

Question Period
TBS Business Lines
March 2017

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March 22, 2017

➤ PC leader Brown to Premier (Government Advertising)

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. By now, everyone has seen or heard the taxpayer-funded Liberal advertisements. I will ask the Premier, through you, Mr. Speaker: When will the Premier stop using taxpayer dollars to advertise for the Liberal Party of Ontario?

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The Premier speculates why we're raising this issue. Using taxpayer dollars to advertise for the Liberal Party is wrong. That's why we're bringing it up. It is wrong. The Premier knows it is wrong. The Liberals have a fascinating talking point. They say that they have to run these Liberal vanity ads so they can use this information to tell people how to manage their budgets. But for 13 years, when they raised hydro bills 400%, did they ever run ads saying, "Sorry, we're raising hydro rates 400%. You need to manage your budget"? Not for a second. This is about

one thing and only one thing, and that's selling the Liberal Party, using taxpayer dollars to do so. It's wrong. My question to the Premier is: You know it's wrong. Do the right thing. Stop running these ads.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm not speculating on why the member is asking that question. I know exactly why he's asking the question: because, Mr. Speaker, if he had a plan, he'd be pushing his plan. He'd be putting his— As I've indicated before, when the Premier is answering and I'm hearing heckling from the same side, it's very difficult for me to ask the other side to come to order. That's number one. Number two: Right after I finish indicating to you that both sides are getting a little bit too carried away, it continues. Therefore, I'm moving to warnings.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The other part of our plan, which is a real plan, which we are going to move forward to implement, is that we will hold rate increases to inflation for the next four years. So this is not about putting in place a reduction and then not holding those rates— Finally, Mr. Speaker, we're creating a \$200-million affordability fund for people who want to make investments and aren't able to do that.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: Yesterday, the Attorney General alleged that they had "strengthened legislation to provide a clear definition of partisan advertising." But what did the Auditor General say about this? She said, "We cautioned when the government changed the law in 2015 that it was opening the door to" spending taxpayer money on ads that appear partisan. And then the Auditor General said, "Sure enough, the government walked right through that open door" that they created. Clearly, the Liberals are using a loophole they created to abuse taxpayer dollars. This is what it's about. They can do all the talking points they want. They can say they strengthened the laws or that it's about budgeting. They created a loophole. They're driving a truck through it. It's abuse of taxpayer dollars. It's wrong. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier stop running these ads?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We created the legislation. We put the legislation in place in the first place, because Mike Harris's face was all over advertising consistently. But let me tell you about the other part of our plan, Mr. Speaker, which again is a real plan that is going to reduce people's electricity prices, which is the issue that we are dealing with in this province, because we have made huge investments. We are in a situation where we have a clean electricity grid and clean air, because of shutting down the coal-fired plants, but there's a cost associated with that. So the other part of our plan is that we are removing delivery charges from all on-reserve First Nation residential consumers. That is a huge issue. As some of the leadership in the First Nations have said, this will do a huge amount to deal with electricity poverty on reserves. It's a very important step forward.

➤ MPP Tabuns to Minister Hoskins (Hydro)

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm addressing this to the Premier. Yesterday, the Minister of Health boasted that he hadn't heard from a single hospital complaining about massive hydro bills. Clearly, the Premier and her minister aren't listening. On February 2, 2017, the Ontario Medical Association said, "Hospitals like South Bruce Grey Health Centre are ... forced to use their 1% funding increase to deal with skyrocketing hydro rates instead of patient care thanks to the Ontario government." The Premier and her party ignored Ontarians' concerns about their soaring hydro bills until political pressure forced them to acknowledge the problem. Clearly, they haven't learned their lesson since they're now ignoring hospital concerns about the same issue. When will the Premier admit that there's a problem in hospitals and that she and her Minister of Health know about it, and when will she do something to fix it?

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again, back to the Premier. Maybe she'll answer the question. In their pre-budget submission delivered directly to the government, the Ontario Hospital Association also made the case that skyrocketing hospital hydro bills are a huge concern in Ontario. Page 4 of their submission reads, "Energy costs are putting a tremendous strain on hospitals.... Hospitals are by no means immune from the same rising hydro costs that affect all Ontarians." Do the Premier, or her minister, not read documents given to them by official, non-partisan and highly expert bodies like the OHA?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I acknowledge that energy costs are a concern for hospitals. It represents roughly 1% of their operating budget. We have consistently increased the operating budgets of hospitals as well as targeted funding to— We have. Despite what the member opposite is saying, we have consistently increased the operating budgets and targeted funding for hospitals. I want to give one good example from this week, where Mackenzie Health actually received an award for converting all of their lighting to LED lighting. They are the first 100%-LED-lighting—and they've been financed to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: As a result, it is estimated that through that process they are going to be saving \$210,000 each and every year. So I think there are excellent examples where hospitals are finding innovative and appropriate ways to work together in partnership with us to find ways to address that aspect of their budget.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I can tell the Premier doesn't like these questions; she's not answering them. It's not just the professional associations that have been raising a red flag about hydro costs. The CEO of the Windsor Regional Hospital alerted the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs that hydro costs at his hospitals were set to increase by \$700,000 in just one year. He said, in January 2016, "Last year, for our hydro costs at Windsor Regional Hospital between our two campuses, we spent \$3.5 million. This year, to the end of March, we're projected to spend \$4.2 million, a \$700,000 increase." If the Premier and her minister just ignore the experts and say that no one is worried, how can she expect Ontarians to trust that her phantom hydro plan is a genuine attempt to provide relief to Ontarians and not just a support-grabbing occasion?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We provided Windsor Regional Hospital with an increase in their operating budget of \$9.9 million last year—significantly, astronomically more than the numbers that have been quoted over a period of time by the member opposite. It's a 3.2% increase in their operating budget. Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge that our hospitals are facing a number of pressures—and electricity, I have to reiterate, is roughly 1% of the total operating budget. I think there are hospitals around the province that can look—Mackenzie Health, for example, that received from their distribution network a cheque for \$125,000 to assist them in that conversion to 100% LED lighting. It's a great innovation. It's an innovation that's going to save them nearly a quarter of a million dollars a year on their electricity costs. The combination of investments that we make in innovations out there will help us address this particular issue.

➤ [MPP Tabuns to Minister Hoskins \(Hydro rates\)](#)

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we went through this yesterday, as we remember, when various examples were given. Hamilton was an example that was provided, where I referenced that last year we gave Hamilton Health Sciences a 3.6% increase in their operating budget—an additional \$29.5 million to that corporation to assist them in not

only providing and maintaining a sustainable operating budget but also many new and important advancements that lead to the high quality of care that they provide. I have to say, I'm deeply disturbed that the member opposite continues to revisit Sault Ste. Marie, because that hospital had to go out publicly and oppose what had been declared and asserted by the leader of his party. The hospital had to go out publicly in the media and say that while electricity costs have risen over the past five years, those increases have not resulted in layoffs at the hospital and no decisions have been made based on those electricity costs.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again, back to the Premier: This problem is widespread. Access-to-information documents reveal that Health Sciences North in Sudbury and Peterborough Regional Health Centre both saw their hydro consumption rates reduce over the same period of time as their hydro bills went up. That just doesn't make any sense. Can the Premier tell us if her 2% savings at least gives hospitals enough hydro relief to stop their bills from going up while the amount of energy they use goes down?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, okay. Health Sciences North—you mentioned it; I'm going to respond directly to that issue. Health Sciences North received 8.8 million new dollars last year for their operating budget. Peterborough Regional Health Centre: a 4.3% increase in their operating budget last year; 9.4 million new dollars provided to them in a budget, last year, that they voted against.

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, electricity costs for hospitals average approximately 1% of their total budget. That means that 99%, approximately, goes to all of the other expenditures. Specifically, the Niagara Health System, as was referenced, last year received a 2.5% increase in their operating budget, amounting to \$9.4 million. That was more than enough to cover their increase in electricity costs last year, but also to substantially increase their operating budget for all of those other elements, the other 99% of the activities that take place in hospitals that are so important to delivering high-quality care there and around the province.

➤ [MPP Munro to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro Rates\)](#)

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Premier. Premier, 10 years ago, a local restaurant in my riding, Fork and Plate, had a hydro bill of \$600 per month. Today, their

bill is at least \$2,200, and in the summer it climbs to \$3,500. Your 25% figure includes the HST rebate you have already announced, so it's really 17%. In the last 10 years, you have more than tripled their hydro bill. This is your legacy. Now you offer them a fraction in return. To top it all off, InnPower is asking for a retroactive rate increase. Premier, when will you do the right thing and provide real and lasting relief to families and businesses?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just wanted to let the Legislature know—and I know some people are seeing it on social media—that news is breaking that there's been an incident near the UK Parliament. Dozens of people on the Westminster Bridge have been injured and Parliament is in lockdown. I just wanted folks to know that, and I think all of our thoughts are with the people and their families and parliamentarians in England. We have a plan. The business that the member opposite is talking about will see, it's true, an additional 17% reduction—17% plus 8% is 25%, Mr. Speaker. It's very important to us that those local businesses are able to thrive, and that's exactly why we're bringing a plan forward. I know that the opposition doesn't have a plan to reduce electricity bills. We do, and we're going to move ahead so that businesses just like this one will be able to see that reduction.

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

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, I'm pleased to rise and talk about the fair hydro plan and the 25% reduction that all families, small businesses and farms will be receiving across the province. I know the honourable member mentioned InnPower and their rate application. I think it's important to mention, as part of our fair hydro plan, in bringing down electricity costs our government is also providing additional support to those facing the highest delivery costs in the province. When introduced, regarding the distribution charges levied, there will be eight utilities with the highest rates which will be lowering their distribution rates to protect ratepayers in those areas. InnPower is one of those utilities whose distribution charges will be reduced. And as we said, that 25% reduction—with the RRRP reduction that they're going to be seeing through InnPower, they can see anywhere up to a 40% to 50% reduction.

➤ [MPP Vanthof to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. I'd like to tell a little tale about Henry Fiset and Sons Ltd. in Elk Lake. Jerome and Terry are pillars in that community. They run a machine shop. Their hydro usage in January 2011 was 391 kilowatt hours per

day. They made huge changes in their business, and in January 2017 their kilowatts per day were 220. So that was a 43% decrease. They have done their part, yet the overall bill went up. Actually, the cost per kilowatt hour went up by 66%. Will you finally admit that your hydro plan for people like Henry Fiset and sons has been a disaster for the last decade?

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

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

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

➤ [MPP Hillier to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Premier. Many constituents are sending me their hydro bills and letters expressing their outrage and their concern. The Calberrys are a retired couple on a fixed income in Hartington. They've followed every step laid out by this government to help conserve energy. They schedule their lives by their time-

of-use meter. A 17% reduction is not enough for them and many others in my riding. In the words of the Calberrys, these “so-called reductions being rolled out are nothing but a case of giving with one hand and taking with two.” When will this government stop giving with one hand and hurting so much with the other two?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I’m pleased that the member knows about the fair hydro plan and the 25% reduction that is coming to seniors. It is important to know, Mr. Speaker, that I’m assuming that these individuals are Hydro One customers. That means that they’re also going to see a significant reduction from the RRRP. That will actually reduce their bills between 40% and 50%. On top of that, they can also apply for the Ontario Electricity Support Program, which, through Ontario’s Fair Hydro Plan, is actually going to give them an additional reduction on top of that. Do you know what? We need to ensure that couples like the seniors that have been mentioned by the honourable member ensure they know about the fair hydro plan and know about the reductions that are coming, because we actually have a plan, like that party—they do not.

