaker, through you, I'm asking the Premier to do the right thing while they still have the majority of the shares and rein in these offensive executive salaries.

>>Premier Wynne: I really do understand why the Leader of the Opposition is taking this track: because he has no plan and no idea how he would reduce electricity bills. As I said, I know these salaries are high. We know that people are struggling with electricity bills. That's why we are going to reduce people's hydro bills. We remain committed to continued regulation of Hydro One. We made that quite clear from the outset. Hydro One has now transitioned into a publicly traded company. It's not a government agency. I would think that the Leader of the Opposition would understand that.

Hydro One has made changes. In fact, in the first year of their going public, they've actually found \$60 million in savings. What's happening is that Hydro One is becoming a better company. We knew that that was going to happen. They are publicly traded and they are regulated by the rules for publicly traded companies.

>>MPP Brown: Again to the Premier: In the entire sunshine list, with 123,000 names on it, only two people topped \$1 million. Hydro One has five senior executives making \$1 million, and that is only the ones we know about, the ones that the government hasn't hidden. There could be untold others in this millionaires' club.

And we have the Premier, who still has majority control, trying to have it both ways. She has allowed these salaries. The Premier knows that she could rein this in, but instead of actually taking responsibility, she's blaming others. We heard one minister blame GO train riders who couldn't understand, and now the Premier is trying to blame the opposition for salaries that she handed out, for salaries that she approved. They're the government. They've created this mess. Do the right thing and rein in these offensive executive salaries.

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and address this subject. As the Premier mentioned, and as the opposition doesn't seem to know, Hydro One is now a publicly traded company. The decisions over compensation are not made by the government. But let's put some context into this, Mr. Speaker. The executive salaries at Hydro One—Let's have some context here. The executive salaries—

The executive salaries at Hydro One make about 0.1% of their total budget. Even if the member opposite cut these salaries in half, that wouldn't take one cent off of a single customer's bill.

That just shows that they have absolutely no plan and no idea on what to do in the electricity sector. Our 25% reduction, on average, will make sure we help every small business, family and farm—

NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier (Executive compensation)

>>MPP Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The sunshine list was released on Friday, and there was one very notable company name that was not on it. That was Hydro One. We know that the Hydro One CEO raked in a salary of \$4.5 million in 2016, a 500% increase from the last time the CEO's salary appeared on the sunshine list. Can the Premier tell Ontarians why her priority seems to be protecting the salaries and anonymity of the people at the top, instead of regular Ontario families and businesses that are struggling just to get by?

>>Premier Wynne: My priority is to make sure that everyone in this province gets relief on their hydro bills: a 25% reduction for every family in this province who pay electricity bills in their homes, relief for those small mom-and-pop shops on main streets in communities, relief for farmers. We recognize—
Interjections.

We recognize that there are people across the province who need that relief, which is exactly why we're putting a plan in place that actually will reduce people's electricity bills. People will see those reductions come the summer. That is in direct response to people's concerns about their ability to pay their electricity bills.

>>MPP Horwath: By privatizing Hydro One, Premier Wynne ensured three things: that those at the top can make massive salaries, that the rest of us will pay massive electricity bills and that she could throw a blanket of secrecy over the whole mess.

What does the Premier have to say to Ontarians who are struggling to keep up with their hydro bills and are outraged by her continued insistence on selling off Hydro One, while hiding how much top executives are being paid?

>>Premier Wynne: Let me once again be very, very clear. I know that the leader of the third party loves to conflate these issues, but changing the direction on broadening the ownership of Hydro One would not take one cent off one electricity bill anywhere in this province, as much as the leader of the third party would like to pretend that that was the case—not one cent, not off one electricity bill.

We have brought forward a strategy, a plan, that is going to take people's bills down—a 25% reduction across the province—because we recognize that people need that support. The investments that we have made in the electricity system to make it clean, to make it reliable, have a cost associated with them.

We are going to reduce people's bills, on top of the 8% that people have already seen, by another 17%, because we know that they need that support.

>>MPP Horwath: It is disgusting that while people are suffering and some can't even pay their hydro bills, we have executives at public utilities raking in millions. The CEO of OPG was the highest-paid public employee last year, and the CEO of Hydro One made over \$4 million.

