

Question Period

TBS Business Lines

February 2017

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February 22, 2017

PC Leader Brown to the Premier (Executive Compensation)

>>MPP Brown: Mr. Speaker, the question is to the Premier. The government's defence is that the base salary doesn't start at \$4 million. But they got paid \$4 million when people can't pay their hydro bills. And it's not just Hydro One. What we have is, we're seeing executive compensation across the board getting out of control. The Liberals were going to allow Ontario Power Generation to more than double the salary of their CEO before they got caught. The Premier backtracked and said, "Come forward with something more reasonable."

Since you won't answer about Hydro One, will you at least answer about OPG? What do you consider, Premier, to be reasonable?

>>Premier Wynne: The President of the Treasury Board has been very clear about the process that has been put in place. The only reason that we're talking about caps on salaries, that we're talking about ranges, is because we've put that policy in place, Mr. Speaker. We have initiated that process because under previous governments there has been no such process; there's been no such transparency.

What we have said is that the increases must be reasonable. The salaries must be reasonable. If they're not, if the comparators that the organization is using are not fair comparators, then, as the President of the Treasury Board said, they will have to go back to the drawing board. They will have to start again and come forward with a rationale that is—

>>MPP Brown: Again, to the Premier: The Premier said if they're not fair comparators, they'll be sent back to the drawing board. The CEO of Hydro One makes \$4 million. In BC, it's \$400,000. In Quebec, it's \$400,000. This is completely out of whack with comparators.

So the question is—
Interjection.

>>MPP Brown: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: Will you have the hydro CEO come back to the drawing board so that we have compensation that's appropriate when people can't pay their hydro bills?

>>Premier Wynne: First of all, let's deal with the facts. As the President of the Treasury Board said, the \$4-million number that the Leader of the Opposition is using is the outside amount. In fact, the CEO of BC Hydro took home \$1 million last year, not \$500,000. So as long as we're dealing with facts, that's a good thing.

Our focus is on reducing electricity prices for people across this province. It is very clear that we have made some changes. The 8% reduction is in place now, but there's more we have to do. Our focus is on finding those ways to take costs out of the system to help people with their electricity bills every day. That's what we're focusing on.

>>MPP Brown: The Premier is applauding that it's only four times the amount the hydro CEO gets paid in BC. The only thing this government is looking at is ways to avoid disclosure. The only thing this government is looking at is hiding these salaries. I can't get an answer on whether you think it's appropriate or what's reasonable. I can't get an answer from this government on actually allowing these salaries to be disclosed on the sunshine list, so let me try something new. Maybe the Premier will answer this. It's not just OPG, it's not just hydro, it's Metrolinx. This government decided that it's appropriate to give \$100,000 pay bumps to a group that built a bridge upside down. You're actually giving pay bumps to individuals who aren't even doing their job competently.

My question to the Premier is, can we have a commitment that we're actually going to rein in these executive salaries that are completely out of whack with the rest of the country, yes or no?

>>Premier Wynne: I know this is an issue that is of concern to people. I had a conversation with a gentleman yesterday. We were talking about electricity prices and he raised the issue of CEO salaries. I talked to him about the reality that we are putting caps on and that we are working with organizations to make sure that there are comparators that are reasonable.

But the reality is, as I said, the CEO of BC Hydro took home \$1 million last year; that is my understanding. So there is a range of salary for highly qualified people, who we need. We need highly qualified people to run these organizations, whether it's Metrolinx, which is overseeing the largest transit investment in more than a generation, or whether it's our electricity system. We need those people in place. At the same time, we are focusing on helping people with their electricity bills.

NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Premier told Ontarians that she was planning to get a deal with every local hydro utility so she wouldn't need legislation to stop winter disconnections. This morning, she introduced legislation, which means she couldn't get the deal. So which companies said no to the Premier?

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that there will be—there's a law that has been passed, a bill that's been passed in this Legislature, which will mean that all distribution companies across the province will have to reconnect or cease disconnections. So that's the reality. I actually don't know which LDCs were not in a position, by midnight last night, to make that decision. But they will all now have to comply.

>>MPP Horwath: Yesterday the Premier told Ontarians that she would get a deal with local hydro utilities so she wouldn't need legislation to stop people from having their power cut off. Today, her minister said that the Premier couldn't get a deal because the utilities couldn't stop cutting people off "in a timely manner." It looks to me—it looks to people, it looks to everyone—like the Premier is passing a bill her minister says can't be enforced. Is this more about good-news Liberal press releases than it is about stopping people from having their hydro cut off?

Interjections.

>>Premier Wynne: I'm trying to follow the logic of the leader of the third party. But I think what she's saying is that even though there is a bill that has been passed and our expectation is that we will have royal assent today—even though that will be in place, I think what she's saying is that there are local distribution companies that won't comply. That is a ridiculous assertion. I have every expectation that every distribution company in the province will comply with a law that is in place. If the leader of the third party has information to the contrary, I think she should share it with this House.

Interjections.

>>MPP Horwath: Just ask her energy minister, Speaker. It was he that said that the companies said that they couldn't make this happen in a timely manner. So she just needs to ask her own minister to get the answer to that question.

But look, here's Liberal logic: Last year, 60,000 people had their power cut off. Last year, it didn't matter to the Premier that kids went to bed cold or seniors were in the dark. The difference is that now the Premier seems to be in political trouble and there's an election looming. Can the Premier explain to people why this wasn't a problem until it became a political problem for the Liberal Party and this Premier of Ontario?

>>Premier Wynne: I just do not accept the premise of the question. The fact is that I and my government care deeply about what people are dealing with every day in their lives. I care deeply about families who are struggling with costs. We started to try to lower electricity costs more than a year ago. We understand that there are challenges that people are dealing with.

As far as the disconnections go, we have moved. We brought legislation in in June. We had hoped that it would be passed earlier. It has now been passed and all local distribution companies across the province will have to comply. That's the bottom line. That's what's important to people across the province.

NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. Yesterday, the Premier said, “We’re confronting the reality that people have across the board seen unacceptable increases” on their hydro bills. If it’s unacceptable today, why has the Premier caused this unaffordable hydro crisis in Ontario’s hydro system?

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I’m really happy to talk about what has happened over the last number of years to improve the electricity system in Ontario. When we came into office under the previous Premier in 2003, we inherited a system that was degraded—

This, actually, is less of a partisan comment than the heckling from the opposition would suggest, because government after government, of different party stripes, had not made the necessary investments in our electricity system. They had kept dirty coal running, had not invested in transmission lines, and had not invested in new, clean, renewable energy.

As I said, that is not a partisan comment; that is something that was a reality. We inherited a system that was sorely in need of investment. We have made billions of dollars of investment, and we are now seeing the impact of that. People across the province have had a steep increase in electricity prices, and that’s why we’ve been working to take those costs out of the system.

>>MPP Howath: What this Premier and her government have done is to systematically break our electricity system in the province of Ontario. That’s what they have done. Yesterday, the Premier said that hydro rates were unacceptable, but she accepted it when she signed off on the decision to cancel the gas plants—

She accepted it when she signed off on the decision to cancel the gas plants, she accepted it when she decided to privatize Hydro One, and she accepted it when she watched as the cost of electricity has risen by 280% in the province of Ontario. This is a Premier who just doesn’t get it, and hasn’t been getting it for far, far too long.

If the Premier thinks hydro bills are too high, if they’re unacceptable, why has she been causing them to go up for 14 years?

Interjections.

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let’s be perfectly clear that what the leader of the third party is saying, first of all, is that she would not have made the investments that we made in this province. She would not have jump-started a renewable industry in this province. She would not have shut down the coal-fired plants. She would not have invested in tens of thousands of kilometres of line. She would not have built new generation in this province.

She would not have made those investments, and today, what she would do is that she would cancel the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One, which would not take one

cent off an electricity bill in this province. That is the solution that the leader of the third party is putting forward, a solution that would not take one cent off one electricity bill. Interjections.

>>MPP Horwath: Speaker, I don't think it's acceptable that in a province like Ontario, people have to choose between paying their rent or having their power cut off. It is not acceptable now; it wasn't acceptable last year or the year before that. Families are at a crisis point all across this province. For people who have to choose between child care or hydro, paying their rent or their hydro bill, filling a prescription or paying for hydro, what does this Premier expect people to do? Interjections.

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, on this we can agree: It is unacceptable, and that is exactly why we started last year making changes. The 8% reduction, I understand, is not enough. It is something, but it is not enough, and that is why we are working—the Minister of Energy is working day and night, literally, with his officials to find ways to reduce the costs.

But to suggest that those investments in the electricity system to make it clean, to make it renewable, to make it one of the leading clean grids in North America—to suggest that that was not a reasonable investment? To connect people in the north, to make sure that we had a reliable grid—to suggest that that was not a good investment? I think that's irresponsible. That would have been an irresponsible path to take.

We need to lower people's electricity prices. We are working to find more ways to do that. But we have a reliable, clean grid in Ontario, and that's a good thing for the people of the province.

MPP Clark to the Premier (Government Spending)

>>MPP Clark: My question is for the Premier. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Premier on the award she received today: the lifetime achievement award from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation for the government's mishandling of energy policy. It's called the CTF Teddy Government Waste Award.

Congrats on your Teddy, Premier. Would you like to offer an acceptance speech?

>>Premier Wynne: I would have thought the 8% reduction on electricity bills would be something that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation would have agreed with. I would have thought that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation would have thought that was a great idea. Free tuition for young people who are going to college or university or who are trying to get their way back into the system, I would have thought that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation would have thought that was a good idea.