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

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

March 21, 2017

➤ PC Leader Brown to Minister Naqvi (Hydro Rates)

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Out of respect for the Legislature, will the Premier immediately halt all the hydro vanity ads until the Speaker has ruled on the case for contempt? Will the Premier please answer?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, again, as you know, this matter is before you. This matter has been referred to you, so of course we await a ruling. On this side of the House, we are focused on making sure that we bring meaningful relief to the people of Ontario, that we reduce the hydro rates by 25%. That's what the government is doing. It's a very important policy. Obviously the opposition is only engaged in distraction because they have no plan. They are actually really confused, and given that they have no plan, they are relying on procedural tactics, denying opportunities for Ontarians to have access to important information that will ensure that they know exactly the kinds of steps the provincial government is taking; that is, to reduce their hydro rates by 25%.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The issue here is about ads, paid for by taxpayers, that are used for partisan purposes. Yesterday, the minister said the following: "I'm very pleased to rise and talk about when we're going to be bringing forward the legislation this spring" to enact the Liberal hydro scheme. Clearly the legislation is coming forward, and the minister is making a mockery of this Legislature and its members as he runs self-congratulatory ads, paid for by taxpayers. Will the Premier stop her re-election campaigning and using taxpayer resources to do it? It's wrong, and the Premier knows that.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I think the member opposite is confused. I think he still thinks that he's sitting in the Harper government, where they ran ad after ad on Harper's Economic Action Plan and he kept touting that. On this side of the House, this government has taken some very concrete measures in making sure that we have one of the strongest pieces of legislation when it comes to government advertising. Our government has strengthened legislation to provide a clear definition of partisan advertising, requiring the government to submit a preliminary version of the ad to the Auditor General for review and reinforce rules around government advertising during general elections. Under our legislation, the government ad can't include the name, the voice or the image of a member of the executive council or a member of the assembly, including the name or logo of a party, or directly identify and criticize a recognized party or member of the assembly. The members opposite, of course, remember the good old Harris days where they were able to do that. We have passed legislation, and that will not be allowed in Ontario.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The minister quotes and references the Auditor General. The Auditor General's powers have been stripped. She said on the record last Friday that she wouldn't have supported these. They're simply a pat on the back. I will continue. The Minister of Energy said they will spend "under \$1 million on both the radio ads and the social media ads" but there will be "more to come." The question everyone asks is, how much more? How many millions is this government going to spend of hard-earned taxpayer dollars for their own partisan purposes? My question is to the Premier: Do you really think it's right to use taxpayer dollars to run partisan ads? It's wrong. Stop it. The government has a responsibility to inform Ontarians, to make sure that we raise awareness and communicate—

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think it's important that we communicate important, vital information to Ontarians. We know that people's hydro bills have been a serious concern for Ontarians. It is important that they know what the government plan is. Speaker, we have a plan. We are going to be cutting electricity rates by 25%. What Ontarians are asking of the official opposition is: What is your plan? The reason the opposition is so worked up about a procedural matter is because they have no plan. Their plan is a blank piece of paper. That's what Ontarians are asking about, and they have no information on that.

➤ [PC Leader Brown to Premier \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Since I can't get an answer on the taxpayer-funded Liberal election ads, I'm going to ask another question. I'm going to read a quote from Mark Nantais, the president of the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association. He said that the Ontario government appears "to do nothing to address a climate of investment uncertainty related to what has been" their "number one request": to deal with "electricity rates that can be two to three times higher in Ontario than in competing auto jurisdictions." This manufacturing leader says the government has done nothing when it comes to hydro. Mr. Speaker, is this government going to risk the jobs of over 124,000 people employed in auto manufacturing in Ontario—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Energy is going to want to comment on this question in the supplementary, but I want to just say that the record amounts of investment that we have seen in the auto industry over the last six months really speak to the reality that the auto sector in Ontario is extremely important. It's extremely strong, and we are going to continue to support it. We are going to continue to work with the auto sector, and not just the plants but the supply chain, making sure that that supply chain is in place, that it's strong, and making sure that we have the highly educated workforce we need to be innovating in the auto sector. The whole issue around automated vehicles and artificial intelligence, that's very much the cutting edge. That's the frontier of the auto sector. That's why we're investing in those technologies, and we are doing very well in terms of North American investment in the auto sector.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The Premier says the government is helping the auto sector, but the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association says that their number one request about protecting these jobs in Ontario is being ignored, so the facts seem to be very different than what the Premier is suggesting. Let me ask another question, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal caucus Q&A that was given out to Liberal members before their hydro scheme—question 29 said, “Will this rate decrease apply to curling rinks, hospitals and schools?” Mr. Speaker, do you know what the answer is? No, there's not going to be relief. Why won't this scheme keep curling clubs and hockey rinks open? We're seeing small towns across Ontario that can barely keep these rinks, these recreational services open. Hospitals are struggling. Public institutions are struggling because of the Liberal hydro crisis. So my question to the Premier is, when can we expect relief for hockey rinks and curling rinks? When can we expect relief for hospitals and schools? They're struggling with these hydro increases.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I understand the intensity behind the question that's coming from the Leader of the Opposition because, in fact, we have a plan that is going to reduce people's electricity bills across the province. We understand that electricity bills have been a burden for people, and we are taking action. The Leader of the Opposition seems to suggest that he supports our plan, but he thinks that we should do more, and that's fine. We're going to continue to work with municipalities. We'll continue to work with people across the province, with businesses. The Minister of Energy is well aware that there are groups who are still looking to us and saying—How is this going to work for us? But the reality is that people in Ontario will see a 25% reduction in their home electricity bills come this summer. That's something that I hope the Leader of the Opposition is tacitly saying he's supporting.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The Premier says that I said we should do more. I absolutely agree. We need to do more by not paying the Hydro One CEO \$4 million a year. We need to do more by stopping signing these ridiculous green energy contracts—1,100 more proceeded when we don't need it—and you give a commission in Pennsylvania, Ohio and New York. This government is continuing to charge Ontarians to give energy away and we're spilling water power. I want them to stop that. Absolutely, we have to do more. Our hospitals can't afford it. Our small businesses can't afford it. Our seniors can't afford it. This isn't enough. This is a Band-Aid on a bullet wound that this government created. They're borrowing money to pay for their own mistakes, and Ontarians have had enough of it. My question for the Premier is, when can we have real relief? When can we see these contracts stop being signed? When can we see relief on hydro CEOs—

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and talk about our plan that is going to help every family, every small business and every farm in this province. While they stand up and yell and shake their fists, they actually have no plan, absolutely no plan—I know it's a very touchy subject for them, but they have no plan. The member even

stood up to the media and laughed when asked where his plan was. He said, “In the policy department.” Our plan will deliver results for Ontario families, businesses and farms. They don’t have one; we have one, and it is working.

➤ [NDP Leader Horwath to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Hospitals all across Ontario have been facing huge hydro bill increases on top of Liberal budget freezes and cuts. Last week, it was revealed that the Sault Area Hospital in Sault Ste. Marie saw nearly a \$1-million increase to its hydro bill in just four short years. Since she won’t release her plan, can the Premier tell Soo residents who are now facing cuts to front-line health care if her \$40-billion borrowing scheme will help the Sault Area Hospital?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know that the leader from the third party is talking about the Sault Area Hospital, so let’s be clear about what the Sault Area Hospital had to do after their media announcement. The Sault Area Hospital said that they have not made decisions directly tied to increases in electricity rates and that increases have not resulted in layoffs. Let’s also talk about hospitals. They’re also eligible for a range of programs like the Save on Energy audit and retrofit initiatives to help lower their bills by becoming more energy-efficient. For example, Sudbury Health Sciences North got more than \$275,000 for help in energy efficiency upgrades, and now they’re saving over \$500,000 each year in energy costs. On top of that, the fair hydro plan will also help hospitals see a modest reduction of between 2% and 4% as well.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It’s not just northern hospitals that are suffering. Right here in Toronto, access-to-information documents show that the Mount Sinai health system saw a 45% increase in hydro bills between 2010 and 2015. That’s nearly \$1.5 million that is not going to support front-line health care—that Torontonians depend on. If she refuses to release the details of her phantom plan, can the Premier at least tell Mount Sinai health system if she plans to help them out with some relief?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, we did help Sinai Health System out last year by giving them an additional \$7 million for their budget, a 2.1% increase in their operating budget. I know that my colleague the Minister of Energy quoted from the CEO of the Soo hospital, but I think it’s really important that we revisit that, because the leader of the third party has a tendency to visit hospitals without having those important conversations first with the board, with the CEO.

After her visit to Sault Ste. Marie, the hospital was forced to go out publicly, on the record, and say that while electricity costs have risen over the past five years, those increases have not resulted in any layoffs at that hospital.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If the Premier won't tell the Sault Area Hospital or the Mount Sinai health system if they're going to see some relief under the phantom plan, perhaps she could enlighten the University Health Network, which has seen its hydro bills go up by over \$6 million in six years. Or how about Toronto East General Hospital, which saw a 67% increase in six years? The Premier needs to show Ontarians that she is serious about real relief and not just buying some support for the Liberal Party ahead of the next election. Will she release the details of her plan?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to inform the Legislature and the public that last year we provided an increase to the University Health Network, to their operating budget, of \$9.5 million. I need to go back to Sault Ste. Marie, because it's a tremendous hospital providing excellent care to the individuals who rely on it. The Sault Area Hospital, in the second part of their public declaration—and no, we did not ask them to do this. They felt compelled, because of the misinformation that had been provided. The Sault hospital said that it “has not made decisions directly tied to the increase in electricity rates” and that there are “no planned layoffs of front-line staff at Sault Area Hospital.”

➤ [NDP Leader Horwath to Minister Hoskins \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. I have to say, it's sad that hospitals that get a little bit of money after years of freezes are having to use that to fill a hole in their budgets that the Liberal hydro plan has left them with—that's a really sad situation—when it should be going to front-line care. The Premier has heard the facts from Sault Ste. Marie and from Toronto, but perhaps that's not enough. Let's try London. At London Health Sciences Centre, which is made up of several sites, access-to-information documents reveal that hydro consumption dropped by 13% over the same six-year period that hydro bills went up by 29%. Does the Premier not understand how this would worry Londoners who depend on good-quality care at their hospitals?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we could go on all day, because I'm happy to report that for London Health Sciences Centre, we increased their operating budget last year by over \$17 million. I think it's important—so you've got your list; I've got my list. I'm happy to continue to report, Mr. Speaker, that the investments that we've made, the investments that they voted against in the last budget, where our annual increase to hospital budgets was close to 3%, include all of the hospitals that the member opposite, the leader of the third party, is referencing. I have to say, in the almost three years that I have been Minister of Health, I have not had a single hospital board or CEO come to

me and say that the component of their budget, that roughly 1%, that goes towards electricity has been a burden to them.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Windsor Regional Hospital's Metropolitan Campus saw a 49% increase in their hydro bills in the five years between 2011 and 2016. What does the Premier have to say to the people in Windsor, who know that not only is she lining the pockets of her banker friends with her \$40-billion phantom plan, but she's also offering hospitals in Windsor nothing at all to deal with the problems they have created in the electricity system?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I think I should have provided this list in advance to the member opposite, because she'd be a little bit more careful in the hospitals that she chooses. Again, Windsor Regional Hospital: I'm happy to report that they received more than a 3% increase to their budget and, again, \$9.9 million more to that hospital corporation last year. We continue to make these important investments, investments that routinely, regularly and consistently that party has voted against. When we added \$345 million to the operating budgets of hospitals in the budget last year, they voted against those investments. When we added an additional \$140 million last fall to support those hospitals—those are important; they're critical investments and they are investments that we take very seriously to ensure that our hospitals are able to manage and are able to provide the highest quality of care that they do in this province.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I don't know what planet this minister is on. We've got hallway medicine happening in every hospital virtually across this province. Four years of frozen funding; a 1% increase in the last budget. They have not only made a mess of our electricity system, they have made a mess of our hospital system, and every patient that deals with hallway medicine experiences that each and every day in the province of Ontario. I'm going to talk about my own hometown hospitals. In Hamilton, St. Joe's electricity costs doubled from \$3.98 million to \$8.15 million, an increase of 105% between 2010 and 2016—105%. Maybe the Premier can tell us, since she won't release details of her phantom plan, will that plan actually deal with the rising hydro costs, the soaring electricity bills in our hospitals across the province?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm happy to listen to the facts. Hamilton Health Sciences: I'm pleased to report to the Legislature that last year we provided an increase of 3.6% to that corporation, \$29.4 million more to their operating budget than the previous year.

➤ [MPP MacLeod to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. Last week I visited SunTech Greenhouses with owner Bob Mitchell. Bob is a good man. He is a proud farmer and he is known in Ottawa for his little miracles in Manotick. But between the Liberal green energy tax, the HST, the new carbon tax, the Liberal green energy tax and all the waste

in energy from cancelled gas plants to power lines to nowhere mean that Bob's cucumbers and his tomatoes are 30% more expensive than his Mexican counterparts. He couldn't even run his lights this past winter to grow his beefsteak tomatoes. Liberal energy policy is doing its best to put Bob out of business, and what does he hear from the Liberal government? He hears from the PA of the Minister of Energy who says that it's humidity, not energy prices, that are forcing greenhouses down south. Bob and every other greenhouse grower in Ontario deserve an answer from this government. Will they phase in the burden of cap-and-trade—and will they ensure that these farmers have an ability to make their profits?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I do want to thank the member for that question because the greenhouse growers throughout the province are an important part of our economy. I know the Minister of Agriculture does great work with them as well. We met with them several times to talk about the programs that are out there that actually help our greenhouse growers. The greenhouse growers were thrilled with the fact that we actually introduced the ICI program, and dropped it from three megawatts to one megawatt, because many of those greenhouse growers can actually now apply and qualify for the ICI program, which will allow the greenhouse growers and any other business that is part of the ICI program to drop their bills by up to one third. That is significant for many of these greenhouse growers right across the province, and many of those companies as well that can benefit from the ICI program. And do you know what, Mr. Speaker? The Ontario fair hydro plan dropped that even further, from one megawatt to 500 kilowatts, so more businesses can apply.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: That's simply not true. That's counter to everything that Bob Mitchell told me. I met with Dwight Foster of North Gower Grains—he owns the largest grain elevator operation in eastern Ontario—and Fernando Medeiros of Carleton Mushrooms. What you're telling me today is simply not true. Like SunTech, all of them produce quality food. They employ dozens, if not hundreds, of people. But the Liberal energy policies of this government over the past decade are continuing to hurt them. The Liberal PA to energy was clearly told by Jim DiMenna, president and CEO of Red Sun Farms, last week, "Humidity, that's not a deal breaker—the cost of energy is a deal breaker." Will the Premier stop handing out glossy flyers congratulating herself and actually do something—for the grain growers of this province and the people—

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know they don't like to hear the fact that the ICI program actually lowers bills by a third, but that is true, and there are thousands of businesses that are actually taking this government up and doing just that. But the opposition is overlooking some great examples of greenhouses that are choosing to base their future right here in Ontario. I'm particularly pleased with the recent announcement that Greenhill Produce has planned to invest up to \$100 million to develop a 100-acre greenhouse in Chatham-Kent, adding up to 300 jobs in this province. That is just one example of many. We're continuing, through the Minister of

Economic Development and Growth, through the great work of the Minister of Agriculture and through the great work and the leadership of this Premier, to make sure that we build this province up and make us the most competitive in North America.