In Montreal, Bombardier, a private company, listened to public pressure and is holding off on massive pay increases for the company's top staff after hundreds of Quebecers rallied outside the company's headquarters.

Here in Ontario, people are equally outraged by the planned pay hikes for Hydro One's CEO, especially amid soaring hydro bills. Why won't the Premier do the right thing and rein in the salaries of the executives at Hydro One?

>>Premier Wynne: Let me just say again that I recognize that people across the province are struggling with their electricity bills, which is exactly why the fair hydro plan will reduce people's electricity bills by 25%. That is the context within which we are having this conversation.

We have a plan that we have brought forward that will reduce people's bills substantially. In more rural and remote communities, people will see a reduction of 40% to 50%. We know that people need that support. We know that they need those reductions.

At the same time, the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One is directly related to our ability to invest in infrastructure—transit and transportation infrastructure—that the leader of the third party does not support but which is necessary to the well-being of this province.

We are going to continue on that path. Hydro One has found \$60 million in efficiencies. They are a better-run company, and people will see reductions on their electricity bills this summer.

NDP Leader Horwath to Health & Energy Ministers (Executive compensation)

>>MPP Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. The problem the Premier has is that nobody believes her anymore. Nobody believes anything this Premier says anymore.

The Wynne government's priorities are backwards. It's not just in the energy sector; it's health care too. Six of the top 10 highest-paid public employees in 2016 were hospital CEOs. Health care dollars should make it to bedsides, not stop at the corner offices. Ontarians need health care that they can count on, and they won't get it if the Premier continues to allow these exorbitant salaries while also allowing hospital hydro bills to soar.

When will she finally put patients' needs first, stop her ridiculous, unwanted sell-off of Hydro One, and cap hospital CEO salaries so that public money actually goes to patient care?

>>Minister Hoskins: I think all of us appreciate, in the first instance, that hospitals are independent corporations. But we expect, as we do across government, that when they make decisions with regard to allocation of public funds, they take into consideration the opportunity and responsibility to allocate as much as possible towards front-line care, that high quality of care that they provide.

It's no different than in our hospitals. That's why I'm particularly proud that we also, as a government, passed the Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act. It sets out certain parameters and expectations that we do have.

But we need to recognize that we need to provide our hospitals with the ability, as independent corporations, to manage their affairs so that they are able to truly provide the highest quality of care and allocate resources responsibly to that effect.

>>MPP Horwath: The sunshine list also grew yet again this year, but because of her wrong-headed decision to sell off Hydro One, the salaries of the executives are hidden from the public. Thanks to the Premier's meddling, we don't have any idea how much public money was spent on salaries at Hydro One.

How can the Premier claim to care about the mess that she has created in our public hydro system if she won't even open the books at Hydro One? What is this Premier afraid of?

>>Minister Thibeault: I know, as the Premier said, our government strongly believes in ensuring that public salaries are fair to employees but also reasonable to the public purse.

When it comes to Hydro One and OPG, following the process that is laid out in our government's framework, OPG sought appropriate comparators set for compensation at a level that is restrained but competitive for that industry.

I understand that the salaries at OPG can seem surprising. It is important to remember some key facts, Mr. Speaker: These are experts—technical, nuclear experts—and we want these operators in our plants to be the best in the world.

The most recent compensation frameworks for OPG's nuclear leadership team reflect performance initiatives paid out only if the company attains certain goals during refurbishment, which, I'd like to say right now, is ahead of schedule and under budget because of the dynamic team that we have at OPG.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

>>MPP Horwath: Speaker, only a Liberal cabinet minister would say million-dollar salaries are "restrained." Only a Liberal cabinet minister would have the gall to say that. The sunshine list this year reminds Ontarians that this Premier and her government are only out for themselves and those at the top. She has refused to disclose salaries at Hydro One, even though the government has yet to finish its sell-off. She's allowing millions to be funnelled to top hospital executives while Ontarians get less and less front-line health care.

Will the Premier wake up and realize that the people of Ontario need a leader who will fight for them, not just allow those at the top to rake in millions while protected by a veil of secrecy that she has thrown over her unpopular decisions?

>>Minister Thibeault: Again, we recognize that we brought forward a framework to help keep salaries restrained, Mr. Speaker.