The fact that—

The fact that we have one of the most competitive tax regimes in North America, I would have thought the Canadian Taxpayers Federation would have thought that was a good

idea. I look forward to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation having those conversations with me.

>>MPP Clark: Again, back to the Premier: Another award. It's a banner day for Ontario. Ten provinces; one winner: That was Ontario, which won the Teddy award for provincial waste.

This one is for Ontario's Electric Vehicle Incentive Program that provides \$14,000 cheques to those who buy vehicles that cost \$100,000. Will the Premier take the stage, accept her award and acknowledge the waste?

>>Minister Sousa: I appreciate the member opposite recognizing what's happening in Ontario. He failed to talk about the fact that we're coming to balance, our economy is growing and we're outpacing the G7 countries. The Conference Board of Canada has cited that Ontario leads all of Canada in that growth and, as a result, our revenues are up. As a result of economic growth, jobs are up—700,000 net new jobs, as I said, since the recession, and our deficit is the lowest it has ever been since the recession at \$1.9 billion as of third quarter.

Going forward, we're doing everything possible to ensure that we balance the budget and ensure that we continue to invest and make everyday life easier for Ontarians by ensuring that we can afford even more support systems, including mitigating electricity rates.

MPP French to Energy Minister (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP French: My question is to the Premier. Families in my community are fed up with paying for this government's mistakes on their hydro bills. Last week I heard from Matt, who got a \$50 hydro bill for a yet-to-be-completed basement apartment.

Now, \$50 might not sound so bad, but when you look at the bill and realize that the electricity used was 000.000 kilowatt hours and the \$50 charge was for the delivery of literally nothing, I would ask: Does 50 bucks for nothing seem like a fair deal to the Premier?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm very pleased to stand and answer this question because what we're talking about is distribution. Actually, when you look at distribution, it comes from generating plants on the wires and then into the LDC and then to that home. We're working hard right now on making sure that that's equitable across the province.

As the Premier has often said, we need to ensure that we find ways to lower rates for everyone, and that's one of the things that we're doing. But we will make no apologies—we will make no apologies—for investing in a system that actually—

We'll make no apologies for investing in a system that was actually a mess, that needed repair and that actually needed to be greened. Now we are saving \$4.3 billion in our

health care system because air pollution deaths are down 23% and 41% in hospitalizations. We invested in our system and we're proud of that.

>>MPP French: I'm sure that Matt appreciates that wonderful explanation.

But again to the Premier: Matt paid \$50 to have nothing delivered—nothing. That's like giving the UPS guy 50 bucks to send an empty box. Fortunately, this bill won't break the bank for Matt, but it might for others. The only relief that he saw with your paltry provincial rebate was two whole dollars and 41 cents.

Speaker, is the Premier so out of touch that she thinks this is okay?

>>Minister Thibeault: It sounds like the NDP wants us to go back to coal as well. They want cheap electricity. Rather than invest in a system that's renewable and green, they want cheap electricity. That's kind of appalling, knowing the investments that we've made.

We recognize that we need to ensure that we find ways to actually help people who are having a hard time with their bills, because we understand that the investments that we've made are costing others more.

We're going to continue to invest in finding ways to lower rates for all Ontarians. We're going to continue to do that on top of the 8% and the \$60 reduction we've seen through the RRRP.

MPP Smith to Energy Minister (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Smith: My question is for the Premier this morning. Speaker, another mind-numbing example of Liberal mismanagement on the energy file: Yesterday, we learned that Windstream Energy would like the government to pay the \$28 million the NAFTA court said that they were owed after the government cancelled their offshore wind project.

My question to the Premier is, has the federal government asked your government for the money to pay Windstream?

>>Minister Thibeault: We have been working with our federal counterparts to ensure that we rectify this payment. We're continuing to work with our federal counterparts, and we hope to have that done in very short order.

>>MPP Smith: I think the thing that everybody wants to know is, how much more is this going to cost the ratepayers and the people of Ontario?

The Premier has two options on this file. The Premier is either going to pay Windstream or she's hoping that the electricity crisis that her government has created will blow over—I don't see that happening—and then she can announce that the government is

actually going to go ahead and build this \$5.2-billion project with Windstream. Either way, Ontario families are on the hook for millions or billions of dollars.

Is the Premier going to make them pay now for this project, or are they just going to make Ontarians pay for the next 20 or 30 years for this project?

>>Minister Thibeault: Once again, I think I answered that question earlier. We're working with our federal counterparts on that. But based off of Windstream's and the offshore wind turbines, we're relying on the science coming from our colleagues in MOECC.

But the one thing that I find very interesting is, from a party that has no plan on how to deal with the energy crisis, the only thing that they can offer is ripping up contracts, which would actually cost us billions of dollars more in litigation. I find it a little ironic that they're saying one thing from one side and then another thing.

NDP Leader Horwath to Energy Minister (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The spokesperson of the Sault Ste. Marie electricity utility—the public utility—doesn't want to see families' electricity cut off. He says the solution is to bring down the actual cost of electricity.

Is the Premier going to do what's right for families in the Sault, as well as families across Ontario, and start to actually address the cost of electricity so people can start to afford their electricity bills?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise on this question. Of course, Mr. Speaker, we've already brought forward the 8% reduction that is actually helping every family in Sault Ste. Marie. For those who are in and outside of Sault Ste. Marie on Hydro One, as an R2 customer within those regions, they're seeing a \$60 reduction on their bill. You know what else the folks from Sault Ste. Marie are seeing? A clean grid, and one that they can rely on—one that was in a mess back in 2003. We've invested billions and billions of dollars to make sure that families, like in Sault Ste. Marie, in Sudbury and northern Ontario, have access to an electricity grid that is reliable and clean. That's something that we have done as this government: invested in the electricity system to make sure that it's clean and reliable.

We're going to take it to the next level now and make it as affordable as we can for all families and businesses right across the province.

>>MPP Horwath: Giordan Zin, the spokesperson at the Sault PUC, was pretty clear: "If you want to solve this problem, the solution is in controlling the commodity price of electricity." The Premier knows as well as I do that private contracts lock Ontarians into paying private profits for years, but we can actually direct public companies to charge

less. It's why power is a powerful tool that benefits families, businesses and the province as a whole.

When the spokesperson of Sault Ste. Marie PUC is telling the government it needs to reduce the cost of electricity, the question is, is the Premier actually listening?

>>Minister Thibeault: This Premier has been listening for years. We've actually renegotiated the Samsung agreement, saving \$3.7 billion; reduced FIT prices by \$1.9 billion; created a competitive LRP process, saving \$1.5 billion; and suspended the LRP2 project, \$3.8 billion. We've been investing in making sure that we find ways to have downward pressure on rates while building the system up for a decade.

One thing we should also talk about: When it comes to Sault Ste. Marie, this government has been listening. For example, ongoing provincial support for the city of Sault Ste. Marie will be more than \$30 million in 2017. That's in the neighbourhood of about \$1,200 of provincial support per residential taxpayer. Timmins, for example: \$18 million.

This government gets it, Mr. Speaker. We're listening and we're acting.

February 23, 2017

NDP Leader Horwath to Energy Minister (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Since the Liberals came to power in 2003, how much money have people and businesses paid to private and foreign companies in Ontario's hydro system?

>>Minister Thibeault: In relation to that question, we have invested heavily in rebuilding our system. One of the things that we have done is to ensure that we have a reliable system and a clean system. Putting that on the burdens of affordability, we want to make sure that we can make it as affordable as possible for ratepayers. We had to spend \$50 billion in generation and transmission. We cleaned up our system and made it reliable, and we know there has been a cost to ratepayers on this and that has been significant, and that's why we're acting.

When it comes to generation, we have hundreds of companies in this province that are doing a great job of ensuring that we have a reliable system, one that we can count on and one that we know is clean and green and reliable.

>>MPP Horwath: Well, Speaker, the Conservatives say the high cost of hydro is green energy, not private ownership. The Liberals say it was replacing coal with private gas plants and privatized wind power, and not private ownership.

What neither the Conservatives or the Liberals will talk about is that people and businesses aren't paying for the cost of power, Speaker. They're paying for power plus guaranteed profits for private and foreign companies, now and for years and years to come.

>>Minister Thibeault: The one thing that the third party is not looking at is, for example, our nuclear generation, something that we should be proud of in this province. The Candu reactors are being sold around the world, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in this province, Mr. Speaker. The refurbishment of Darlington and the refurbishment of Bruce are going to continue to see our GDP grow and grow. They're creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in this province. The investments that we're seeing—like great companies, for example, in Cambridge: BWXT. I was in Port Hope with Cameco. There are jobs from Ottawa to Windsor to northern Ontario that are happening because this government invested in Ontario companies to ensure that we have generation that is going to give power that is clean and reliable, something we should be proud of.

>>MPP Horwath: Does the Premier believe that it's in the public interest for our transmission system, which is a monopoly with no competition, to be controlled by private interests for the benefit of shareholders, or would she agree that something as important as the electricity grid should be managed by the public in the public interest, in the interest of Ontarians?

>>Minister Thibeault: Again, if I can continue talking about the importance of what we're seeing in the generation, in the transmission of companies that we have here in Ontario that are creating thousands and thousands of jobs—that's something that we all know will benefit our overall economy and our overall GDP. When we have companies that are investing in Ontario and making sure that we're creating jobs in wind, in solar and in biomass, that is something that we should be proud of, especially when I talk about companies, again, like Laker in Burlington—fantastic work that's happening out at Laker. They're creating work and jobs. They're expanding their business. They started with 75 employees; they're now up to 150. And you know what? They're going to expand again. That's because this government recognized the importance of investing in generation, investing in a system that is clean and reliable—something we can all be proud of—but at the same time, creating jobs in every part of this province.

NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. The Premier is promising to reduce hydro rates by taking money from health care, education and transit. Does the Premier understand why that makes people cynical?

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we have committed to reducing the costs that people are paying on electricity. In fact, the leader of the third party has been talking about this for some time. I know she understands that the 8% reduction on people's bills this

month was a part of that, but I know she also understands that that's not enough, that there's more we need to do.

She also needs to know that we will continue to invest more in education, more in health care. I point to the free tuition for post-secondary that starts this September. Students who are living on a low income will have free, or better-than-free, tuition. That's an increased support for people; that's an increased support for our education system. I know the leader of the third party would support that.

>>MPP Horwath: For nearly 14 years as an MPP, cabinet minister and Premier, this Premier has driven up hydro bills. She's ignored the people of Ontario. Now, with an election on the horizon, she claims to suddenly get it.

But as Libby Keenan—you remember Libby Keenan, the farmer from Essex who she met at Queen's Park—wrote in an open letter, "Your political ambitions have run amuck and your priorities have little to do with the people you were elected to serve."

Does the Premier understand, Speaker, how frustrated people are with the hydro crisis that this Liberal government has created in our province?

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I was privileged to meet with Libby, and I have spoken to many people across the province about their concerns on electricity prices. That's exactly why we began some time ago to reduce electricity costs, to take costs out of the system, to put in place programs like the Ontario energy support program for people living on low income, the 8% that came into play in January that people will see on their bills. That's part of the strategy. But there's more that we need to do.

Mr. Speaker, my political ambition has been to make life better for people in this province, to make sure that education, health care, a clean, renewable electricity grid, infrastructure, support for people in their lives today, and strong economic growth into the future—that's my political ambition, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Horwath: Speaker, this week, people saw that the Liberal government will pass legislation to stop hydro disconnections, but only if they got the credit. The Liberals will make promises to lower bills, but only if they see a political benefit. The Premier thinks hydro costs are unacceptable, but only after 14 years of making things worse, making those bills unacceptable.

Can the Premier explain why people's problems don't really seem to matter at all until they become political problems for the Liberal Party?

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have been working for some time to take costs out of the system. Long before the leader of the third party was going on this subject day after day, we were already renegotiating the Samsung deal; making a decision not to build new nuclear, which was in the order of a \$15-billion saving—that's a cost that will not be put into the electricity system—making sure that there was a low-income support program in place; and taking the provincial portion of the HST off people's bills.

I recognize that this is a concern of people across the province. That is why, before the budget, we will bring out further measures to help people with their electricity bills.

MPP Bisson to Energy Minister (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, hydro prices is a real issue for real people. It is not an abstract thing. There are citizens across this province, and businesses across this province, who are being hurt. I want to give you but one story. In Kapuskasing live Monsieur and Madame Oliva Sylvain. They have to heat with wood because there's no natural gas where they live. They're off the grid. They use electricity only as a backup to wood if the wood fire was to go out. They are there all the time. They used to pay about \$275 a month for their electricity bill, but it started to go up some years ago, so they decided to take your advice and that of your ministers and to do everything they could to reduce their electricity bill by reducing consumption. They have taken stuff offline. They have bought all of the LED lights they can get. They've done everything they're able to in order to reduce their hydro bill, but yet it went up. This month, they got their hydro bill and it's 375 bucks.

How can anybody have confidence in your government when they do what you say they are to do and yet their bill still goes up?

>>MinisterThibeault: I thank the member for the question and for explaining the situation that many families in northern Ontario are facing.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to recognize that those in the north and in rural areas are seeing their bills go up, and that's why we're going to take more action. We did come forward with the RRRP reduction of \$60 that they are seeing on their bills.

The one thing that it is important to recognize when it comes to conservation programs is that they do work. They do work in the sense that when we conserve energy—if every household continues to save energy, to conserve energy—we don't need to build more generation. And if we don't need to build more generation, we can keep our costs on a downward rate. That's what we're going to continue to do.

But in that instance—I don't know the full story about the couple from Kapuskasing, but I do recognize that in the north and in rural parts of Ontario, we can do more and we will do more.

>>MPP Bisson: Minister, it doesn't work for Oliva. He has done everything, along with his wife, that they can do to reduce consumption. They're doing what you asked, but their bill still goes up. This is why people are so frustrated. It's not just the fact that they pay more; it's the question that they do everything to save, and yet it still goes up. Why don't you admit that your entire hydro policy is a failure and that what we really need to do is to find a solution to reduce their hydro bills and stop talking about it and do something to help Monsieur and Madame Sylvain?

>>Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I wonder, when they were in power and they cancelled the conservation programs, if that actually helps the families. We had to reinstitute them. We had to rebuild the entire system, and that comes with a cost. For all families in Ontario, the one thing that we've done is we phased out coal. That has actually helped every family in this province. By phasing out coal, we've saved \$4.3

billion in our health care system. We're seeing a 23% reduction in air pollution deaths and a 41% reduction in air pollution hospitalizations.

We've built a system that people can rely on. We no longer see rolling brownouts or blackouts. But we know we can do more. We want to see more conservation, we want to see a stronger grid, and we'll make sure that we find ways of helping that family in Kapuskasing and all families around the province.

MPP Harris to Minister of Transportation (Public Transit)

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. As this government considers pay increase proposals for Metrolinx executives, we see more examples of how the Liberals' transit agency can't get anything right. The latest is a \$770-million 182-train disputed contract with Bombardier that, after years of delay, has devolved into a war of words and legal threats.

Now, it's no secret that some of the projects where the Liberals had planned to send the 182 light-rail vehicles have fallen off the rails, leading some to wonder if Metrolinx is trying to sneak out and avoid paying for these trains they ordered. Those suspicions grew when we learned that Bombardier has had a test vehicle ready for inspection since October. The media saw it yesterday, yet Metrolinx refuses to inspect after filing for contract termination.

Premier, it's a mess. Can you explain what the heck is going on here?

>>Minister Del Duca: You know, it's always remarkable to me to hear the member from Kitchener-Conestoga—frankly, any member from the Conservative ranks—stand up and talk about challenges that might be faced in the transportation and transit realm. Everybody in this Legislature, everybody watching at home and everybody across the province knows that literally year after year, month after month, decade after decade that party has had no plan to invest in transit. It's had no plan to put forward initiatives that would suggest that we'd ever be able to transform GO, that we would build LRTs. We all know the story, but it bears repeating. It's important for people to be reminded of the fact that they killed and filled the Eglinton subway project the last time they were in power; that literally every single year, every single provincial budget I have seen since I became a member of provincial Parliament, which has contained unprecedented amounts for transit and transportation, has been rejected by that member, by their leader, by this party, and yet they have the audacity to ask a question on this particular topic—

>>MPP Harris: Yet he has the audacity not to answer the question that I actually asked. It was this Liberal government that negotiated the terms of the contract, and now we're going to foot the bill for their mismanagement, not just for the delays running right through the entire \$770-million deal, but now for legal proceedings and a potential new tendering process for a replacement. Meantime, Bombardier claims everything is on track for the 2021 delivery.

Everything this government's transit planners at Metrolinx set their sights on runs off the rails, with the cost going directly, of course, to the taxpayers—UP Express, upside-down

bridge trusses and now LRV trains. The people of Ontario aren't asking for much here. They just want their trains that they paid for. Will the Premier tell us when we will get our LRVs and how many millions more we will have to actually pay for them?

>>Minister Del Duca: I appreciate the follow-up.

Listen, on this side of the House, this Premier and our government—here's what we're doing in transit. We are standing up for the people of Waterloo region. We are investing to make sure the ION LRT is delivered on time. We're standing up for the people of the GTHA. We're building GO regional express rail. We're building LRTs along Hurontario, in Hamilton, along Eglinton with the Crosstown, and along Finch West with the Finch West LRT. We are literally building transit. We're expanding into Niagara, we're expanding into Bowmanville. We are building transit every single day of the week. The challenge I have with that question is, it sounds to me like it was written by Bombardier. We're here on the side of the people of Ontario to build transit, to deliver the positive outcomes. We're going to continue to focus on that. I would encourage that member to get onside with the people of his own community and help us deliver the outcomes they're expecting.

MPP Nicholls to Minister of Energy (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Nicholls: My question is to the Premier. Ryckman Farms is a quail farm in Chatham-Kent that was once expanding but is now struggling to keep up with the cost of doing business in Ontario. In November, in their hydro bill, their electricity usage was \$590. However, the total bill came to a ridiculous \$5,900 thanks to a delivery charge of nearly \$1,800 and a massive global adjustment fee of over \$2,700. That's not an adjustment, Speaker; that's highway robbery. His bill was 10 times his electricity usage. Scot and Cheryl Ryckman are doing what they can to survive. Your government, Premier, isn't doing enough.

To the Premier: How can Ryckman Farms and all Ontario businesses account for such outrageous extra fees?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thanks for the question, because it is important for us to talk about the investments that we had to make after the system that they left us was in a mess. Those farms wouldn't have been around. Many businesses wouldn't have been around if we were to continue to have rolling brownouts and blackouts. It's catastrophic for a business—

It's catastrophic for a business when it can't even turn the lights on. We invested in the system—

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that there are some businesses out there, along with families and other ratepayers, that are having a hard time with those types of bills. So we invested in building a system and we've also invested in putting forward programs that will help many of these businesses. If they're large enough, they qualify for the ICI program, the IEI program, the Demand Response Program and many others.

If they're part of the retail price plan, they've got an 8% reduction, and the saveONenergy program is helping businesses like that and many others.