➤ [MPP Clark to Premier Wynne \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, for 47 years, Swan's Variety was a landmark in the village of Athens. Swan's survived a major fire and lasted through the terms of eight Premiers, but not the ninth. On Friday, heartbroken owner Karen Swan turned out the lights for the last time. It wasn't the lack of customers that spelled the end for Swan's; it was the crippling cost of hydro, culminating in last month's outrageous \$7,000 bill. The Premier diminishes the hydro crisis and energy poverty she created by calling it a mistake. Speaker, what does the Premier have to say to Karen Swan, who just paid for this mistake with her family business?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't know the circumstances around this business. What I do know is that there are small businesses all over the province that are going to see a 25% reduction this summer. We know that it's not just individuals or families in their homes who have been carrying a burden and, as we have said, have been asked to pay for upgrades to a system that had been neglected—They have been asked to pay for improvements in the system that will last for many, many years, which is why we're spreading the cost of those over a longer period of time. Again, I don't know the specific circumstances around this business, but we understand very clearly that small businesses, mom-and-pop businesses, in towns around the province need support.

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: Speaker, for years the Premier ignored our warnings that unaffordable hydro rates were destroying our communities. Now, when her political future is at stake, she suddenly claims to care. They shamelessly spend taxpayer dollars on ads designed to portray themselves as heroes in a disaster they created. But if she stops patting herself on the back and looks around, she'll see that no one is buying it. Ontarians will never forget that this Premier did nothing as hydro rates soared, businesses closed and families were forced from their homes. Speaker, will the Premier admit that it was her failed leadership on the hydro crisis that cost Karen Swan everything she had?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: The honourable member used the word "disaster." That was the electricity grid that they left for us. They left the province and the electricity grid in a disaster. We had rolling brownouts on a regular basis—a blackout, Mr. Speaker. So we acted. This government—this party—acted, and made sure that we rebuilt the system, rebuilt generation, rebuilt transmission and rebuilt distribution. That was needed to ensure that all businesses in this province and all families in this province were able to keep the lights on. Now, Mr. Speaker, we're making sure that we're reducing those bills

by 25% for small businesses, for farms and for families right across the province. And let's not forget a 40% to 50% reduction for those folks who are Hydro One customers.

➤ **MPP Bisson to Minister Mauro (Privatization of public assets)**

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I have a situation that proves that privatization is a disaster. Your government went and privatized the delivery of Internet services and long distance in northeastern Ontario, when you privatized Ontario. Now what happens is, I get phone calls from constituents like Bill Waychison in Timmins, who ended up losing his Ontera service, which had very high-speed Internet, up and down, so that he could do what he had to do. He was forced to go to the private sector, with Bell, to purchase Internet service. The cost went up by 50%, and his service went down, with a lower bandwidth. Will you finally admit that privatization of public services is a bad thing?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for the question. What I know about the file is simply this: In October 2014, the province and the board completed the sale of Ontera to Bell Aliant, which is now Bell Canada. The reality is that, over the past decade, Ontera was not able to generate sufficient revenues to cover its operating and capital expenses. The government had external financial experts look at ONTC's books and evaluate the costs of keeping Ontera in public hands. They found that keeping Ontera was going to cost about \$148 million in the long term, and that by selling it we could actually save \$96 million. The cost to the ONTC of continuing to own Ontera was greater than the short-term cost associated with the sale. I look forward to providing more information in the supplementary.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, what hogwash. Ontera was set up for the reason that there isn't a large enough market for the private sector to deliver the service needed. So that's why the Ontario government stepped in with Ontera so that people in places like Timmins and people in Iroquois Falls and other communities are able to get the Internet. Instead, you decided to leave them to the avails of the market. The market is not large enough, and now we're forced to pay more to get less service. Will you finally admit privatizing Ontera was a mistake?

Hon. Bill Mauro: There have been tremendous changes in the telecom industry, and it no longer made sense for ONTC to run a telecom company whose services are being provided more efficiently by private sector companies. The sale of Ontera is part of the government's strategic path forward. We've committed a \$15-million investment that will be matched dollar for dollar by Bell and will result in a \$30-million update to fibre network systems and tower and system upgrades. While there were short-term costs associated with the sale of Ontera, the costs of continued ownership—While there were short-term costs associated with the sale, the costs of continued ownership outweighed the short-term costs of the sale. Proceeds from the sale include \$6 million in cash and

an estimated \$9 million in long-term revenue to the ONTC through a fibre licence agreement with Bell.

➤ MPP Gates to Minister Thibeault (Hydro rates)

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. A local business, Border City Castings from Fort Erie, contacted our office regarding a recent hydro bill. It was \$12,000—yes, \$12,000. This local business actually used around \$1,000 in electricity, but between global adjustment charges, delivery charges and HST, the bill is \$12,000. While I appreciate that there is an 8% discount to help businesses in Ontario, unfortunately, this business does not qualify for that reduction because of their kilowatts-per-hour usage. I believe this is unfair. The Liberal government should be concerned that businesses in Niagara and across Ontario are going to have to close because of these policies. I ask the Premier: Will you commit to taking immediate action to help small and medium-sized businesses in Ontario with their crushing hydro bills by stopping the sale of Hydro One and taking real action to lower hydro bills?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It's very important to note that the ICI program actually helps all businesses with under one megawatt of power usage by reducing their bills by up to one third. I don't know the specifics of that individual business. I'd be more than happy to talk with the honourable member about that to find out what programs they do qualify for. There are many, many programs that are out there. I was at a great company in Brant called Hematite. We were there giving them an award. They saved \$200,000 by changing their lights. But do you know what? They were unaware of the ICI program. We're working with them to actually help them save one third on their bills. The way we've reduced this from one megawatt to 500 kilowatts: Thousands more small businesses and medium-sized enterprises will qualify for the ICI. That's great news for business in this province.

March 20, 2017

➤ PC Leader Brown to Premier Wynne (Government Advertising)

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. This Liberal government has no business in possibly spending millions of hard-earned taxpayer dollars on self-promoting hydro ads. They are blatantly partisan, and they are littering radio stations and social media in a sad attempt to save this government's falling popularity. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier do the right thing, stop spending public dollars on these advertisements, and order that they be cancelled today? Yes or no?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been travelling the province. I've been talking to people for months, including last week. People are very, very concerned about their hydro bills.

The Leader of the Opposition knows that. He knows, as does the third party, that people are looking for relief, and that the work we have done up until now—that there's more we need to do. That's why the 25% reduction is very important. We're moving ahead with our plan. I would have thought, given the noise from the other side, that they understand that people are concerned about their electricity bills, and that they would be supportive of the changes we are bringing forward that will give real relief to people across the province.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: As the Premier travels the province, no one is asking for more government vanity ads. The Liberal government has a bad track record—a long track record—of misusing taxpayer-funded ads for partisan purposes. We all remember the \$8.1 million in self-congratulatory ads for the job-killing pension scheme that never came to fruition—\$8.1 million, just to pat themselves on the back. How many millions of dollars is this government going to waste on more self-congratulatory radio ads?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The two issues that the Leader of the Opposition has raised—retirement security for people across the province, and lower electricity rates—I'm extremely proud of our record on delivering both of those. The reality is that this Leader of the Opposition sat in a federal government for nine years—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: He sat in a federal government for nine years that wouldn't even talk to the province about retirement security, wouldn't even talk about Canada Pension Plan enhancement. We've moved on that. We now have a national agreement on pension enhancement, Mr. Speaker. We have an enhanced Canada Pension Plan because of the work that we did on the ORPP. In addition, we're going to deliver lower electricity rates.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: It really is unbelievable. When people can't afford their hydro bill, this government is spending millions on vanity ads self-promoting their own agenda. I want to read a quote from the Auditor General: "The ads likely wouldn't have been approved under the old government advertising rules." That's Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk. The changes the Liberals enacted in 2015 reduced her office to a rubber stamp. I'll continue the quote from the Auditor General: "'Under the previous legislation it would likely not have passed because it does convey a positive impression of the current government and it's more like a pat-on-the-back type of advertisement,' she said." Those rules were put into place to prevent Liberals wasting taxpayer dollars on vanity ads. They changed the rules so that they could use taxpayer dollars to promote themselves. The government can dance; the government can point the finger; the government can avoid answering the question. For years they complained about these types of ads when they were in opposition. They come into government and change the rules to not allow this to happen, and now they're doing the same thing. To the Premier: Are you going to continue with these vanity ads?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue. The reality is that, when this government came into office under my predecessor, there were virtually no rules around partisan advertising. In fact, I can remember sitting in this gallery, Mr. Speaker, when the Liberal opposition was asking the then Tory government about advertising that had the Premier's face in it and that was all over. There were kids out of school because there were strikes. There were hospitals being closed. Amalgamations were being imposed. Chaos was reigning, and the Premier of the day had his face all over advertising. We changed those rules, Mr. Speaker.

➤ **NDP Leader Horwath to Premier (Government Advertising)**

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The Premier and her Liberal government ads touting their phantom hydro plan have been condemned by the Auditor General as “a pat on the back,” a partisan exercise that would never have been allowed before the Liberals changed the rules on advertising. Can the Premier tell Ontarians what the price tag is for these self-serving ads?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I will just remind the leader of the third party that we were the province in this country that actually introduced rules around partisan advertising, Mr. Speaker. Before this government came into office under my predecessor, those rules didn't exist. We put in place rules that said partisan advertising is unacceptable, in reaction, Mr. Speaker, to the really egregious advertising that had been done by the Conservatives that was so blatantly partisan that it was obvious there needed to be restrictions put in place. Those restrictions are in place—and we adhere to them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I feel like it's comedy hour in the Legislature. This government changed the rules and then changed them back so that they could use public money to advertise and promote themselves when they get into political trouble. Not one dime has come off the skyrocketing hydro bills, and this Premier has not tabled a plan yet or even any legislation yet to show Ontarians what their money is going to be spent on or if they are even going to save any money in the future. But she is still spending more money on advertising, claiming that the problem has been solved. How much is this attempt to buy some political relief on hydro bills going to cost Ontarians?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just remind the leader of the third party that we have a plan that actually will reduce people's electricity bills and will reduce those bills by the summer. Substantial relief: 25% on average off all bills across the province for residents who pay for electricity in their homes, further relief for people who are paying disproportionately high distribution costs in remote and rural areas, and an enhancement to the Ontario Electricity Support Program that will help people on low income. It's a substantial program that will deliver relief and will deliver it in a timely

manner. I am so pleased that the leader of the third party is eager to get going on that plan, and I look forward to her support as we move forward.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Instead of partisan ads, how about we actually see the plan? We hear a lot of talk, we see a lot of press releases, but we have not yet seen a plan. These ads are obviously much more about the Premier and her Liberal Party instead of making life more affordable for the people of Ontario. How much public money is this Premier and her Liberal Party spending on advertisements for the billion-dollar hydro borrowing scheme that she has still not made public?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I am so pleased that we are talking about our plan, the plan that we've brought forward that is going to reduce people's electricity bills across the province, because it is a substantial plan and it actually will work. I was at a business this past week, called J'adore, in Newmarket—no, Barrie. I was in Barrie at a great chocolate and cheese shop. They are going to see a substantial reduction in their electricity bill, which is going to allow them to expand their business. They are building a patio on the back of their store, J'adore, and it is going to be a real anchor on the main street in Barrie. That's the kind of business we want to see thrive, and that's why it's so important that the real plan that we are bringing forward is going to give them real relief.