Talking about Hydro One, in that time since we've broadened the ownership of Hydro One, they have become a better-run company—they sure have. It's providing better service and better value, both to its customers and to the province. Just a few of the customer initiatives they've taken out in the last few months:

- introduced more active customer communication, calling customers directly with issues;
 - introducing a voluntary ban on winter disconnections;
 - giving customers choice with their billing cycles, helping them to manage their bills better;
 - introducing e-billing and working towards mobile billing; and
 - ending the practice of security deposits for new customers.
- Last year, that executive group saved \$60 million.

MPP Tabuns to the Energy Minister (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. In 2015, then-Energy Minister Bob Chiarelli promised that the privatization of Hydro One wouldn't drive up hydro rates. In fact, he said, "Hydro One will now be an even stronger-performing, customer service-focused company and any efficiencies created can be passed on to consumers to help reduce rates."

Well, late last Friday, Hydro One filed its distribution rate application for 2018 to 2022. Instead of reducing rates as promised, Hydro One wants a 6.5% rate increase next year and a total increase of 20% by 2022.

Will the Premier finally admit what 80% of Ontarians—

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and address this. Let's remember something important here too, Mr. Speaker: Our government is lowering bills by 25% on average for households and as many as half a million small businesses and farms,

starting this summer. It's the single largest reduction in the province's history, with rates also held to inflation for the next four years.

We will achieve this reduction no matter the outcome of this application. In fact, Hydro One's rural customers will be seeing even greater reductions from our fair hydro plan. We're expanding the support for these customers facing the highest delivery costs in the province, including Hydro One's rural customers. As a result, some of these Ontarians will see reductions as large as 40% to 50% on their bills. These are truly substantial savings, and the fair hydro plan will work for all.

>>MPP Tabuns: In 2015, the Premier's privatization czar, Ed Clark, said "private sector discipline" would mean lower rates for Hydro One customers.

Private sector discipline means that the Hydro One CEO's salary is now six times what the previous CEO had been earning, paid for by ratepayers. Private sector discipline means that Hydro One is fighting to keep the benefits of a \$2.6-billion tax cut that would normally benefit ratepayers. And now, private sector discipline means a 20% increase for Hydro One, so Ontario families can pay more profits to private investors.

Ontario ratepayers can't afford any more private sector discipline. Will the Premier stop her short-sighted sell-off of Hydro One and return it to public ownership?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, the OEB, our judicial regulator, makes sure that they will review this application. In the past, they have denied applications and they have decreased applications. Of course, we're not going to prejudge where they're going to go with this, unlike the opposition.

When it comes to Hydro One, as mentioned, \$60 million in savings that do benefit and go back to the ratepayers, unlike what the opposition is saying. Again, a better-run company, voluntarily bringing forward and introducing that—

Of course, introducing a voluntary ban on winter disconnections; giving customers choice with billing cycles, helping them to better manage their bills; and let's not forget, with the fair hydro plan, a 40% to 50% reduction for Hydro One R1 and R2 customers.

MPP Scott to Minister Leal (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Scott: My question is to the minister of rural affairs and small business. I'm sure the member heard about the closure of Roland's Steakhouse, a local institution in the Peterborough area. Roland's has operated for 60 years. The restaurant was a popular fixture in the community and was a contributor to the local economy.

Do you know what finally drove them to close their doors? It was the outrageous hydro costs resulting from this government's misguided policies. The owner of Roland's shared his hydro bills with me and after seeing them, I'm not surprised he was forced to shut down.

Rising hydro costs are hurting the rural economy in our area, and the government's poor excuse of a relief plan will do little to undo more than a decade of runaway increases. My question to the minister is: How much longer will he stand by watching successful rural businesses like Roland's close as a result of the government's mismanagement of the hydro system?

>>Minister Leal: I really want to thank the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for the question. But there’s another story to Roland’s and the mayor of Peterborough, Daryl Bennett, set the record straight on his Cogeco cable show on Friday.

The fact of the matter is that the owners—whom I know very well—were offered a substantial amount of money for the property for a commercial development. The mayor was very clear: This was strictly a commercial development. The owner was offered a substantial amount. I know the area very well. It’s a stone’s throw from my house in Peterborough. There’s going to be a substantial commercial development.