>>MPP Walker: My question is for the Premier. Pat Cottrell and Peter Knipfel are small business operators and they are hurting under this Liberal government's failed energy policies. They're finding it harder and harder to stay in business. In 2011, the cost for electricity was \$8,000 per year. Today, at \$37,000 a year in hydro bills, Pat's seasonal family campground won't be able to stay in business. It's unaffordable.

And with Peter's hydro bills at \$119,100 a year, 120% higher than in 2003, how long can his store keep absorbing the costs of Liberal mistakes, mismanagement and ideology?

To make matters worse, the Wynne Liberals have slapped a \$2-billion cap-and-trade tax on Ontarians struggling to make ends meet.

The Premier says she is listening. However, her policies and ideals are forcing businesses to either shut down or move out of Ontario.

Why should anyone trust the Liberals' energy plan any more today than the past four years under her leadership?

>>Minister Duguid: As the Minister of Energy indicated, that very business will be getting 8% off their energy bill as a small business, which actually is—

At the same time, the member is dead wrong when he says that Ontario is uncompetitive when it comes to business. Just look at what we've done on the tax side. The capital tax saved by businesses is \$2.3 billion a year. Our corporate tax rate is saving businesses \$2.5 billion a year. Even the Leader of the Opposition, yesterday, in Mississauga had this to say: "We have an advantage right now with our corporate taxation rate."

Maybe the member ought to connect with his leader; for a change, he was reading out of the facts part of the library instead of the fiction part. It was good to see. It's a first, and we're very pleased that the Leader of the Opposition is actually using facts in the Legislature for a change.

February 27, 2017

PC Leader Brown to the Premier (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Brown: My question is for the Premier. In 2011, the Auditor General pointed out the government's energy policies were disastrous, but it took until last week for the Minister of Energy to actually come clean and admit it. Why did it take six years—six years—for the Liberals to acknowledge the damage they've done?

>>Premier Wynne: I think the Leader of the Opposition knows full well that there have been investments that have been made in the electricity system in Ontario that were absolutely necessary—

With the shutdown of the coal-fired plants, the jump-starting of a renewable industry, investments in transmission lines across the province—investments in a system that had been degraded because of a lack of investment by previous governments.

For months now we have been working to find ways to take costs out of the system. We have renegotiated contracts, like the contract with Samsung. We've made decisions not to invest in new nuclear, which will save billions of dollars to the system. We know that there's more that has to be done. We'll be bringing our plan forward soon.

>>MPP Brown: Back to the Premier: The Minister of Energy actually went off his Liberal talking points and said, I quote—this is what the Minister of Energy said: “Hindsight is 20/20” when it comes to Premier Wynne’s disastrous energy policies. Hindsight is 20/20, but hindsight doesn’t put money back into people’s pockets. Hindsight doesn’t turn the lights on. Hindsight doesn’t make it easier for seniors to choose between heating and eating.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: The Minister of Energy says that hindsight is 20/20. Does the Premier agree that her policies have been disastrous, or is this just more talking points?

>>Premier Wynne: This is a very, very important issue. It’s an important issue to people and businesses across the province. But I have to say that I think the Leader of the Opposition has embellished what the Minister of Energy said just a bit. The Minister of Energy is very supportive of the fact that we’re saving \$4 billion a year in health care costs because the coal-fired plants are shut down. The Minister of Energy and our whole government are very supportive of the fact that we have a reliable, clean electricity grid in Ontario.

The reality is, those were decisions that were made in order to have a clean grid, in order to rebuild an electricity grid that was not reliable. Are there things that we could have done differently? Yes, of course there are. And hindsight is 20/20; we’ve acknowledged that.

But the reality is, today we know that more costs need to be taken out of the system. People need relief, and we’re going to deliver that.

>>MPP Brown: Back to the Premier: The Minister of Energy’s mea culpa was Friday. They’ve already forgotten it. They’ve already forgotten they said, “Hindsight is 20/20.” Well, the Minister of Energy actually said, “How did we get here?” And I’m going to answer that for the government—

Mr. Speaker, this may be a laughing matter for the Liberal benches, but it isn’t. Ontarians are struggling. They can’t afford their hydro bills.

The Minister of Energy said, “How did we get here?” on Friday. Let me answer that for him: the Green Energy Act; absurd executive salaries; cancelled gas plants; the fire sale of Hydro One; and giving away millions in free electricity to neighbouring states.

My question is this: If there really was a mea culpa, which one of those policies are you going to walk back? Is it the Green Energy Act? Is it the executive salaries? Is it the fire sale of Hydro One? Which one of your policies are you going to walk back?

>>Premier Wynne: As I said, Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious issue, and we are taking it extremely seriously. That’s why we have to deal with the facts of the matter. We have to deal with the possible solutions that we are considering.

I’ve said I support what the Minister of Energy said. Hindsight is 20/20. Maybe the Leader of the Opposition would go back to when his party was in office and look at the decisions that were made during those years. Maybe he’d look at the sell-off of the 407 and the lack of benefit that came to the province of Ontario. Maybe he would look at the energy policies.

The reality is, we’re dealing today in the reality that more needs to be done to give people relief, and we’re going to do that.

PC Leader Brown to the Premier (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Does the Premier believe this recent mea culpa will bring back the jobs and the investments that have fled Ontario?

In every part of this province, we have lost jobs and we have lost investment because of these destructive hydro policies. I hear the government heckling: “No, we haven’t lost any jobs. We haven’t lost any investment.” They are dead wrong. We have lost investment. We have lost jobs.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: How are you going to get these jobs back that we’ve lost?

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition seems to not recognize that Ontario actually is leading economic growth in the country. We’re leading in job creation. We’re outpacing the growth of OECD countries. In fact, in relative terms, Ontario is doing very well.

The reality is that there are parts of the province where they’re not sharing in that economic growth as evenly as others. We recognize that. But the net new jobs, the net growth—Ontario is doing very, very well.

>>MPP Brown: Back to the Premier: In this bubble of Queen’s Park, the Premier may believe that Ontario is creating jobs. But you leave Queen’s Park, you hear stories of businesses, and it’s a very different reality.

On the weekend, I visited Ross Smibert, who is 89 years old and has run North Star Ice in London since 1954. In less than two years, his hydro bill has gone up \$100,000, or 55%. He employs 25 local London residents, but he said it would be cheaper to run his

business in Michigan. He has poured his heart into this company for 63 years, and he's struggling to keep it in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is, all these jobs you say you're creating—what's your message to Ross Smibert, who is struggling to keep his business in Ontario because of your policies? What is your answer to him?

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, whenever there is job loss in the province, obviously that affects the family and the community, and it's of serious concern. But the reality is that in Ontario we've created 697,600 net new jobs since the recession, 303,000 jobs since I became Premier, 28,000 new jobs just last month, and 2,000 tech jobs—net new jobs—in London. The reality is, there is job creation happening. There are different jobs. I will absolutely acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that there is a change in our economy. We are going through a transition; that is a reality. But to suggest that there are not jobs being created is just not the fact. There are jobs being created in this province. There are net new jobs, and our unemployment rate has been below the Canadian average for 22 months.

>>MPP Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: The government's own cabinet documents say there are fewer jobs today relative to the population than before the recession; that's their documentation.

Let me share another story about how this is hurting jobs in Ontario. Mastronardi Produce Ltd. was awarded the Premier's agri-food innovation award, but the problem is, because of this government's policies, they had to move that award-winning project—that they got the Premier's award for—to Michigan. In fact, Mastronardi has now invested \$100 million since 2011 in Michigan. They're an Ontario family. They want to invest in Ontario but, because of this government's policies, they can't. They tell me they're worried now that all of their future investments are going to go to the US. Mr. Speaker, why has the Premier created policies that are driving jobs, like the Mastronardi ones in southwestern Ontario, into the US and not into Ontario?

>>Premier Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

>>Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that facts still matter in this province. They may not matter to the Leader of the Opposition, but they matter to the people of this province, and they matter to our business community, who have—Mr. Speaker, facts still matter. The fact is, 697,600 net jobs have been created in this province since the global recession—87.8% are full-time, 78.6% are above the average wage, and 75% are private sector jobs. Those are the facts. The Leader of the Opposition can deny them till the cows come home, but he's wrong. We're creating jobs in this province. We're at the lowest level of unemployment in Ontario that we've had in eight years.

That being said, our Premier cares about those areas that haven't kept up. So we're going to keep investing in our regional economic development funds. We're going to keep growing this province. We're going to keep—

NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Families are at a breaking point in this province when it comes to keeping up with their skyrocketing hydro bills, people like Jane in Kingston, who has been forced to choose between groceries or electricity. She bought groceries and her hydro was cut off. It took a political crisis for the Liberals to finally take winter disconnections like Jane's seriously.

What is it going to take for the Premier to address the root causes of those disconnections, stop just tinkering with the hydro system, and finally bring hydro prices under control?

>>Premier Wynne: I know that the leader of the third party knows that winter disconnections, in every part of the province, should not be happening now. If there is a situation where it's happening, I know the Minister of Energy would want to know about that.

Mr. Speaker, I have said repeatedly in this House that I understand that there are people across the province who are overburdened by their electricity costs. We have moved to reduce their costs by 8%, but we know there is more to be done. We will be bringing a plan forward. We're looking at all options, and we will be bringing a plan forward to do just that: to further reduce people's electricity costs across the province.

>>MPP Horwath: Electricity isn't a luxury, and it shouldn't be priced like one. People like Richelle in Smithville have had hydro bills so high that she is being forced to choose between filling the family's prescriptions or paying to keep the lights on. No mother should have to make that kind of choice.