➤ [NDP Leader Horwath to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. The Premier has shown Ontarians where her priorities are: self-serving, partisan radio ads first; actual legislation or a tangible plan, sometime later I guess. Ontario families, businesses and public institutions like hospitals have a right to know what will happen to their hydro bills and who will pay the price for the \$40 billion going to line the pockets of bankers. When will the Premier finally table her proposed hydro plan so that people know when and by how much their bills are going to end up going up?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and talk about when we're going to be bringing forward the legislation this spring to reduce everyone's bills by 25%, in time so they can have this relief before summer. I know there will be time for proper debate and public hearings. I now know that the opposition critics have received a technical briefing on our plan, and they've also received comprehensive briefing documents including technical decks, background, our speeches and sample bills demonstrating the reductions that are going to be happening. I know our plan is going to offer real relief for all of our families, small businesses and farms right across the province. I know the opposition parties are putting forward nothing but platitudes. Our plan is going to make sure that we bring forward real relief for families, for small businesses and for farms right across the province. We're going to make sure it happens before summer.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: From 2011 to 2015, the hospital in Sault Ste. Marie saw their hydro bill rise by \$2.7 million, an increase of 45% in just four short years, while their hydro consumption during that time frame remained exactly the same. Since the Premier refuses to release her plan, will she be running an ad soon to let hospitals like the one in the Soo know if they're going to see relief on their hydro bills any time soon?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know the third party needs to stop misleading Ontarians about the health care—I will withdraw—confusing Ontarians about our health care system. Since coming into office, we've increased hospital funding by 54%, allowing us to treat more patients, provide better care and reduce wait times to some of the shortest in the country. Now I know both opposition parties are furiously trying to muddy the record by—not necessarily confusing the impact of energy costs. The reality is that hospitals spend 1.6%, on average, of their total operating budgets on electricity. That means well over 95% of hospital budgets go towards the rest: hiring nurses and doctors, keeping wait times low and ensuring that patients have access to the high-quality services that they need. Hospitals are also eligible for the save ONenergy program. I'll talk more about that in the supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's not just families at home, businesses or hospitals that are suffering either. Municipalities are also worried about whether the Premier's \$40-billion borrowing deal will actually help them keep community facilities open. When I met with leaders from Echo Bay, Desbarats, Bruce Mines, Hilton Beach, St. Joseph, and Batchewana First Nation not long ago, they all told me that skyrocketing hydro rates are on the verge of closing their local arenas or community centres. Since this Premier refuses to release the details of her \$40-billion borrowing plan, will she run an ad soon to let local municipal leaders know if they're going to get some real relief from soaring hydro bills and be able to keep community centres, like arenas, open?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I want to begin by saying that, since forming government, we've increased municipal support to nearly four times what it was in 2003. So, unlike the previous Conservative government which downloaded billions of dollars of costs onto the backs of municipalities and residential property taxpayers, we are alleviating the financial burden off of our municipal partners. Residents in every single one of Ontario's 444 municipalities will benefit from the fair hydro plan. Talking about municipalities, I know that the mayor in Hamilton was in the news recently, talking about our fair hydro plan. He says that a 25% reduction "is a very positive step for the city's hydro customers." He credited our government with listening to Ontarians and implementing what he calls "dramatic" reductions. Mr. Speaker, this is the mayor of the leader of the third party's own city. So it begs the question: When this legislation is brought forward, will they support this, and will they follow the advice of the mayor of Hamilton and make sure that they support us in supporting this 25% reduction—

➤ MPP Hardeman to Minister Thibeault (Hydro Rates)

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is for the Premier. Vuteq, one of the largest employers in my riding, said that on a single hydro bill, the charge for electricity used was \$38,000, but when they add on the government global adjustment and other charges, the final monthly bill was—listen to this, Premier—\$385,000. They run 24 hours a day to deliver “just in time” to car plants, so they can’t shift production to use the ICI program. Can the Premier explain why this major employer is paying more than \$350,000, or 90% of their hydro bill, for the government’s extra billing charges?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I’m very pleased to rise and talk about the programs that are out there that are actually helping businesses, and I do hope that this one business will utilize many of the programs that are out there to help them save dollars. There is the IEP program, there is the Industrial Accelerator Program—there are many other programs out there to actually help small businesses and help our medium-sized manufacturing businesses ensure that they can reduce their rates, because we recognize the importance of actually helping our businesses reduce those rates. We’ve seen many of those businesses right across the province use many of these programs, and that will help them reduce their bills. When it comes to Ontario’s Fair Hydro Plan, we’re going to see all of our small businesses—they’re going to see that 25% reduction coming right off, and that’s something that will help them and farms right across the province.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: The minister obviously missed the comment. I said these programs do not work for Vuteq in Woodstock. Back to the Premier: In the past few months, it’s been announced that Oxford is losing 1,000 jobs, and the government’s hydro rates for businesses are putting more of these jobs at risk. Yet the government’s hydro announcement does nothing to help the major businesses we have left, which of course would be Vuteq. Premier, people can’t pay their hydro bills if they lose their job. What does the Premier have to say to all the people of Oxford who are worried that their job will be the next to disappear because of her government’s policies?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, here’s what I say to the folks in Oxford and here’s what I say to folks right across this province: We have taken a number of measures to make this province more competitive. In fact, we have the lowest effective corporate tax rates, very generous R&D tax credits. Our investments with businesses right across this province of \$3.1 billion since 2004 have accrued over \$31 billion in private sector investments, 175,000 jobs created and retained. Where are we, Mr. Speaker? We have not had a lower unemployment rate in a decade—not in a decade. We’re leading the G7 in growth. We’ve created 700,000 jobs, and for the first time in 13 years, we’ve seen seven consecutive—

March 9, 2017

➤ NDP Leader Brown to Minister of Energy (Energy Policies)

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. While the Liberal government is in the mood for acknowledging their mistakes, I have a suggestion: They can acknowledge another one. That mistake would be the fact that this government refuses to make the cost of cap-and-trade visible on natural gas bills. Will the Premier announce that that mistake is going to be corrected today?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, I'm please to rise and acknowledge the work that this government is doing to address climate change. The action of us doing nothing would have been catastrophic. That's why it's this government that acted. We brought forward cap-and-trade and our climate change action plan. As the Leader of the Opposition well knows, Mr. Speaker, the decision to put cap-and-trade onto the bills within natural gas was a decision that was made by the Ontario Energy Board. They did consultation after consultation. They talked with the industry stakeholders, and they said that this was a cost of doing business. That cost will not be a part of the conversation as they move forward. But this was an OEB decision.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: The reason this Liberal government does not want to admit this mistake is that they want to cover up and hide the fact that this is a cash grab.

Mr. Patrick Brown: The government is trying to hide this cash grab—\$1.9 billion a year—to pander to voters, not to help the environment; not to make a real difference. If it was anything more than a cash grab, they would be open and transparent about it. This is a Premier who promised she would be open and transparent, and this is the exact opposite. So my question, Mr. Speaker, directly to the Premier: In the spirit of being open and transparent, will you do the right thing? Will you make sure that this cost is very visible and the government no longer hides it?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I really enjoy the Leader of the Opposition, the man with no plan. He has no plan to reduce electricity by 25%. He won't support us. But he does have a plan, Mr. Speaker, on climate change, and we're so excited about it. He wants to introduce a carbon tax, a carbon tax that wouldn't put three cents on natural gas; it would put over 12 cents. It's a carbon tax that wouldn't put four cents on propane; it would put it at 10 cents, just like BC. He would put not four cents on gasoline but 16 cents on gasoline.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier: Once again, the minister is simply making it up. This is a cash grab, and the government is trying to hide it. Lorrie Goldstein pointed out, "Once Ontario joins the California/Quebec cap-and-trade market next year, all bets are off." Only 18% of the permits were sold last month, in terms of the latest auction. Mr. Speaker, how much money will taxpayers be on the hook for because of this disastrous cap-and-trade?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition keeps on telling us that he likes this BC carbon tax model, which would add not five cents on diesel, as our lower-cost system would, but almost 20 cents. That, as he said, would make him the best leader Michigan ever had, to use his words. He— To come anywhere near—and those are numbers at 20, 30, 40 or 50, under the federal government's cap. That's the minimum amount, Mr. Speaker, that would be required. So if he isn't using the BC model, which costs four times as much as the Ontario model, just what is his position?

➤ [Minister Singh to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday was International Women's Day. Because of systemic inequality, we all know that women are disproportionately affected by skyrocketing hydro bills—women like Valentina, who lives in Brantford. She says what keeps her up at night is not knowing when hydro bills are going to increase again. The Premier's plan is nothing more than a band-aid. It offers no comfort to women, like Valentina, who can't save for their kids' futures because they don't know when hydro bills are going to go up again. When will this Premier understand that her plan is nothing more than a plan to help bankers instead of helping the everyday people of Ontario, people like Valentina, who need a permanent solution that will actually keep hydro bills down?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Energy is just raring to answer the supplementary question. I want to just say to the member opposite that it was International Women's Day yesterday. I hope that he had an opportunity to see the announcement that we made in the morning about levelling the playing field for women in sports, because it is extremely important, as we know. Some 94% of women executives say that they competed in sport and it made a difference to them in their career trajectory. The announcement we made will mean that provincial sport organizations will be required to have equity policies in place. We're putting money into training women coaches. It's a very important initiative in terms of levelling the playing field for women in sport in Ontario.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Sharon is a senior who lives in Sault Ste. Marie. The Premier and this government have heard Sharon's story before. She lives in only one room of her apartment because she can't afford the peak time-of-use fees to keep the heat on during the day in her apartment. Since the Premier claims that her plan is designed to

help women like Sharon, why didn't she put an end to the unfair, mandatory time-of-use fees that leave Sharon suffering at home in the cold?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Our plan will reduce those bills by 25%. Specifically in Sault Ste. Marie and area, if those folks live on the outskirts, if they're a Hydro One customer, if they're an Algoma Power customer, they are going to see their bills reduced between 40% and 50%. But it's not only Sault Ste. Marie that is going to see the benefits; it's right across the province. Yesterday, when I was in Hamilton—the mayor of Hamilton, Fred Eisenberger, was in the news yesterday talking about our hydro plan. Do you know what he said, Mr. Speaker? Our government's plan to reduce our bills by 25% is “a very positive step” for their city's hydro customers. He credited our government with listening to Ontarians and implementing what he calls “dramatic” reductions.

The party on that side has put together a proposal— It's nothing more than wishful thinking on that side. We're putting in place a plan that offers significant relief for all Ontarians.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, women across this province are suffering under the weight of skyrocketing hydro bills—women like Valentina, Sharon, and Mehru Malik, a small business owner in Sarnia. Mehru had to leave behind her family in Brampton, her husband and children, because the cost of high hydro bills meant that she had to lay off many of her workers. Now she lives in Sarnia, and that means that she only gets to see her family on weekends, if she's lucky. These women and their families expected more from this Premier and this government than the desperate band-aid fix that they revealed last week. When will the Premier stop putting bankers and well-connected insiders ahead of everyday people and the women of this province, and put forward a plan that actually puts them and their families first?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: All people within this province, Mr. Speaker, are going to see that 25% reduction. Small businesses, as well, are going to see that savings. That's how widely we acted, because we heard from Ontarians that they wanted more relief. We brought forward the 8% reduction, but we heard that people needed more. So we acted, and we brought forward a 25% reduction. Their plan, Mr. Speaker, does nothing. It does absolutely nothing to help the women that he mentioned. Our plan will. It helps them in small businesses. It reduces their bills by 25%. It reduces their home bills by 25%. What they're talking about is not even saving a single cent. Their plan doesn't even mention low-income and vulnerable people until the last page, and they're saying, “Wait.” We're saying we're going to act by summer.

➤ [Minister Campbell to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Ms. Sarah Campbell: My question is to the Premier. The Nickel Lake Lumber sawmill employs 25 people near Fort Frances. It has seen its hydro bills jump 50% in the last

few years. Mr. Kendall Lundy, the owner, tells me he has “just about had it” and that “everyone’s jobs are in jeopardy.” His competitors in Minnesota have hydro bills that are half of what he pays. What’s worse is that he is subsidizing cheap hydro exports to these competitors—costing ratepayers like Mr. Lundy billions of dollars each year. Why does the Premier’s hydro plan have no solution at all to rein in these wasteful hydro exports and reduce overall hydro costs?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I’m pleased to rise to talk about the importance of our forestry sector and of course how important energy is to our forestry sector. I know the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry will want to comment as well. For us in northern Ontario, we recognize that our large industry plays a very important role, not only in our northern economy but in the economy of Ontario and of Canada. That’s why, thanks to this government, for northern Ontario we brought forward the NIER Program—the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program—which is helping every forestry company within all of northern Ontario. That’s why we’re so pleased to see that our forestry companies and their energy costs are one of the lowest—not only in Ontario, not only in Canada, but in all of North—

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know the company in Thunder Bay, Resolute—they’re talking about how their energy costs are some of the lowest in their entire fleet in North America.