The other thing that played into this: Peterborough is very fortunate that a Keg franchise came to Peterborough because they have confidence in the Peterborough area, and Hobart’s set up a steak house in downtown Peterborough. That’s the other story of this. The mayor of Peterborough set the record straight.

>>MPP Scott: Again to the minister: We’re not talking about some abstract idea here. This is a real business, real jobs lost because of the government’s misguided policy decisions.

Last January, the owner paid over \$2,000 for hydro. This past January, his bill had jumped to over \$4,000. That’s double, in just one year—

—and all this after spending \$23,000 replacing all of the lighting with efficient LEDs—

Mr. Speaker, with the trend in hydro going upward, things were only going to get worse for Roland’s. In the owner’s own words, he saw no chance for survival.

Again, when will the minister take the concerns of rural businesses seriously and ensure that they are not driven out by the consequences of your government’s decisions?

>>Minister Leal: I do appreciate the supplementary from the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, but I would strongly suggest—and I will organize—
Interjection.

I would volunteer to organize a viewing. We’ll get the tape from Cogeco. His Worship Mayor Daryl Bennett, the mayor of Peterborough, will provide—

Well, Mr. Speaker, if the folks opposite are questioning the veracity of the mayor of Peterborough, I’ll certainly give him a call about this today. In fact—

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Del Duca (Transportation infrastructure)

>>MPP Hoggarth: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. I know that the members on this side of the House recognize how important it is for our province to have a comprehensive transit and transportation network. To have that network, we need to have good roads. Our roads help the economy thrive, and they connect us to one another.

It isn’t just about our provincial highways. If the people don’t have a way to get onto our highways, they don’t serve much purpose. In Barrie, we have Highway 26, which is

classified as a connecting link because it connects people in my community to a number of our provincial highways, the closest being Highway 400.

Speaker, I know that the Minister of Transportation recently made an announcement about our government's commitment to these vital roads. Would the minister please provide the members of this House with more information on his recent Connecting Links announcement?

>>Minister Del Duca: Of course, I want to begin by thanking the member from Barrie for her question and for being such a strong advocate for her community.

I was pleased just a few days ago, on Friday, to be in Sault Ste. Marie to announce that municipalities are receiving funding through the 2017-18 provincial Connecting Links Program.

This year we had \$25 million in funding available that we are using to support 19 projects right across the province. This includes nearly \$45,000 for the rehabilitation of Bayfield Street from Coulter Street to Cundles Road on Highway 26 in the member from Barrie's community.

Our government is investing in these roads because we understand how vital they are to communities across Ontario. We especially know how important these roads are to small, rural and northern Ontario, and that's why the majority of funding is going towards Connecting Links in those communities.

Our government will continue to make the investments that both our municipal partners and our residents depend on and deserve.

>>MPP Hoggarth: Thank you to the minister for his answer. I know that this is welcome news in my community of Barrie, and that the funding will help make for a much smoother ride on Highway 26.

Speaker, I remember when our government announced in the 2015 budget that we were introducing the new Connecting Links Program. I also remember back in 2016 when the Premier announced that the program would be growing. It was clear to our municipal partners, including my community of Barrie, that they had been heard loud and clear when they said that the funding available for OCIF wasn't enough. The communities are very pleased that the government is taking strong action.

Would the minister please let the members of this House know what our government is doing now to make this important program even better?

>>Minister Del Duca: I thank the member from Barrie for the follow-up question. She is absolutely correct: Both the new Connecting Links Program and our commitment to growing the program came in response to what we were hearing from our municipal partners. While we listened, the parties opposite chose to ignore those voices when they voted against the new program in the 2015 budget and the additional funding in the 2016 budget.

We've now heard again from municipalities who are excited about the program and are excited about the fact that the amount of funding for Connecting Links continues to grow: up to \$30 million for the 2018-19 year.

But we've also heard concerns about what the projects are actually eligible to support. That's why this past Friday, in Sault Ste. Marie, I also announced that we'll be updating

the program guide to allow for even more projects to be eligible, including road widening.

While I was in Sault Ste. Marie, we announced that that community will receive \$2.3 million from this program for this year. I'm excited to see the great work that we are doing, and we'll keep—