The Liberals have had almost 14 years in government. They have put the interests of a small group of their well-connected friends ahead of Ontario families by selling off Hydro One, and selling out people like Richelle in the process. When will this Premier wake up and realize that she is hurting Ontario families?

>>Premier Wynne: The decisions that we have made to clean up the air by shutting down the coal-fired plants, to jump-start a renewables industry, to rebuild lines that had been neglected by governments of all stripes, investments that have not been made, those were decisions that had the people of Ontario at the heart of them—kids with asthma, people who needed reliable energy.

But we have acknowledged that there was a cost associated with those decisions that is hard for people to bear across the province. Electricity prices have gone up very quickly, and we have moved to reduce costs already. We're looking at all options to further reduce people's electricity costs. I look forward to bringing forward our plan in the very near future.

>>MPP Horwath: People are trapped in a struggle every month to keep their family above water in this province. People like Jane and Richelle lie awake at night worried sick about how they're going to pay their hydro bill.

The Liberals have spent 14 years driving up hydro costs for families. Premier Wynne is doing more damage by selling off Hydro One and selling out control over our hydro system. Now that the hydro crisis for families has become a political crisis for the Liberal Party, will the Premier finally admit her sell-off was a mistake and take some real action to lower people's electricity bills?

>>Premier Wynne: We have been working to reduce costs in the electricity system for months—actually, years. We have worked with Samsung to make sure we renegotiated that contract. We have made sure that we made a decision not to invest in new nuclear, which saves billions of dollars into the future. We've put in place the Ontario energy support program to help people on low incomes. But we know that there's more to be done. We're looking at all options.

I really look forward to the response by the leader of the third party when we bring our plan forward, which will reduce people's electricity costs in the immediate term. I really look forward to her reaction, because I think that she should be very pleased with the plan that we're going to bring forward.

>>MPP Horwath: As long as it's stopping the sell-off of Hydro One, Speaker, I'll be very pleased.

NDP Leader Horwath to the Premier & Minister of Energy (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. In fact, prices went up 50% since this Premier has been in office. Families need to see immediate relief and permanent change on their hydro bills. Rural and northern Ontarians are paying sky-high electricity bills, usually driven by delivery charges that are much higher than those that urban customers are paying. The Premier has had many chances to fix this unfairness; instead, she chose to watch rural Ontarians go broke trying to keep up with ever-rising hydro bills, hooking up their house's electricity to generators.

Will this Premier and her Liberal government immediately get rid of the premium that rural and northern families are paying on their hydro bills?

>>Premier Wynne: I'm very concerned about the additional burden that people in rural and northern communities carry because of distribution charges. I think that it is a huge concern. It's something that the Minister of Energy is working very hard at addressing. In fact, we have already begun to address that with an extra 12% reduction on top of the 8% reduction, but we know that, still, there is more that needs to be done.

It's interesting to me that the leader of the third party, in her leadoff to this latest question, said that as long as our plan stops the privatization, the broadening of the

ownership, of Hydro One, then she'll be supportive. That is the one thing that would not take a penny off people's electricity bills. The one thing that the leader of the third party is interested in is an action that would not reduce people's electricity bills. We're looking for ways to reduce people's electricity bills.

>>MPP Horwath: It's time for a government that gets what families are dealing with and takes action to make life easier for Ontarians. Mandatory time-of-use pricing may have made sense in theory, but it has shown to do nothing more than punish seniors who need to keep the heat on at home during the day and busy families juggling work and their kids' after-school activities who can't fit all of their chores into off-peak hours. The Premier is punishing parents for cooking at dinnertime. That is not fair. It's time for people to pay less on their hydro bills. People need relief now. Will this Premier immediately end mandatory time-of-use pricing?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise to talk about how what the IESO, our system operator, has been hard at, is doing exactly that. They're looking at market reform. One of the things that we've been talking about with market reform is making sure that there are opportunities for choice.

The Ontario Energy Board is also looking at putting pilot projects in there to offer different pricing solutions. We get that these types of fixes would actually benefit many of those families, like seniors who are living in a bungalow, for example, in Sudbury, in my riding, on a fixed income. We know that there should be some choice between that and the single condo dweller who happens to live in downtown Toronto.

We've actually tasked this, and the IESO and the OEB have been hard at this for months. We're going to continue to find ways to help all families right across the province.

>>MPP Horwath: Here's a news flash for the energy minister, Speaker: Pilot projects do not create systemic change in our electricity system.

Lower hydro bills start with more public control of the electricity system. The Premier has been in government for almost 14 years. She has been Premier for over four. All she has done during that time is make the hydro crisis worse for people with her wrong-headed sell-off of Hydro One. She has ignored regular people on Main Street in favour of well-connected insiders on Bay Street.

Why doesn't this Premier understand that when Ontarians pay their hydro bills, they expect to be paying for electricity—for electricity—not for someone else's profits, and stop the sell-off of Hydro One?

>>Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, this House well knows that the sale of Hydro One has absolutely nothing to do with rates within the province. There's absolutely nothing to do with that.

What they should know is that time of use is something that is actually saving all ratepayers in this province money. However, what we need to do is ensure that we find

ways to work with our system operator and work with the OEB to ensure that we can create the system to keep our conservation efforts up, because conservation is the cheapest form of electricity. We, on this side of the House, recognize that. That's why we brought forward the plan to work with our IESO and the OEB to look at those time-of-use options.

But we also know that families need help right now. That's why we brought forward the 8% rebate.

MPP Smith to the Minister of Energy (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Smith: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier.

On Friday, the Minister of Energy said that hindsight was 20/20. According to the Auditor General, experts at the OPA told the government back in 2009, prior to the Green Energy Act coming into effect, "to use a competitive procurement for large renewable energy projects." But the ministry ignored that advice. They decided to move ahead with the Green Energy Act that we know is a disaster today.

Speaker, which is it?

Did those experts mislead the auditor, or did the minister not want to admit that the government ignored the experts so he could shirk responsibility for the skyrocketing hydro rates in Ontario?

>>Minister Thibeault: Investing and eliminating coal and building transmission were the absolute right things to do. Investing in renewable energy, investing in green energy was absolutely the right thing to do. Because of our foresight, because of this government's foresight, we now have a clean and reliable system, one that we can depend on, not something that is in tatters, like when they were in power.

I recognize that we were not perfect every step of the way. The what was correct, which was green energy and renewable power, but we did make some mistakes on the how. Fixed contracts and being technically specific in terms of those methods actually did inhibit competitive tension. But we're making sure that we've brought forward fixes to this. We're now seeing competitive tension, we're lowering rates, and we're also working on other solutions.

>>MPP Smith: The minister watched as energy prices, electricity prices, in this province skyrocketed out of control. We've seen school boards and hospitals with increases to their electricity bills of 35% in one year. Just two weeks ago, the leader of the official opposition and I went to Sault Ste. Marie, to the F.J. Davey Home for the aged, where the price in one year at that seniors' long-term-care home went up 39%. It's all on the backs of this Liberal government, and they ignored the advice of the energy experts to go down this hole.

Every time a member of the government takes a question on their electricity crisis, they say that they only had two options: Either they could do nothing, or they could do the most expensive thing possible. Why does the government think that doing their job right in the first place wasn't an option in the case of electricity in Ontario?

>>Minister Thibeault: There was only one option, which was to rebuild a system that they left in tatters and which was blacking out on a constant basis. Making sure that businesses actually keep the lights on was our option. Making sure that hospitals were able to do the surgeries they needed was our option. When you de-invest in the system and run Niagara Falls dry—that's what they did. With the amount of generation they never—

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We'll continue to find ways to help families right across the province. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? When it comes to renewable energy, we will make sure—

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to find ways to have competitive tension, when we're looking at lowering rates for all families, when it comes to renewables. The cost of solar and wind is the lowest it's ever been in this province, and provinces and states are looking to us for the leadership we've provided on building a clean, reliable system.

MPP Tabuns to Minister of Energy (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. New Democrats know that privatization of hydro by the Liberals has hurt Ontario families and businesses, but we haven't forgotten, and neither have Ontarians, that it was the Conservative privatization of Ontario Hydro that helped get us into this mess in the first place. It's time to stop that the damage that the Liberals and Conservatives have done to our hydro system and take immediate steps to regain control over hydro costs.

Can the Premier tell us, after 14 years in government, when will she finally take action to deal with the hydro crisis that her Liberal government has helped create?

>>Minister Thibeault: We've been taking action since 2003, rebuilding the system. We've made sure that we've invested in renewable energy. We've invested in making sure that we have a reliable system, a clean system, one that I know the Minister of Health is very proud of as well. We have a system that is seeing our air pollution deaths being reduced by 23% and air pollution hospitalizations being reduced by 41%.

We all know that this investment in building our system—in eliminating coal, in making sure our system is clean and green—came with a cost, and with that, we've worked hard. We are continuing to work hard on finding further reductions for families: 8% off their bills come January 1; 12% plus that 8% for those in the Hydro One R2 areas. And we'll continue to find ways to help.

>>MPP Tabuns: The Premier has never taken the hydro crisis seriously until it became a political crisis for her party. As for the Conservatives, they're offering no real solutions. After 17 years as a Conservative politician, people have no idea where Mr. Brown stands or what he's proposing to do.

The NDP knows that people have to be at the centre of hydro policy, and the time for action is now. If the Premier thinks so too, will she immediately halt the further sell-off of Hydro One and come up with a real strategy to address the hydro crisis?

>>Minister Thibeault: Again, there is no cost increase related to the sale of Hydro One; we all know that within this House. The Ontario Energy Board is the agency that is quasi-judicial and that actually sets the rates.