We’re going to continue to work with our forestry sector and with our mining sector to ensure that they remain as competitive as possible with the lowest possible prices.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Here’s the thing: The Premier’s hydro plan does next to nothing to help medium-sized businesses like Nickel Lake Lumber. The sawmill is too big to receive the 8% hydro rebate and, as far as we can tell, it also won’t receive the 17% in bill reductions that the Premier has promised for small businesses. But it is not big enough to have the capacity to participate in the expanded industrial conservation initiative. The NDP’s plan would reduce hydro bills for all ratepayers, including medium-sized businesses like the Nickel Lake Lumber sawmill. Why does the Premier’s plan exclude medium-sized businesses from the 25% in savings she has promised?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I encourage the third party to read our plan, because medium-sized businesses will qualify under our new expansion of the ICI program. We’ve lowered the threshold to 500 kilowatts. We would encourage them to look at the plan. But when talking about the forestry sector—I’ve got a letter here from Tembec, a very prominent forestry company. Let me quote: “Tembec is able to effectively manage our electricity cost exposure in Ontario through our participation in a variety of programs. As a result, electricity costs at the Tembec ... newsprint operations are comparable to our operations in other jurisdictions” and with other competitors. We recognize the importance of the forestry sector, of the mining sector, of our resource

sector. That's what we're doing: bringing rates down with programs like the NIER Program, which is helping all of our industry.

➤ [Minister Qaadri to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Ma question est aussi pour le ministre de l'Énergie, the Honourable Glenn Thibeault. Firstly, I'd like to thank the Minister of Energy, along with my colleagues the MPP for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Minister Albanese and Minister Sousa, for joining us for a lively question-and-answer session with the multicultural press of Ontario. That announcement of the government's energy plan generated an extraordinary amount of excitement—the 25% reduction of hydro bills for all Ontarians, otherwise known as Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan. Speaker, as you can imagine, such significant savings for household costs is an initiative not just for today, but for a sustainable program going forward. In my own district, the exceptional riding of Etobicoke North, we are blessed by a huge number of condominiums. Minister, I ask you, how will my condo residents benefit from the government's announcement of this 25% reduction in hydro costs?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I want to thank the member for Etobicoke North for that important question and also for all of his work on this file. He and I were together the other night talking to constituents about this.

Ensuring that all Ontario households receive this benefit is important to me and to this government, Mr. Speaker, so I think it's important that we clarify. If you pay an electricity bill for your residence, you will receive this benefit, regardless of whether you live in a house, a condo or an apartment. In fact, if your condo has facility costs that are shared among the residents, these shared electricity costs will also be receiving this reduction. This is an essential part of our plan to increase the fairness of our electricity system in Ontario. That's why not only will you see your bill reduced, but costs will be held to inflation for at least the next four years. We are proud of Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan and the significant, lasting relief it will provide.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I begin, Speaker, by thanking the minister not only for this program and his stewardship resulting in this 25% reduction of Ontario's hydro costs, but also physically criss-crossing Ontario to explain the details to Ontarians. Speaker, as you'll appreciate, after decades of neglect of our electricity system—yes, by parties of all stripes—it is heartening now to see that the government is taking steps to secure an energy future that is clean, reliable, and most importantly, affordable to all. I know that the 25% reduction in hydro bills applies to every one of the more than four million households in Ontario. This is especially welcome in my own area of Etobicoke North. The minister has previously mentioned that many small businesses, as well as farms, will benefit from that reduction as well, and I understand there are even more groups

that will qualify. My question is this: Will the minister please share with the House how this announcement will benefit other sectors of our economy?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Again, I want to thank the member for this question and the opportunity to clarify this important point, Mr. Speaker. The 25% reduction through the fair hydro plan will not only apply to households, but to many other small ratepayers, as well. This includes hundreds of thousands of small businesses; the vast majority of farms, which I know the Minister of Agriculture works with day in and day out; small offices of all kinds, including non-profits and charities; retirement homes; long-term-care homes; housing co-ops; community agencies; those on retail contracts or with sub-meters; and more and more will qualify for this rebate. The simplest thing to remember is, if your bill includes the time-of-use prices, you will be receiving the full benefits of this plan. This is going to mean major savings for these cross-sections of Ontario, and we're happy to be implementing a plan.

➤ [Minister Oosterhoff to Minister Matthews \(Digital government\)](#)

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Deputy Premier, in June 2016, your government opened up applications for a chief digital officer, a government executive whose job it would be to make life easier for people through easy-to-use online services and programs. However, it seems that this government doesn't want to actually make life easier for people, because eight months have gone by and this chief digital officer is nowhere to be seen. Once again, the Liberals talk the talk, but won't walk the walk. When will the Deputy Premier, as minister responsible for digital government, get back to work and find a chief digital officer so that Ontarians can access the services and programs they deserve?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I want to say thank you to the member. This is the first question I have ever received as the minister responsible for digital government, so thank you for paying attention. Digital government is all about providing services for the public that are faster, that are easier, that are simpler and that cost government less money. We are absolutely committed to moving forward on our digital strategy. Hiring a chief digital officer is very much part of that. I will ask the member to be a little bit patient, because this is an important job that we are hoping to fill very soon.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is back to the Deputy Premier. Ontarians have seen the result of this Liberal government's bungling in digitization before. This government simply can't be trusted to get the job done. Let's look at the facts: eHealth was an \$8-billion scandal and the rollout of the Social Assistance Management System, or SAMS, was a disaster. Now the government has been putting forward CPIN, the Child Protection Information Network, a cumbersome system that won't even have a searchable database. Consulting costs alone on CPIN have cost tens of millions. What

will the Deputy Premier do to ensure this government delivers a digital system that is actually a service to the people of Ontario, instead of another expensive boondoggle?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: There are many initiatives that are already under way when it comes to digital government, and I have to say I'm enormously proud of our digital government team in Ontario; they're doing excellent work. One example of this, and one that I hope that all of the members in this House have actually taken advantage of, is the new OSAP calculator. This is a tool that allows people—students, elementary school students, their parents, high school students—to actually understand how generous and transparent our student assistance program now is. What it means is that hundreds of thousands of students in this province will have access to education because they have the ability, they've earned the right and they've been admitted—but free tuition for over 200,000 Ontario students, and more generous support. Having that calculator available so that people know up front how much aid they can expect is a big, big step forward.

➤ [Minister Forster to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Premier. My office has been flooded with complaints around skyrocketing hydro bills, from people like Lorna Lampman. Lorna has lived in St. Catharines—the whip may know her—for 30 years, and she says she's never in her life seen a hydro bill so high. Her bills have tripled over the last few years. Her last hydro bill was \$600. Lorna is in her early fifties. She has a decent job, but her husband is on a disability pension and they find themselves having to choose between whether they can put some money away for retirement or whether they're going to pay that hydro bill. Why is the Premier choosing to put \$40 billion in the pockets of bankers and ignore the very people, like Lorna Lampman, who need our help most?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you for the question. It is important that we acted to ensure that we're helping people, like the honourable member has mentioned. That's why the fair hydro plan, the single largest electricity rate reduction in Ontario's history, will be providing a 25% reduction for that family and for all families across the province. While I don't know the specifics of that individual family, the Ontario Electricity Support Program is there to help those types of families. And we also increased the OESP program by 50% and increased it so that more families and more individuals will qualify. The OESP program is there to help, and on top of that, we created the affordability fund. The affordability fund will actually help them, through their utility, to make their home more energy-conserving, to actually reduce their bills.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'm not sure that the minister understands, because Lorna doesn't want this pushed on to her children and her grandchildren. It's not just people like Lorna who are worried about retirement who I'm hearing from, and who are struggling to pay their bills. I also recently heard from a young student in my riding who suffers from a

disability. She expects to graduate soon. She worries about her student loans and the interest that she's going to have to pay when she's finished her studies. She, too, is finding that choice: Do I put some money away for my student loan payments, or do I pay the ever-rising hydro bills? Why is the Premier continuing to support wealthy bankers instead of the very students and people trying to retire in this province?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm pleased to say that that individual student will also qualify for the 25% reduction. On top of that, by the great work by the Deputy Premier and her ministry, all students moving forward are going to get free tuition as well—and that's fantastic. Not only are we providing free tuition, but we're working with folks right across the province to help them reduce their bills. Yesterday, as I mentioned, I was in Hamilton. The mayor isn't the only Hamiltonian that is excited about our plan. At Alectra, they're talking about how the homeowners in Hamilton will see more than 25% savings. The folks in Hamilton will see between 27% and 28% reductions because of our fair hydro plan. That's a significant savings for families and small businesses, and that's something I do hope that the opposition will support, because it is helping all families right across the province.

➤ [Minister Rinaldi to Minister Chiarelli \(Energy policies\)](#)

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Minister, folks in rural Ontario are industrious, hard-working people who pay their taxes, put food on their table, put their kids through school and take care of elderly relatives. Like all other Ontarians, they are looking to get ahead and want our government to make life easier and more affordable. That is why I was excited that the minister recently announced a new natural gas grant, which will help communities like the ones in my riding switch to more cost-effective fuel sources. Spending less money on heating their homes means more money available for their kids' education, for essential home improvements or to tuck away in an RRSP. Speaker, through you to the minister: Could he please explain how the newly announced Natural Gas Grant Program will benefit my constituents?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for the question. At ROMA, I was proud to announce that we are investing \$100 million to expand natural gas to underserved rural communities. This will go a long way toward making energy consumption more affordable for rural Ontarians, and it will leverage hundreds of millions of dollars of investment from natural gas distribution companies. Rural Ontario will have more access, affordability and choice, and greater opportunities for economic development. Access to natural gas infrastructure in rural, remote and indigenous communities is a priority for this government. Natural gas expansion could save consumers up to \$1,500 in heating costs every year.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My thanks to the minister for his response. Minister, saving \$1,500 a year would be a huge win for farmers and rural families. Providing access, affordability

and choice to rural energy consumers is something our government is focusing on. It will support economic development in our rural communities, and that is something of which I'm very proud. This grant program is fully compatible with the energy board's decision on natural gas expansion in November and, most importantly, will provide meaningful support for our communities. Speaker, through you to the minister: Could he please explain how this Natural Gas Grant Program compares to the plans put forward by the opposition?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: That's certainly an excellent question. The fact of the matter is, neither the NDP nor the Tories have ever proposed any policy to expand natural gas access in rural communities. We are investing \$100 million in this program, in direct response to feedback we received from rural stakeholders, such as the OFA and greenhouse operators. Our investment will leverage hundreds of millions of dollars in private investments. We're hearing absolutely nothing from the PCs on how they would expand natural gas to rural communities. The Leader of the Opposition has yet to announce a plan, or even a single idea, that would save rural energy consumers so much as one penny. If the Leader of the Opposition is serious about supporting natural gas expansion, then he should get behind our unprecedented initiative and support what we're doing.

➤ [Minister Coe to Minister Matthews \(Skills training\)](#)

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is for the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development. The Minister of Advanced Education has been in her role for nearly a year, and during that time, the highly skilled workforce expert panel report was also released. Why is this government ignoring its own panel's recommendations? And when will this government address the serious skills mismatch that exists in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. The highly skilled workforce report, which was prepared by a group led by former member Sean Conway, was presented to the Premier. We are committed to actually moving on every one of the recommendations in that report. There is a lot of work under way, a lot of discussions. In fact, just yesterday, I had a very good meeting with the Minister of Education and Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, where we talked about how they could participate in that highly skilled workforce report, particularly around experiential education. One of the most important recommendations, I think, in that report is that every student, by the time they graduate from high school, and again, when they graduate from university or college, has had one meaningful experiential learning opportunity. That's a big, big shift, and we're committed to achieving that.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Back to the Minister of Advanced Education: The Auditor General confirmed that youth unemployment right here in Ontario is hovering at 15%, well above the national average, which is clearly unacceptable. My question is simple: Does the

minister believe that her government's record of high youth unemployment is acceptable? Yes or no?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the answer clearly is no. That's why we're working very, very hard to focus our work on those groups of people who are facing exceptional challenges. We are listening very carefully to what the Auditor General had to say about making sure that we're actually getting results for the money that we are investing in the programs that support young people as they get into the workforce. I do just want to remind the member opposite, though, that his party—everybody over there, in the last election—ran on the platform of firing 100,000 people. Those are the very people who support young people who are facing challenges to get through their education and into the workforce. Those cuts would have been disastrous. We are committed to making sure that every young person in this province achieves their full potential.

March 8, 2017

➤ [NDP Leader Horwath to Minister Matthews \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Acting Premier. Over the past few months, I've been welcomed into the homes of many women in this province who are worried about their skyrocketing hydro bills, women like Adele from Cambridge, a single mom who fought back tears as she told me how her children go with less because her hydro bill has doubled in recent years. Why doesn't the Liberal government come up with a plan that will permanently lower Adele's hydro bill and invest in the services that her family needs, instead of saddling her kids and their kids with the bill?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I want to start by saying that we are implementing a plan that reduces the average hydro bill in Ontario households by 25%. We have already done the first 8%, and we are looking to take the further 17% off later this year. So let's remember that we are implementing a plan that will help people like Adele. That is for all the households: 25%, on average. For those who are low-income families, there's even more support, and for those who live in the rural parts of Ontario, there is even greater relief. We have a plan. We're implementing a plan. It addresses the stories that we heard from people across this province. I'm proud of it. I wish the leader of the opposition would stand up and say, "Good work."

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, Adele doesn't just need lower hydro bills; she needs good health care and she needs good schools for her kids. Instead of investing in health care and education, the Premier's hydro plan gives an extra \$40 billion to her well-connected friends on Bay Street. Bringing Hydro One back into public hands will put \$7 billion into the public purse. It will mean we can invest in families like Adele's

again. Doesn't the Acting Premier think that making \$7 billion is better than spending \$40 billion?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: You know, Speaker, I was really pleased when the NDP actually came up with a plan to bring down hydro prices, because we had heard lots of identification of the problem from the opposition parties, both parties, but we didn't see much by way of solutions. So I was very pleased when I heard that the NDP was coming forward with a plan, until I read the plan, and there just was nothing there that would bring down hydro prices. There was nothing there that would achieve the goal that we all want, which is to provide immediate relief for people who are facing real challenges when it comes to their hydro prices. Speaker, if there's nothing there, why did they scramble so fast to put something out themselves? That's what I want to know. All across Ontario, we need to invest in schools, in hospitals, in child care and in stronger public services. Stopping the sell-off of Hydro One and returning it to public ownership will give the people of this province a \$7-billion payday and lower their hydro rates permanently. How is the Liberal government's \$40-billion investment in bankers on Bay Street going to help women like Adele, her children and her grandchildren, live a better life? Speaker, let's be clear: Our plan is fast. It is substantial. It is widespread. It is long-lasting. The NDP plan, sadly, is very vague. It relies on these expert panels to be struck sometime in the future. Their biggest idea, to buy back the shares of Hydro One, does not take one penny off one bill in this province. There is zero evidence that keeping—

As far as I can tell, the only idea in their plan is to get the deputy leader elected leader and then Prime Minister of Canada, and he will give them 5% off.

➤ [Minister Sattler to Minister Flynn\(Pay equity\)](#)

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Acting Premier. The year 2017 marks the 30th anniversary of pay equity legislation in Ontario. After 30 years, however, the lack of active enforcement of pay equity laws has contributed to a gender wage gap that is stuck at 30%—a gap that is significantly wider for immigrant and indigenous women and women with disabilities. The closing the gender wage gap steering committee called for amendments to the Pay Equity Act in its final report last August. More than six months after the release of that report, nothing has happened. Can the Acting Premier explain why she is dragging her heels on the immediate actions, like amending the Pay Equity Act, that would make a huge difference to close the gender wage gap for women in Ontario?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member for that excellent and timely question. There's no doubt—I think all members in this House will agree—that the gender wage gap still disadvantages women across Ontario and across every jurisdiction, and we need to deal with it. Other parties in the past have said that they would deal with it, but they haven't.

We haven't made the progress that needs to be made. The conversation that is taking place right now in the province of Ontario involves some very real work that was done by the gender wage gap working group. They worked on behalf of government. They came from business, they came from labour, they came from the civil service; they brought us their best advice. We're moving that on now. We've got a group together of some of the best minds in this province, some of the best minds on this issue. Their first meeting is scheduled for April 13. I want Ontario to be a leader in this. We should all want Ontario to be a leader in this. It's simply time. The level of tolerance for the gender wage gap simply has expired in this province, Speaker.

Ms. Cindy Forster: This government has had 14 years. When the non-unionized auto manufacturers recently sought changes to workers' personal leave, the Premier changed the law for them overnight through quiet regulation. When large construction firms like EllisDon sought reforms that negatively impacted workers, you quickly changed the laws for them. What are you going to do today for the majority of low-paid workers in this province—almost 60% of them women—to have decent, secure work that pays at least a \$15-an-hour minimum wage?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you again to the member. As I said, this is a very timely question, Speaker. I'm proud to stand in this House. With the Changing Workplaces Review, with the Gender Wage Gap Strategy, we're confronting issues where the solution has escaped previous governments. We're taking concrete action. When the advice came forward from the gender wage gap working group, there was work to be done in the future but they told us, "There are things you can do right now," and we acted upon that, Speaker. Gender-based analysis is used by this government. It's required. When we're passing any policy that relates to this government, it needs to go through a gender-wage-gap lens. That wasn't done in the past. It should have been. Under this government it is being done. We're moving ahead on this issue. We're determined to put an end to the gender wage gap in Ontario.

➤ [Minister Nicholls to Minister Lalonde \(Correctional facilities\)](#)

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. In May 2016, your Liberal government announced that the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre's main facility would have its body scanner installed by the end of this month. After a drug overdose death at EMDC, former Minister Orazietti said that he would prioritize the installation of the body scanner. Now, the new minister's office is saying the scanner is "prioritized for installation in fall 2017." You keep using the word "prioritize." I do not think it means what you think it means. How exactly does failing to meet a deadline mean "prioritize"?

L'hon. Marie-France Lalonde: J'aimerais aussi souhaiter une belle journée de la femme à toutes les madames ici et partout en Ontario.

Just to make sure, I said my little piece. I thank the member opposite for his question. First off, one of my most important responsibilities as minister is the safety and security of our staff and our inmates. Our government has recognized the challenges surrounding contraband at our correctional facilities, which is why we've announced \$9.5 million in funding to install body scanners at each and every facility across our province by 2018. This makes Ontario the first jurisdiction in Canada to install body scanners at every jail. We've installed one of the first scanners at the adjoining regional intermittent centre right next to the EMDC, where we can have inmates scanned in exceptional situations. EMDC will be getting a body scanner this year. I can confirm that 11 facilities already have—

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Words are empty; they need to be followed up with action now. Back to the minister: Ontario's gold standard jail, Toronto South Detention Centre, was recently called a "\$1-billion hellhole" by Toronto Life magazine. The jail has been a disaster from the start. Unbreakable window were broken by inmates. Officers worried that inmates would grind glass into powder and blow it into their faces. They were told by management to wear goggles. Negative pressure rooms for inmates with contagious airborne diseases regularly malfunction. The software system controlling cameras, intercoms and locks regularly stops working. When I asked why a female officer was trapped in an elevator with inmates for an hour, the staff were slapped with a threatening memo to keep quiet. Well, it didn't work. Staff keep speaking out and the truth has been told about the cells. Speaker, to the minister: Why did the government go ahead with Toronto South Detention Centre's experimental design despite warnings from the Auditor General and staff?

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Again, I want to thank the member for his good question. I want to take the time today, actually, to recognize the hard work our correctional officers, our nurses, our maintenance staff and our cooking staff—everyone who works with challenging situations at times every day to keep our institutions and our inmates safe. I recognize that the Toronto South Detention Centre is not without its challenges, and we know that more work needs to be done for it to live up to its full potential. We need to hire more staff, reduce the lockdowns and improve the overall condition of the institutions. In fact, I was there a couple of weeks ago. I visited the jail and I saw a group of passionate staff who are dedicated to their vital role in maintaining law and order in our society. Through this visit, I got a sense of the progress that actually needs to be made. Our government is committed to the transformation, and I'm working on this

➤ [Minister Hoggarth to Minister Flynn \(Pay equity\)](#)

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of Labour. As you've heard already, today is International Women's Day. This day celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, but it also challenges all of us to seek change in society. The theme for this year is #BeBoldForChange, which calls for a better working

world—a more inclusive, gender-equal world. Ontario has been bold for change. In particular, our Minister of Labour has been looking at change in the working world through the gender wage gap consultations. Can the minister please update the House and talk about the progress that we are making?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I want to thank the member for that question, the interest that she has and her advocacy. I also want to wish everyone a happy International Women's Day. To the women, to the men, to the boys and girls in this House: This should be a day that we're all engaged in. I'm so confident that the #BeBoldForChange theme is going to continue to get people all over the world engaged on this issue. Speaker, this is an issue that begs the attention of all members of this House. It crosses partisan lines. This government is absolutely committed to closing the gender wage gap and to building on the progress we've already made. As I outlined earlier, Speaker, the first meeting of the group is April 13. We're going to get the best advice, we're going to get the best feedback, and we're going to make sure that the advice we received in the past is implemented. We've taken those immediate steps that we could take without further consultation. We are "bold for change" in the province of Ontario. We're going to increase fairness in this province. We're going to close the gender wage gap.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I want to thank the minister for his answer and for being such a strong advocate for closing the gender wage gap. He is right: We all need to work together, because International Women's Day reminds us that, despite our progress, there is still work to do. On average, women still earn less than men, and, simply put, this needs to change. We also know that all women across the economic spectrum are affected by the wage gap, but the gap is more pronounced for women who are minorities, aboriginal, newcomers or living with disabilities. Deloitte reported that the gender wage gap represents 2.5% of Ontario's GDP, and closing it could generate \$11.6 billion in an increased annual consumption of goods and services. Speaker, through you to the minister, could the minister please explain what else our government is doing to ensure women continue to play an important role in our working world?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, thank you very much for that very good question; I want to thank the member again. It's not only the right thing to do; the fact of the matter is that equality for women when it comes to the Ontario economy—to any economy—simply makes good business sense as well. It makes sense for workers. It makes sense for business. It makes sense for our economy. It increases productivity. It strengthens skill sets. It contributes to a healthy workplace. It prepares for the workplace of tomorrow. It was great to see the Ontario Federation of Labour here at Queen's Park this morning contributing to this very important conversation. Speaker, women play a critical role in our labour force. At the Ministry of Labour, we're determined to improve the working lives and the conditions of all workers in Ontario, including women. On International Women's Day, we've got to redouble our efforts to engage with labour and business, and continue to make Ontario one of the best places in the world to work.

March 7, 2017

➤ NDP Leader Horwath to Premier Wynne, Minister Duguid (Hydro rates)

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Premier has dubbed her band-aid solution to the hydro crisis in Ontario the fair hydro plan—odd, because she didn't even mention the completely unfair mandatory time-of-use pricing that Ontario families and businesses have been suffering under. How can the Premier claim her plan is fair when it leaves seniors and young parents at home with their kids to pay more while lining the pockets of her friends on Bay Street?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Energy is going to want to speak to the work that he's doing to look at the market pricing and to look at if there are ways of providing options to people. The fair hydro plan in Ontario is about taking an average of 25% off the bill of every one of those people that the leader of the third party identified. That is fair. It's also fair that people who are living in rural and more remote areas and are paying disproportionately high distribution charges would have relief as well. It's also fair that people who are living on low income would have extra support. That's what makes the fair hydro plan fair.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last week, I visited Versatile Inn in Sarnia and spoke with the owner, a woman named Mehru Malik. Mehru told me all about her nearly-\$8,000 hydro bill. Mehru wants relief, but the Liberal Party doesn't fix the problems, like unfair mandatory time-of-use pricing. When will this Premier deal with the important issues in our electricity system, like ending mandatory use pricing, instead of focusing on her political well-being?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise again to talk about the fair hydro plan that's going to be helping every ratepayer across the province with a 25% reduction, as soon as we can get this legislation passed through the House. It is important to know that time-of-use is something that we've been working on for months. We've recognized that a senior couple living on a fixed income in northern Ontario shouldn't be on the same retail price plan as a single condo dweller living here in downtown Toronto. That's why we asked, months and months ago, for the IESO to start work on this, to start looking at bringing forward some other options besides time-of-use. But while they're doing that, we continue to act. We brought forward other reductions, and then last week, a 25% reduction for every family across this province.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: A senior sitting at home in Sudbury shouldn't have to wring their hands, worrying about turning the lights on and turning the stove on during the day. That's not fair, Speaker. That's not fair. Mehru, the woman in Sarnia who runs this hotel, told me that she washes her own towels and pillowcases for the hotel on-site, as a way to save a bit of money. But even that isn't very helpful, because her staff have to do the laundry during the day so that they won't wake up the guests, and that forces her to pay peak electricity prices. Why didn't this Premier address the unfair time-of-use pricing in her desperate attempt to save her own political skin?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: The one thing that's very important to also highlight about our government's fair hydro plan is that it delivers a 25% reduction for not only every household in the province but to half a million small businesses and farms. That is something we should all be proud of. Not only that, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce has highlighted the importance of the small businesses and the challenges they face. Many regional chambers have spoken to us about that, so we listened and we took action. Every ratepayer who pays time-of-use prices in Ontario will receive the 25% reduction. This includes households, farms, businesses and more. We're very proud of the fair hydro plan.

➤ [NDP Leader Horwath to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Last week, I also visited with Cheryl and Scot Ryckman at their farm in Chatham. They told me that they paid \$75,000 in hydro bills last year alone. For a small business, that's a lot to take. The Premier says she's concerned about hydro bills like Scot and Cheryl's, but her plan doesn't give them any long-term protection. Why is the Premier bringing in a short-term Band-Aid when what she needs—what they need, what Ontario needs—is a long-term fix to the energy system that this Liberal government messed up in the first place?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: We're very pleased to be able to stand and talk about the fair hydro plan and how this is going to benefit farms right across the province, farms that will see a 25% reduction in their electricity bills.