But when it comes to the Premier and this government actually taking it to the next level and finding ways of reducing costs for people right across the province, we saved \$3.7 billion by renegotiating the Samsung agreement. We saved \$1.9 billion by reducing the FIT prices. We've created the competitive LRP process, which saved \$1.5 billion. We suspended the LRP II process, which saved \$3.8 billion. We also got new dispatching rules for wind, which saves \$200 million. We're going to continue to find ways to help families right across this province.

MPP Gates to Minister of Energy (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Gates: My question is to the Premier. Last week, I had a chance to sit down with the chamber of commerce in Niagara Falls. One of the main issues on the agenda was hydro rates. These small business owners in Niagara Falls are saying they're struggling to pay their bills. In some cases, they're saying these rates are going to drive them out of business. They're jeopardizing jobs in my riding of Niagara Falls. Premier, what do you say to these business owners who don't know if they can keep their businesses afloat with rates like these—and, at the end of the day, jeopardizing jobs?

>>Minister Thibeault: I thank the member for the question. Small businesses, of course, are a very important part of our overall economy, and we recognize the importance that they play. That's why when we brought forward the 8% reduction back in the fall economic statement—small businesses actually qualify for that 8% reduction, which they started getting off of their bills as of January 1.

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One of the things I do know is that we're going to continue to find ways to reduce electricity bills for small and medium-sized businesses right across the province and all ratepayers, but there are also many incentives for small businesses to talk about with their local utility, to talk with them about the saveONenergy program, in which they can actually save significant money off their bills.

We were in Niagara Falls back in the fall talking about one of the local industries there that utilized many of these programs and is saving hundreds of thousands of dollars. I encourage all small businesses to talk to their local utility to make those savings.

>>MPP Gates: My question is back to the Premier. It's the chamber of commerce that is talking to us and saying that they're going to have to close their businesses. The 8%

you talk about was put on by the Liberal Party. It's nice that you're taking it off, but the reality is, you put it on in the first place.

Every day, residents in my riding get up and drive right past Niagara Falls. In case you forgot, Niagara Falls is a landmark that drove public power in Ontario for over a hundred years. In those same hundred years, those hydro prices were affordable in the province of Ontario.

Premier, how can you explain these rates to the residents of Niagara Falls who see Niagara Falls every day and also see hydro bills with some of the highest rates in North America?

>>Minister Thibeault: We shut down coal plants. We rebuilt a system. We made sure that our system was reliable so that when we had the blackout in 2003, places like Niagara Falls would actually still have their lights on. What we've done is, we've made sure we have a clean system, a reliable system, one that people can actually use. We know we need to do more. We're acting on that. We're going to be coming forward with a new rate mitigation plan in the very near future. But we also have the saveONenergy program that we encourage all of our small businesses to use. There are many, many programs out there that are helping; for example, Hematite Manufacturing in Brantford. They've saved significantly: \$200,000 every year on their new equipment.

It's great to see that they took advantage of this program. We encourage all small businesses to do so.

MPP Gelinas to Minister of Energy (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP G  linas: Ma question est pour la premi  re ministre. Premier, my constituent—her initials are A.L.—is very concerned about her hydro bill. She and her husband are retired seniors on pensions. They were paying \$140 a month for hydro on equal billing. Last spring, in order to save more energy, they spent over \$400 and switched all of their lights to LEDs. But instead of seeing their hydro bill go down, their bill actually went up to \$200 a month on equal billing.

Premier, how is that these seniors, who have worked so hard to use less energy, are now paying more for their hydro bill?

>>Minister Thibeault: I thank the member for the question. It is important to recognize that we are working hard right now to ensure that those individuals like the honourable member has mentioned are finding ways to see their bills reduced.

We are encouraging conservation, because conservation saves the entire system. When we have people saving and conserving energy, we don't need to build new generation. When we don't have to build new generation we can actually have cost savings for everyone. That's something we encourage.

When it comes to individual cases and reasons for individual bills, I'm more than happy to work with the honourable member to find out ways that we can continue to help this

family. There are many programs that are in place that actually help seniors. The Ontario Electricity Support Program is one of those programs in which seniors can see their bills reduced significantly.

>>MPP Gélinas: Speaker, I can guarantee you that if there was a program out there to help them, we would have helped them. We do this inside and out every single day in my office.

These seniors do their laundry at night. They changed all of their lights to LEDs. For all of their efforts, their hydro bill has gone up. They are on a fixed income and are finding it harder and harder to get by. They are frustrated. They are angry. They have no confidence that the present government will ever make their lives better.

The Premier said that the sell-off of Hydro One would not increase hydro costs, but this is exactly what's happening to each and every one of us in Nickel Belt. When, Premier, will you end the higher cost of rural delivery and give Mrs. A.L. and her husband some relief?

>>Minister Thibeault: As of January 1, those customers with Hydro One on R2 have seen their bills dropped by \$60; we actually enhanced that by \$45 to bring it up to \$60. But we recognize that there's more to do, especially for those folks who are in northern or rural parts of our province. We're actively working right now to find ways to ensure that we can address that issue, because we do want to make sure that electricity bills right across the province—specifically, distribution—are more equitable for where those people choose to live.

At the end of this we're going to continue to invest in a system that is clean, that is reliable, and one that is benefiting the families like the one the honourable member is mentioning. We'll make sure that we can continue to have this clean, green system and find ways to help.

MPP Fife to Minister of Energy (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Fife: My question is to the Premier. This morning you have heard the voices of Ontarians from across the province and the negative impact that Ontario hydro costs are having on them.

A few weeks ago, while knocking on doors in Kitchener–Waterloo, I met Liz and Kenneth Costello, who told me that they cannot get relief from their rising hydro bills. Not long ago, Kenneth was diagnosed with a chronic lung disease. His wife, Liz, quit her job to become his primary caregiver. Kenneth now has to be on oxygen machines 24 hours a day. It is not optional. Their hydro bills have more than doubled since Ken got sick. In January 2014, their bill was \$289. In January 2017, their bill was \$623. They do not qualify for any of your government's hydro relief programs. They are on one pension. They have no other options.

Premier, what is your plan to help Liz and Kenneth Costello?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'd like to thank the honourable member for bringing up that family's situation, because it is one of the situations that we are acting on right now. I do recognize that the honourable member talked about the OESP, the Ontario Electricity Support Program, and that they don't qualify for that program. We are looking at that program and seeing ways that we can enhance it.

One of the other things that they will get right now is that 8% rebate. That's one of the things I know that they'll get right now, but we are working actively right now to try to find other ways to bring forward rate mitigation to help not only that family—because there are other families right across this province who need help. We recognize that, and we're going to make sure that we act on that.

>>MPP Fife: I'm not sure that the Minister of Energy fully understands the gravity of the situation. Their hydro bill was \$289 in 2014. Today, it is \$623. That is a cost that cannot be absorbed by an elderly couple who are living on one income—a pension income, a fixed income.

As I pointed out, 24-hours-a-day oxygen is not optional for them to use your peak times. What this family should be focused on is keeping Ken healthy and focusing on his health. Instead, their primary concern, the number one point of stress in their lives, is their hydro bill.

Premier, I ask you again today: Do you have a plan that can help Liz and Kenneth cope with the skyrocketing hydro costs in the province of Ontario?

>>Minister Thibeault: In 2003, that family wouldn't have been able to use their oxygen, because the power would have been out on a regular basis. We've made sure that we have invested in a system that will ensure that there is power there. We will make sure that we will continue to find ways to actually reduce rates. We are working on that. We'll make sure that we can actually have rate mitigation in the very near future.

February 28, 2017

MPP Smith to Minister of Energy (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier. This government likes to say that hindsight is 20/20 when they talk about the electricity crisis that they've created in the province.

A couple of weeks ago, the leader of the official opposition and I were in Timmins—and we welcome the folks from the Timmins area who are with us this morning. Let's go back to 2014, when the city of Timmins paid \$3.7 million for electricity. Now, Timmins pays \$5.3 million for electricity, an increase of \$1.6 million on the municipality's electricity budget.

How much more does the Premier think that she can squeeze out of the people of Timmins?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise and respond to the question relating to what this government has done to ensure that we are finding ways to lower rates for all Ontarians and for municipalities.

As the Premier has said in the past, we've done some hard work, the heavy lifting, to ensure that we've rebuilt a system that is no longer relying on coal and ensuring that we build a system where we have power in the north—

Thank you, Mr. Speaker—and again, invested billions of dollars in making sure that we rebuilt our transmission system that was left in a shambles when we took over back in 2003. Of course, that takes time and money. What we've done is find ways of reducing those costs that we've had.

I'll make sure I answer more of that in the supplementary.

>>MPP Smith: Back to the Premier: The government has lit the house on fire and they're trying to use the garden hose to put out the flames.

Let's go back to 2014. Quinte Health Care, which operates four hospitals in my region, paid \$2.1 million in electricity costs in 2014. It is up \$600,000 since then. That's almost 30%. If you go back to 2012, it's up almost \$1 million for the hospitals in my region.

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If the Premier doesn't want to talk about dollars, let's talk about doctors. How many more doctors is your electricity crisis going to cost the patients in the Quinte region of Ontario?

>>Minister Thibeault: It's interesting to hear from that side of the House. They were actually going to close one of those hospitals, and it was this government that kept those hospitals open and invested in health care, to make sure that we have doctors in that part of our province.

So let's be clear and let's look at the facts. We've ensured that we have got programs in place to help hospitals. For example, in my riding of Sudbury, Health Sciences North saves about \$200,000 a year after using the saveONenergy program. They are then putting that money back into health care services.