This does much, much more for small businesses right across this province. At the same time, those businesses that are larger, those businesses like our small manufacturing sector, can now qualify for the enhanced ICI program. That's helping them save up to a third on their energy bill. That's because we've taken action to ensure that we're helping not only residences, not only small businesses, not only farms, but our manufacturing sector and our large businesses as well.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Scot and Cheryl have reduced their hydro consumption by 40% over the past year, but none of that—none of that—translated into lower electricity bills. The Premier's plan doesn't address time-of-use pricing. It doesn't address bad contracts

that she signed. It doesn't address the oversupply of energy that we are paying private and foreign companies to generate, that we don't even use. It doesn't stop the wrong-headed sell-off of Hydro One. Can the Premier explain to small-business owners like the Ryckmans why her plan doesn't address any of the underlying problems in our hydro system and why any relief that comes under her plan will only be temporary?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: What I think the leader of the third party needs to do is put down her plan that doesn't address anything—it doesn't save one cent for families or businesses in this province—and actually look at ours and see what the fair hydro plan does: a 25% reduction for small businesses, farms and residences right across the province, and the ICI program is enhanced, helping our manufacturing sector and all our businesses. We're actually helping low-income individuals, which their plan didn't even address until the last page. We're making sure those who are most vulnerable actually get the help that they need. When it comes to our First Nations, those living on-reserve, we are also making sure that there is a new rate for them, that they're getting help. We're actually helping everybody in the province, unlike the opposition over on that side.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Nobody believes for a minute anything that came out of the mouth of that minister a moment ago because it's totally nowhere near the reality of what occurred last week. Here is the reality, though: The Liberal plan does nothing more than make a last-ditch effort on behalf of this government, this Premier and her political party that's trying to hold on to power here in this province for just a little bit longer. Mehru Malik knows it. The Ryckmans know it. In fact, everybody in Ontario saw it for exactly what it was last week.

When will this Premier stop putting the interests of her banker friends and her political party ahead of the interests of small businesses, family, industry and mining in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Let's talk about who else is talking about the fair hydro plan and all of its benefits. Francesca Dobbyn, the executive director of the United Way of Bruce Grey: "This shows Kathleen Wynne's government is listening to people. With these positive changes, our rural community will now truly benefit from the low-cost power it produces." Isadore Day, the Ontario regional chief: "The elimination of the delivery charge will assist our citizens by reducing energy poverty in our communities. It also represents recognition for the use of the land in the development and expansion of the provincial energy grid.... Today's commitment by the Ontario government is commendable and allows a path forward for greater quality of life for First Nations in Ontario." Mr. Speaker, I can keep going on the number of quotes that we have here. Well, I know I won't have time, but I'll look forward to talking about more in some of my supplementaries.

March 6, 2017

➤ PC Leader Brown to Premier Wynne (Energy policies)

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. I was reading a Globe and Mail editorial, and I'm going to share with you what that editorial said. According to the Premier's energy plan, "She isn't fixing the electricity ... mess. She isn't lowering the extortionate system costs created by a decade of poor choices and mismanagement of the province's power system. She's simply rigging consumers' bills during an election year." This isn't about fixing the structural challenges. Is it just about what we all know it is, your own political survival?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What our Fair Hydro Plan is about is taking a burden off people's electricity bills all around the province. It's about making sure that people see, on average, a 25% reduction—people who are having trouble paying their rent, who are having trouble looking after their families—making sure that they have the relief that they need soon, that it's practical and that it's adequate. That's what our Fair Hydro Plan is about.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, obviously, this is a sensitive topic for the Liberal government. The Globe and Mail editorial said, "A Liberal Premier has found yet another way to make Ontarians pay more for electricity, but this one is selling it as the act of a thoughtful government coming to the aid of" families. That is exactly why I have written the Financial Accountability Officer asking for an open, transparent and honest accounting of what this is going to cost Ontarians and if the government's numbers are actually accurate. Mr. Speaker, the truth will come out eventually. Just how much debt is going to be saddled on the next generation of Ontarians?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm happy to say that the office of the Financial Accountability Officer was briefed last week. We're very happy to have the FAO get the information that he needs. His office has been briefed, and we will continue to work with him. In fact, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, we actually expanded the purview of the Financial Accountability Officer so that he could get all of the information that he wanted. So we're happy to do that. This plan is about giving people relief on their electricity bills. It's about spreading out costs over a longer period of time, costs that have been incurred through investments in a system that was degraded, that had to be upgraded and that was susceptible to brownouts and blackouts when we came into office under the previous Premier. We absolutely had to make the investments. We've

done that. We have a clean, reliable electricity grid, and we're going to relieve people of their electricity costs.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The Globe and Mail placed the blame where it belongs. I quote from the Globe and Mail: "The blame for this falls squarely on the consecutive Liberal governments of former Premier Dalton McGuinty and his successor," the Premier of Ontario today, "in power since 2003. Their mismanagement of Ontario's power system has led to today." That's their mismanagement. Now the Liberal government—to pay for their mistakes, for their mismanagement, it's going to cost \$25 billion in additional interest costs. We've seen Liberal math before, how it doesn't add up and how it seems to be something different afterwards. Just look at the gas plant. It was supposed to cost a cup of coffee, then it was \$40 million and then costs skyrocketed. Their numbers, historically, do not add up. My question, Mr. Speaker: Given the fact that their math hasn't added up before, can we have the guarantee of the Premier that they will not block any information being shared with the Financial Accountability Officer?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We've already provided a technical briefing to the office of the FAO. We are happy for the Financial Accountability Officer to have the information available to his office already. It's already there, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to work with him. Underlying the question of the Leader of the Opposition is an assumption that, had they had the opportunity, they would—not have upgraded the system, they would not have cleaned the electricity grid, and then they would not have had a plan to deal with those costs. We've taken the responsible path. We know that the costs that people are being asked to pay are too up front. We're spreading those over a period of time. It's a 25% reduction on average. That's what we're moving forward with.

➤ [NDP Leader Horwath to Premier Wynne \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Premier and the Liberals have had 14 years to fix the mess that her party has helped create in our hydro system, but it is only in the last few weeks that she has admitted that there is a problem and only last week that she admitted she could actually do something about it. Up until she began to fear for her political life, she told Ontarians there either was no problem, or if there was, there was nothing she could do about it. The Premier told this House: Our rates "are competitive with New York, with Michigan, with Pennsylvania.... Those energy prices are competitive, Mr. Speaker." I ask the Premier, what's behind the sudden conversion?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, that's just not an accurate portrayal of the situation. The fact is that for some time, a number of years, we've been working to take costs out of the system. We renegotiated the Samsung deal. We made a decision about not building new nuclear. We were very aware that we needed to find ways to get costs

out of the electricity system. We made a decision around the 8% reduction on electricity bills—the provincial portion of the HST—last year, Mr. Speaker. It's in effect now.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We did hear from people around the province, and I knew that it was not enough. That's why we brought forward an average 25% reduction that people will see on their bills this summer.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Hydro rates have been a crisis for families and businesses in Ontario for as long as the Premier has been saying there was no crisis. It's not just the Premier who denied the problem. On September 15, 2016, the minister said, "Energy costs are in the middle of the pack when compared to other Canadian provinces. The government has used virtually all available public policy levers at our disposal to mitigate rate pressure for customers." When will the Premier admit how out of touch she is with Ontarians and apologize for denying over and over again that the crisis they were facing is real?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, it seems to me that a plan has been brought forward that is actually going to reduce people's electricity bills in a number of ways. First of all, an across-the-board average 25% cut for residents who pay bills—they're going to see, on average, a 25% cut. People who pay exorbitant distribution rates in rural and remote communities are going to see another 10% or 15% reduction. People who are living on low incomes are going to see an enhanced benefit, so they will see further cuts. That's a practical plan that I think demonstrates that we have understood. We've listened and we've understood. We've brought forward a practical plan as opposed to a plan that does not respond because it would not work, which is what the NDP has brought forward. We've brought forward a plan that actually is practical and it's going to reduce people's electricity bills.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, she may forget this, but the other part of the Premier's story was that the Liberal government had no control over hydro prices, that it was all in the hands of the Ontario Energy Board. On September 29, 2016, the Minister of Energy said, "The OEB is a quasi-judicial organization that's not part of the government. They set the rates." Clearly, the Premier does think she has control over rates, because just last week she finally decided that the political cost to her and her party of ignoring this crisis that she has created for Ontario families was just too much, and she came up with a band-aid fix. What changed, Speaker?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, for many months we have been working on finding a solution to help people with their electricity bills, whether the leader of the third party accepts that or not is entirely beside the point. The point is that there are people in this province who are paying too much for their electricity. They can't afford to look after themselves and their families. There are people in this province who are paying too-high distribution costs, and there are people living on low income who are not getting enough

support. We are tackling all of those challenges. The relief will be in place in the summer. It will stay in place. The reality is that I am most interested in those people, in their concerns and their families.

➤ [NDP Leader Horwath to Premier Wynne \(Privatization of public assets\)](#)

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. One part of the Premier's story that she still clings to is that selling Hydro One is a good idea, once again ignoring the wishes of the vast majority of Ontarians. By returning Hydro One to public hands, we bring in \$7 billion over the next 30 years that we can invest in Ontario. Instead of investing in Ontario families and businesses, the Liberal plan gives away an additional \$25 billion to \$40 billion to bankers over that same period. When will this Premier wake up and realize that continuing with her wrong-headed sell-off of Hydro One is not just vastly unpopular, it is absolutely the wrong thing to do for Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, again, we put the facts on the table. The proposal that the leader of the third party has brought forward as part of her plan—that would not work—is to stop the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One and buy back Hydro One, none of which would take one cent off one electricity bill in this province—not a penny. What we've brought forward is a plan that will reduce people's electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. It will spread the costs over a 30-year period for an asset and for assets that are going to be used by people for that period. So it's only right, it's only fair, that people in this generation would pay part of the cost, but people who are going to be using that asset down the road would pay part of the freight for that. That's what we're doing. We're bringing forward relief for people immediately.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Liberal plan will cost the people of Ontario more in the long run. That is absolutely the case. And it doesn't solve any—not a single one—of the underlying problems in our current electricity system, nor does it stop the sell-off of Hydro One. For years, the Premier didn't listen to Ontarians when they were struggling with hydro bills that were far too high and that they could no longer afford. The Premier has not learned from that lesson. Why isn't she listening to Ontarians who are telling her that the right thing to do is to stop putting her political career ahead of the people of this province and put an end, once and for all, to her wrong-headed decision to sell off Hydro One, their vital public asset?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's actually hard to know where to begin. The reality is that underlying the question from the leader of the third party is an assumption that there was no need to rebuild the electricity system in Ontario: that we don't need a clean electricity grid; we don't need to build all those thousands of kilometres of line; we don't need clean, renewable capacity; and, underlying her question about Hydro One, we

don't need to build transit—all of which, I think, are really surprising assertions coming from the NDP.

On top of that, the proposal that she has put forward to reduce electricity costs because of the investments that we've made—there is a cost associated with those—the proposal she's brought forward would not work, would not take money off of people's electricity bills. We've brought forward a practical plan that will reduce people's electricity bills. That's the right thing to do.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What we don't need is to sell off a vital public asset that generates revenues for the people of Ontario. That's what we don't need. People need more than a desperate attempt to hold on to political power. People need so much more than that. People need more than a plan that kicks the problems in our hydro system down to our grandkids. We need a plan that prioritizes Ontario families and businesses, because all Ontarians see that the Liberal plan is an extra \$40 billion going into the pockets of this Premier's banker friends. When will this Premier show Ontarians that she is about more than saving her own political skin, admit that she was wrong and stop the sell-off of Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been asked a lot about this question of grandchildren and how we would explain it to our grandchildren. Well, I have three grandchildren, and I'm quite comfortable talking to Olivia, Claire and Hugh about the reality that their mom and dad need some support in order to allow them to take skating lessons or swimming lessons, allow them to do the things that they want to do for their family now. That will mean that Livvie, Claire and Hugh, will be helping to pay for those assets. Mr. Speaker, for months, the leader of the third party has been looking for solutions to actually help people in their daily lives. We're bringing that forward. I would have thought she might have been supportive.