Mr. Speaker, there are programs in place, there are systems in place to ensure that we keep the lights on, that we keep the operating rooms—with the electricity that they need—and at the same time reducing costs. We're going to continue to find ways to do more.

>>MPP Smith: It's time for this government to stop doing more, because every time they do more, it hurts more and more the people of Ontario.

Just before the end of the business day yesterday, my office was made aware of a family in Chatham-Kent, down in southwestern Ontario. The same utility controls both the electricity and the water for this family—Entegrus. On Friday, when their electricity was turned back on, their water was turned off. They were told that it would only be turned back on when they were no longer in arrears.

Cities, hospitals, families—all hurting. That's your Ontario, Premier. That's your Ontario. Everybody is hurting.

Speaker, what price is too high for this government?

>>Minister Thibeault: There are many electricity companies around the province that look after both water and electricity, but when they look after the water component, they're looking after that for their local municipality. I would encourage them to contact their local municipality.

We will find ways to continue to do more, because if we were actually to follow what that party did, we would have left our system in a shambles. We would have relied on coal. We no longer want to rely on coal. We want to ensure that we have a clean system, that we have—

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Coming back to disconnections: Last week we had the bill pass this House unanimously, which was great news. I was very pleased to see that the OEB acted very quickly and decisively. On Thursday, they issued a decision to all local utilities to make sure that they have all of these reconnections connected—

>>The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

MPP Singh to the Premier & Minister of Energy (Energy Policies)

>>MPP Singh: My question is to the Premier. The Premier has said that she will look at fixing hydro. The Premier has had 14 years to look at solving this problem and four years as Premier: four years as Premier and 14 years as a government to solve a crisis that they helped create. Ontario needs more than a Premier or an electricity minister to look at solutions to this crisis. They need someone who is going to act on solving this problem.

Here's the question. Here's a concrete thing that this government can act on. Will this government act to commit to a real promise to end rural delivery charges?

>>Premier Wynne: There are many ideas that are coming forward, and I appreciate the member opposite putting forward some thoughts. The reality is that we have committed to bringing forward a plan before the budget comes out, and that plan will be a plan to reduce electricity prices immediately.

We have already begun. The 8% reduction is already on people's bills. That is already being taken off people's bills.

The plan we bring forward will mean more immediate reductions—unlike, I would say, the plan that was brought forward yesterday by the NDP, the cornerstone of which is a pillar, the repurchasing of Hydro One, which would not take one cent off one electricity bill.

>>MPP Singh: Here's another idea: ending time-of-use fees. Ending time-of-use fees isn't just a wild policy idea; it will actually impact people immediately and have a real impact on their lives. Take, for example, Ann-May. Here's an example. Ann-May—

Interjections.

>>MPP Singh: Take Ann-May, for example. She's a senior living in Hamilton. She has recently been told that she's got to start using an in-home oxygen-making machine. That's going to increase her bill by about \$250, which will pretty much double her hydro bill. If Ann-May could opt out of time-of-use fees, she could actually be at home and use her machine during the day instead of having to be up all night and worrying about how she's actually going to afford to use this machine.

This is how it should be. Hydro is a necessity, not a luxury. Will this government commit to ending these unfair, mandatory time-of-use fees?

>>MinisterThibeault: When it comes to time of use, Mr. Speaker, time of use actually provides an overall benefit to the entire province by conserving power during peak demand. But we do understand, like the example that was used by the honourable member, that there are some people who do need to use power during peak times. That's why we've already started the process with our system operator of looking at actually having some type of alternative plan, having time of use and having a flat-rate plan. We're so far into this that the OEB has already started a pilot project looking at that.

But the important thing for us on this one case is, the individual who needs to use a piece of medical equipment can actually apply for the Ontario Electricity Support Program and see their benefit double. I do hope that that person gets access to that information.

>>MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, people in Ontario need to see real changes that will actually impact their life right now, to make sure that the hydro system is actually working for them.

The Premier says they're working on it, but they've had lots of time. They've been in power since before Facebook was a thing. They've been in power since Destiny's Child was better known than Beyoncé. In fact, this government took power when people were still renting VHS tapes from Blockbuster. This government has had a lot of time, but we're not seeing any results. How much more time will it take so that people can see some justice with respect to their energy costs?

>>Minister Thibeault: We've been in power long enough to ensure that we've eliminated coal. We've been in power long enough to ensure that our system is reliable. We've been in power long enough to ensure that people can actually use our system and not worry about it having a brownout.

We actually invested in our system over the last 14 years to make it a better system than was there before, to make it a cleaner system than was there before, and to make sure that people who have asthma can go outside and take a breath of fresh air and not worry about having a smog day, which we haven't had in this province since 2014. We need to be proud of that.

Other states and other provinces are looking to us because we've been leading the way in building a system that is clean and reliable. We are taking it to the next level to make it as affordable as possible.

Interjections.

MPP Singh to the Premier (Infrastructure Program Funding)

>>MPP Singh: My question is again to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier said that if stopping the sell-off of Hydro One is a priority, then investing in infrastructure would have to take a backseat. Just because the Premier says that Ontario can't have affordable public power and build infrastructure at the same time doesn't mean it's true. In fact, if the Premier continues to repeat it, it doesn't make it any more true.

My question to the Premier is this: I'm pretty sure that Ontario has had public power for over a century. I'm also sure that over that century, we've built infrastructure—

We've invested in public infrastructure and transportation infrastructure. My question is, why can't this Premier do the same thing?

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, it's very interesting. The member opposite makes the assertion that there has been building of infrastructure in a rational way over decades, and that's actually not true. The reality is that there were long periods, there were decades, where infrastructure was not built, where investments were not made. We know that if there isn't a 5% investment in infrastructure year over year—and that can be a combination of federal, provincial and municipal contributions—then in fact we're not even keeping up with, let alone building, new infrastructure that's needed. We've actually tackled that, and we've actually broken that cycle of neglect that had been in place for at least 20 years.

We're going to continue to build infrastructure, because that leads to economic growth and that leads to the well-being of people in this province.

>>MPP Singh: The Premier said when she "travels to other countries and talks to businesses about coming to Ontario, they want to know about infrastructure." I think that makes sense, and a part of that infrastructure is the cost of hydro. Does the Premier admit that sky-high hydro rates are hurting current businesses here in Ontario and discouraging other businesses from investing in our province?

>>Premier Wynne: Actually, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that in all of the conversations that I have had in other countries, the number one issue that people raise with me is availability of talented, skilled people. That is the number one concern and it is the number one reason that businesses come to Ontario. If you talk to Thomson Reuters, the reason that they are coming here explicitly is because of a terrific supply chain of well-educated, talented people.

That is who we are in Ontario. That is what we are selling to the world. We're leading economic growth in this country largely because of our talented, skilled—

>>MPP Singh: It seems like this is the same sort of false logic. By talking about the rising price of hydro, I didn't in any way talk about the fact that we don't have a talented pool of people. But it shows this government's lack of logical rationale; they can't address the issue.

On the topic of drawing businesses to Ontario, the Ontario government should also look at what the Ontario Chamber of Commerce has to say about our current hydro system in this province. The 2017 economic report states that the experience that many households have with respect to rising electricity rates are amplified when it comes to businesses. The report goes on to note that the uncertainty with respect to these rates is discouraging businesses from investing here in this province, and that means fewer jobs for the people of Ontario.

Here's the reality: We need to invest in infrastructure. We need to build not only affordable public hydro, but a public transit system and transportation infrastructure. Instead of selling a false choice that people don't believe, will the government actually start to do that?

>>Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, it would be nice if the NDP would stop talking down our economy. Our business community, the people of this province and the talented people the Premier talked about have worked very hard with this government to build this economy up. They've created 700,000 net new jobs, yet the party opposite keeps talking their efforts down. That's not fair.

And then they say—

Speaker, they talk those efforts down by saying they're part-time jobs—wrong; 90% are full time.

They talk them down by saying they're not good-paying jobs—wrong; 80% are above the average wage.

They say that they're public sector jobs—wrong; 75% are private sector jobs.

MPP French to Minister of Energy (Energy Policies)

>>MPP French: My question is to the Premier. The Premier promised that winter hydro disconnections would stop. Well, Georgina lives in Oshawa. She pays her hydro bill to a private company that submeters her apartment building and not to the local utility. This private company is regulated by the OEB, but they are not being told to stop disconnections, so Georgina has had her power cut off.

What is the Premier going to do to get Georgina's power back on?

>>Minister Thibeault: As mentioned last week, we passed the legislation to give the Ontario Energy Board the power to end winter disconnections within our province. We were very pleased that the OEB acted quickly and decisively. On Thursday of last week, the OEB issued a decision to all utilities—and that would include these companies—that banned all disconnects until April 30—

required currently disconnected customers to be reconnected at no cost and ordered the removal of any load limiters being used to limit electricity use.

The OEB has announced a comprehensive hearing and review process for customer service rules. I'd be happy to speak with the member afterwards to ensure that we can get all of the information to help that one individual.

>>MPP French: It would seem that the minister is also disconnected, but I'm more concerned about Georgina right now.

It turns out that there is a loophole in the Premier's promise that people won't have their power cut off during the winter. The Premier surely must have been briefed about this loophole, but I guess she didn't choose to fix the problem. It looks like the Liberals are more interested again in scoring a political win than really fixing the problem of winter connections.

When did the Premier learn about this loophole, and what is she going to do to close it?

>>Minister Thibeault: Again, the OEB has acted quickly on this and in making sure all local utilities will stop winter disconnects. It happened last Thursday. We're making sure that everyone is going to be reconnected as soon as possible.

The important thing is, we acted on this. We started talking about this in June and now we're very pleased to see this happening. We're going to ensure that we continue to find ways to help all ratepayers right across the province. We're going to come forward with a real action plan, one that's not based off of ideology and ideas. We have really good ideas that we're bringing forward—

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

PC Leader Brown to Energy Minister (Energy Contracts)

>>MPP Brown: My question is for the Premier. We all know about the Minister of Energy's mea culpa and hindsight, but the Auditor General found that Liberals ignored the advice of their own energy experts when handing out 20-year contracts to Liberal friends. If they had listened to the Auditor General, it could have saved Ontario \$4 billion.

We also know that the 30 big renewable companies donated \$1.3 million to the Ontario Liberal Party. My question to the Premier is: Given this hindsight, given this regret about these bad contracts, will the Ontario Liberal Party return the \$1.3 million in donations?

>>Minister Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise. Investing in eliminating coal and building transmission, as the Leader of the Opposition talked about, was the right thing to do. Because of our foresight, we have a clean, reliable system that we can depend on. As I said in my speech, yes, hindsight is 20/20. The "what" was correct, but not the "how." But I know the Leader of the Opposition knows hindsight very well because when it came to the updated sex-ed curriculum, he actually used hindsight and changed his mind, because they didn't support it and then they did support it. Then he wrote a letter

not supporting it and then he supported it again. Hindsight is something that they know very well.

We've recognized on this side that we actually have invested in a system, built a system that is very strong. We will continue to find ways of lowering rates for—

>>MPP Brown: Again to the Premier: I asked a serious question about hydro. The government has acknowledged that their Green Energy Act was a mistake; they signed bad contracts. The response I get from the Minister of Energy is a smear on an unrelated topic.

So I will try again, Mr. Speaker. Directly to the Premier: How does the Premier reconcile the fact that we've overpaid massively for renewable energy; that if we had listened to the Auditor General, we could have saved Ontarians \$4 billion on their hydro bills; and that the Ontario Liberal Party received \$1.3 million in donations? A very clear question: Given this acknowledgement, given this mea culpa, will the Premier ensure the Ontario Liberal Party returns the \$1.3 million to Ontario ratepayers because of these bad contracts?

>>Minister Thibeault: Again, the Green Energy Act, the “what,” was the absolute right thing to do. On how these contracts were negotiated, we of course could do better. That's what we're actually doing. We're finding ways of doing better for the people of Ontario and bringing forward a rate mitigation process that's going to help all families and all businesses across the province.

When talking about savings for people, we've already done that and we're going to continue to do that. The renegotiated Samsung agreement was \$3.7 billion in savings; reduced FIT prices were \$1.9 billion in saving; the LRP process saved \$1.5 billion and the reduced FIT cost was \$800 million. We've continued to do this, while at the same time eliminating coal and rebuilding a system that they couldn't care for, that they left in shambles.

MPP Sattler to the Premier & Energy Minister (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Chris and Robina Willis live in London West with their five children. Both have jobs but, like too many working families, they are struggling to keep the lights on. Any time they fall behind on their hydro bills, they must pay hefty fees and a larger deposit, leading to bills as high as \$1,000 and forcing them to cut back on necessities. As hydro rates increase, this vicious circle just gets worse.

Why is the Premier ignoring the crisis faced by families like Chris and Robina Willis and refusing to act now to keep hydro costs affordable?

>>Premier Wynne: We have already begun to take action, and we are bringing forward a plan that will continue to take action in the immediate term.

What's interesting about the questions from the NDP is that the document they brought out yesterday lays out a number of initiatives, most of which wouldn't reduce electricity prices, and none of which would reduce electricity prices in the immediate term. It would take a very long time, and some of them—I have no idea how they would do it, in terms of, for example, asking the federal government to take action and forgo revenue. We're going to bring forward a workable plan. We're going to bring forward an initiative that builds on the actions that we've already taken—
—a real plan that will reduce electricity prices immediately.

>>MPP Sattler: Speaker, Chris and Robina Willis are doing everything they can to keep up. They have had to use the food bank multiple times. They have removed their children from extracurricular activities. Now they say they will no longer be able to organize birthday parties for their children.
Speaker, does this government think it is fair to make children pay the price for their failure to take real action on hydro rates?

>>Minister Thibeault: I think everyone in this House would agree that it's unacceptable that any family would have to do that. That's why we acted and we're continuing to act. When we brought forward the 8% reduction, that's helping five million families across the province, with small businesses and farms included in that. But we know that more needs to be done. That's why we're continuing right now to work and to find ways to help families.
We know that we had to rebuild that system. It was paramount for us to eliminate coal, to make sure that we can have a system that's clean and reliable. But we will take it to the next level. We will work hard to ensure that we make this as affordable as possible for every family and for every business right across our province, from Windsor to Ottawa to Kenora and everything in between. We're working for everyone in this province.

MPP Gretzky to Energy Minister (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. For people living in Windsor, like Mary, even the most basic services are more and more out of reach. I'm not talking about luxuries: Mary doesn't have a pool, a hot tub or even a dishwasher. As she says, "It's just basic living." The price for basic living? A \$200 electricity bill, double what she was paying last year.

Will this Liberal government listen to Mary, finally admit that electricity is a necessity, not a luxury, and begin to treat it that way?

>>Minister Thibeault: We continue to find ways to help people like Mary, and every other family and person and business in this province. We did start, starting on January 1 with the 8% reduction for those R2 customers in the province—330,000 households. They're seeing a \$60.50 reduction.

We know we can do more. There are programs in place to help people like Mary. I do hope that Mary is looking at some of those programs. But we will find ways. We are working hard right now to continue to find ways to reduce cost.

We do recognize that the system that we built—eliminating coal, rebuilding the grid—cost billions of dollars. We know that cost actually came at the expense of many families. That's why we are now looking at ways of ensuring that we can continue to find some downward pressure on rates and bring immediate action and relief.

>>MPP Gretzky: Again to the Premier: Not a day goes by in Windsor where I don't hear yet another hydro horror story. Parents can't buy school supplies for their children, enroll them in sports or send them to summer camp, all because of their skyrocketing hydro bills. Businesses can't afford to expand. Some have already closed.

I invite the Premier to come to Windsor and actually listen to how difficult it's becoming to afford even the most basic needs like hydro, food or medication for seniors. I'll introduce her to my constituents. I'll even buy her lunch. People in Windsor need action, not more Liberal talking points. They need more than \$5 off this month and maybe \$6 off the next.

Will this Liberal government end the sell-off of Hydro One and offer a real plan to lower electricity bills?

>>Minister Thibeault: Once again, Mr. Speaker, as we said, there are several programs in place that actually help these families significantly in terms of dollars that they're saving every month when it comes to their electricity bill. We're also making sure, as I said before, that the 8% reduction that started as of January 1—that's a significant reduction for many families and farms and businesses right across the province. That took effect as of January 1. Many of those families are now seeing the full benefit of that, now that we're at the end of February.

We recognize that the investments that we made in this system—making sure that we're off coal, making sure that we have a clean system, a reliable system and one that we could count on—came with a cost. Now we're taking it to the next level. We're working hard on finding other ways that we can reduce costs for not only this family, as was mentioned, but all families and businesses right across our great province.

MPP Vanthof to Energy Minister (Hydro Rates)

>>MPP Vanthof: My question is for the Premier. The Horne Granite Curling Club is a cornerstone in the community of New Liskeard, as are many curling clubs and ice rinks. Tragically, a few years ago it burned to the ground. Through the dedication of its members and support from the community, it was totally rebuilt. It's totally modern. It faced a huge challenge.

Now it faces an even greater challenge. Last year the membership fees for the Horne Granite Curling Club were \$42,000. Their hydro bill was \$46,000, so you know where

that's going. How is it that we've come to this, that our rural way of life is being destroyed by your hydro policies?

>>Minister Thibeault: It is a great day to talk about curling. I know Sudbury has a great curling club as well. The Copper Cliff Curling Club have come to me and talked to me about their electricity bill. And do you know what I did? I put them in touch with their local utility, their local utility that went in and worked with them on the saveONenergy program. The saveONenergy program is now saving that curling club thousands of dollars every month.

I encourage that member to utilize the local utilities that are within your area. Use the programs that are in place, because we rebuilt this system, we've made sure it's clean, and now we're making sure it's affordable for every single business and for every single person in this province.

>>MPP Vanthof: Minister, with all due respect, this example—it's a brand new facility. They've done everything that they could to save energy. They have worked with every program available, as have most people in this province. Anyone who comes in our office, we make sure that we look for every program available. Yet this club and many others like it are in danger of closing because they can't pay their hydro bills.

The real question is, your ministry has policy analysts, experts, long-term energy plans: How did you not foresee this happening? Why did it have to come to a crisis before you realized that, "Oh, the people in rural Ontario can't pay their hydro bills? Oh, perhaps we have to do something"? How did it come to this with your energy programs?

>>Minister Thibeault: It came to this because for decades the opposition parties, when they were in power, never invested in the system. It was up to us to rebuild it, and that doesn't happen overnight. We've rebuilt the system. We've made sure it's clean, we've made sure it's green, and now we've made sure that we've got a system that we can rely on.

We're going to continue to work hard for the folks who are in rural parts of our province. We've started with the \$60.50 RRRP reduction. We're going to continue to find ways of finding programs that will help these organizations, just like we did in Sudbury, just like we've done in Thunder Bay, just like we've done right across our great province. We will continue to find ways to help, not only in rural but in urban parts of our province, Mr. Speaker.