➤ [MPP Fedeli to Premier Wynne \(Energy policies\)](#)

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Rumours have surfaced regarding the employment status of the 70 men and women at the OPG facility in North Bay. In fact, these now appear to be more than rumours. OPG and North Bay have had more than a 100-year relationship. They have a responsibility to be open and transparent with the communities they've had partnerships with, especially those for more than a century. If OPG is indeed transferring dozens of employees out of North Bay, why are they doing it by stealth? Speaker, I ask the Premier, does she agree that this is an outrageous failure by a publicly owned corporation to live up to the standards of accountability that are expected here in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm happy to respond on behalf of the Minister of Energy. I find it kind of passing strange that the member opposite, who is always on his feet talking about efficiencies in government and doing the right thing and allowing our crown corporations to do what they need to do to be able to keep their budgets in order, is now standing up because something happens to be happening in his riding, that now it's something that they shouldn't be doing. My understanding, Mr. Speaker, is that there are no jobs being lost in this move, but that the senior vice-president is in North Bay today, speaking in person to the employees who are affected. I know that this is a decision that OPG takes seriously. OPG has more than 9,000 employees in every corner of this province. They're a big corporation. But the role of our government—the role of any government—is not to interfere with these human resources issues.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Premier: For weeks, OPG told the media, "We don't respond to rumours." For weeks, the city of North Bay's requests have gone unanswered. Their failure to respond has caused great concern in North Bay. Their silence is a betrayal by OPG to behave as good corporate citizens, and their refusal to be honest tells us to no longer trust what OPG says. If OPG is willing to turn its back on the city it has been in for 100 years and ignore the pleas of the municipality, what else will they ignore? Speaker, I ask the Premier, if OPG won't be open about their plans in North Bay, how can they be trusted to be accountable for what they say about any of their projects?

Hon. Brad Duguid: It's all about accountability. It's about giving our crown corporations the ability to manage what they're doing in the best possible way. The member is on his feet all the time talking about cutting costs, cutting salaries, and all of that stuff. The minute something happens in his riding, he wants us to go in the opposite direction. The senior vice-president is in North Bay today. It is a sensitive issue, and it's a decision OPG takes very seriously. They'll be working very closely with the labour union representatives, as they have been all along, and they'll work hard to balance providing thousands of good jobs in Ontario while delivering low-cost energy. That's what we're trying to deliver here in Ontario. So you can't have it both ways, Mr. Speaker. You can't have it both ways.

➤ [MPP Tabuns to Premier Wynne \(Privatization of public assets\)](#)

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, a question to the Premier: Over the weekend, there was a credible report that Hydro One is negotiating to purchase Toronto Hydro. There were denials, but we've heard many denials before, just like before the last election when the Premier denied that she was selling Hydro One. This sort of deal-making is happening because this government is giving out fat tax breaks to utilities that are sold to the private sector. Why is the Premier subsidizing the privatization of public utilities like Toronto Hydro?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: As the mayor said on the weekend, there are no discussions going on between our government and the city of Toronto on this matter. I don't know where the rumours came from, but you're asking me to respond to rumours that we have no idea what the source of those rumours is from. I think, though, the question that Ontarians want asked is: Are we getting value for the investments that we're making in our energy system? Are we getting value from the tough decisions that this government has made in terms of the Hydro One issue? Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is, the NDP now have a plan that they want to buy back, for \$4 billion, the shares of Hydro One. Where are you going to get the money to pay for the interest—

Hon. Brad Duguid: One sentence: Where are they going to get the money to pay for the public transit that we're building in Toronto and across the province?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Back to the Premier: I remember Ed Clark's words from October 2015, when he said that Hydro One transmission should stay in public hands. The Liberal government announced six months later that they were selling off Hydro One. The Premier has given the public good reason to be cynical and skeptical when it comes to privatization in Ontario's electricity system. Will the Premier stop subsidizing the sale of public utilities to private investors?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, that question is more about arcane, outdated political philosophy than it is about running an efficient hydro system. The fact of the matter is, the issue that he is referring to—and I'll say it again: There are no discussions going on between the province and the city of Toronto about Toronto Hydro. So let's be very, very clear about that. At the same time, we have to find ways to build public transit across this province. We have to find ways to build more roads and bridges across this province. The NDP want to go back to the days where we had a huge deficit in infrastructure. We're not going to do that. We've made tough decisions on this side of the House because we know how important it is to the people of Toronto and to the people of Ontario to build transit, to build roads, to build bridges, to build this province up and to make this economy hum. That's what we've mandated ourselves to do and that's what we're going to do.

➤ [MPP Vernile to Minister Duguid \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Growth. Last week, the government took a momentous step forward in ensuring that clean, reliable energy is affordable for everyone in Ontario. That announcement, the Fair Hydro Plan, is a 25% reduction on average for all households in Ontario. No loopholes, no exceptions; just significant relief for this very important household cost. I

know that this announcement will go a long way in helping families in my riding of Kitchener Centre and right across the province of Ontario.

Of course, homeowners are not the only ones in the province who are paying electricity bills. Business owners have also said that they face challenges with their monthly electricity costs. Speaker, would the minister please share with this House in what ways the government's Fair Hydro Plan is going to help businesses in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Ensuring that electricity is affordable for business is a very important part of maintaining Ontario's strong economy. Last year, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce launched a campaign called Small Business Too Big to Ignore. It highlighted the importance of small business to Ontario's economy and some of the challenges they face. Electricity prices were one of those challenges. I'm pleased to share that the Fair Hydro Plan for Ontario is designed to help on exactly this issue. The 25% reduction applies not only to every household in this province but to tens of thousands of small businesses as well. Everyone who pays time-of-use prices will see this benefit, regardless of whether they're a home, a farm or a small business. There is no doubt that 25% is a significant savings and will go a long way to ensuring that the cost of doing business in this important sector is still very competitive in Ontario.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'd like to thank the minister for his answer. These reductions in energy bills are getting very positive reactions from Ontarians. All residential electricity customers, farms and small businesses are going to be seeing an average of 25% off their bills. This is the largest electricity price cut in Ontario's history. Low-income customers and those living in rural areas with the highest delivery charges are going to see even further reductions. In my riding of Kitchener Centre this past weekend, constituents I ran into at public events and even at the grocery store came up to me to tell me that they welcome the actions our government is taking. Speaker, I'd like to ask the minister: How are these initiatives going to impact the economy here in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: This government announced a bold but sensible plan to lower electricity rates for households and businesses. All businesses will see a 2% to 4% reduction in their energy costs. Many small businesses will see a 25% reduction. Those medium-sized manufacturing and food processing companies will now qualify for the industrial conservation initiative and that could save them up to about a third of their energy bill. It's important to point out, though, Mr. Speaker, that the reason we are able to afford to do this is that the Ontario economy is doing very well. We're leading the country in job creation. We're leading the entire G7 in growth. We've now created 700 net new jobs since the recession. Our unemployment rate is at an eight-year low. This economic growth has enabled us to make these important investments to lower energy

bills. Speaker, we now have an energy system in the province that is not only clean and reliable, but also affordable.

➤ MPP Hillier to Minister Duguid (Energy policies)

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Premier. Premier, a few weeks ago Northland Power's Kingston Generating Station was forced to close its doors, along with 18 jobs. For 20 years Northland was under contract to the IESO, and their contract ended on January 1. They offered a new contract to sell their power at the very low rate of 5.9 cents per kilowatt hour for another five years, but this government would not purchase this clean, cheap power and they won't allow Northland to sell directly to other consumers. Just down the road, in Bath, they're building a new generating station that has been contracted to sell power at 20 cents per kilowatt hour. Just across the water on Amherst Island, they're building wind turbines that are contracted at over 20 cents per kilowatt hour. Why does the Premier insist on shutting down clean, low-cost electrical generating stations and make Ontario buy the most expensive electricity—

Hon. Brad Duguid: Ironically, the particular contract the member is talking about was signed during the Conservative government. You know what, Mr. Speaker? What that contract did is, it meant that generators did run around the clock, creating excess greenhouse gas emissions and operating at uncompetitive prices. Under the updated contracts, these facilities will only choose to produce power when they can compete with other forms of generation in Ontario's electricity market. The replacement contracts will result in ratepayer savings of up to \$53 million. They laugh at savings, but that's how we're able to continue to drive down energy rates in this province. We're going to keep working at bringing savings in the energy system, even if the PC—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again to the Premier: I will say, Speaker, that that response was nothing but poppycock from the minister. This Premier has stated that she has made mistakes, and that's clearly an understatement. This latest screw-up demonstrates that the Premier continues to make the same mistakes and has not learned any lessons. The Premier continues to build expensive, unneeded generating stations while she closes down low-cost existing generating stations. The Premier throws people out of work while increasing the cost of electricity and adds billions to our debt. Ontario is becoming an energy wasteland under this government: mothballed generating stations, energy poverty, 600,000 consumers who can't pay their monthly bills, and the Premier's solution is to turn Ontario into a subprime debtor with multiple subprime loan mortgages. Speaker, will the Premier commit to ending these generating plants, not only in Bath and Amherst Island, but everywhere in this province?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Speaker, it's funny. There was a time when the PCs used to talk about trying to cut energy costs. Today, they're asking question after question about ways to increase costs within the energy system. We're not going to apologize for finding savings in our energy system. That's how we're able to lower energy rates for the people of this province—a 25% cut in energy rates for every household in this province because we're doing what we need to do to make our energy system as efficient as we possibly can. There's still a lot of work to do. We're in the process of replacing 80% of the infrastructure in our energy system. We're well on the way to doing it. We've had to expend about \$50 billion for the last 10 years to do that—

➤ [MPP DiNovo to Minister Del Duca \(Public transit\)](#)

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. A few weeks ago, Metrolinx provided an update to its fare integration process. Metrolinx is now looking at basing transit fares in the GTA on fare by distance, like a private taxi company. It's becoming clear that the government's fare integration process is not about transit service, ridership or the public good. This is about imposing more costs onto riders, especially TTC riders living in places like Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke. Instead of imposing more costs onto riders, will the Premier restore provincial funding for municipal transit operations, as the city of Toronto and the NDP have proposed?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member for the question. I think that member knows that, in fact, what Metrolinx has done is put forward four separate concepts or ideas for the fare integration discussion. I should note that in 2014 the mandate letter I received from the Premier stipulated that moving forward with delivering on fare integration is a critical part of the Ministry of Transportation's mandate. I think all members from the greater Toronto and Hamilton area would know that, in fact, providing that notion of integrating the fare system, which is set with respect to the table being set by the Presto fare card fully deployed right across the greater Toronto and Hamilton area—that we are moving towards that fare integration concept. To the member's question: That is simply one of four concepts that is being consulted upon. Metrolinx looks forward to getting back with respect to the feedback, and we'll have an update in coming months.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This question is again back to the Premier. Because Metrolinx's fare integration process keeps getting more complicated and more convoluted—the minister will know that. Taxi-style transit fares are about helping the government cut costs by imposing those costs onto the riders who rely on transit most. Riders don't want complicated fares, where they need a calculator, a ruler and a map to figure out how much it's going to cost to get to work. They want a simple and affordable fare that lets them travel across the region. Will the Premier guarantee to put riders and the public interest first, and restore funding for municipal transit operations, as the NDP has proposed, or not? Yes or no?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member for the follow-up. I can say very clearly in this House that making sure that we take into account the affordability and accessibility concerns of transit users across the region is very much top of mind for Metrolinx and for our team at MTO, and we'll continue to keep that top of mind.

But really and truly, that member should know, a number of weeks ago, the Premier announced that over the next four years, our government will be doubling the gas tax money that the city of Toronto, all 905 communities and, frankly, nearly 100 communities across the province of Ontario that have transit systems will be receiving. That means that by 2021, the city of Toronto will be receiving approximately \$340 million from this government to support the expansion of transit. Interestingly, the leader of the NDP's plan to provide transit funding support for Toronto does nothing for the 98 other communities across the province, like Ottawa, like Waterloo, like Vaughan, that have transit systems and need our help as well.

March 2, 2017

➤ PC Leader Brown to Premier Wynne (Energy policies)

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. The Premier acknowledged this morning that she made a mistake. At least six times, she used the word "mistake" or "mistakes." We know the cost of the mistake is \$42 billion. The Premier just signed off on \$42 billion in interest payments alone to pay for this government's mistakes. Mr. Speaker, whether you pay today or whether you pay tomorrow, eventually the Liberals are going to go back to raising rates. Hydro bills may go down temporarily, but eventually ratepayers are going to have to pay this back. The question is, how long and how soon is that going to be?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the reason the people on this side of the House are standing and cheering is that the people of Ontario who pay for electricity are going to see a 25% reduction by this summer. That's why they're cheering.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Your decision to continue while I'm standing is making me decide whether or not I'm going to move to warnings. I might have to do that anyway. So if I warn somebody, it's because you've been warned that you could be warned.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is warned.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, \$42 billion to make up for a mistake—\$42 billion in interest payments—and the incredible thing is, this government is proceeding tomorrow with more of these bad green energy contracts. You would think they would learn. Paying more to pay for these bad contracts—and they're proceeding tomorrow. My question is: Given that you've said this morning six times you made a colossal mistake, are you still going to proceed tomorrow with these additional bad contracts for generation we do not need? When does it stop?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, let's just get the facts on the table. What we're talking about is spreading the costs of the investments that have been made as a result of neglect that was in the system from all governments— For 50 years, investments were not made. All governments, Liberal, NDP and Conservative, have to answer for that. We're talking about spreading those costs over 30 years, and over those 30 years we're talking about a \$25-billion cost. I don't know where the member got \$42 billion. It's \$25 billion over 30 years so that people across those 30 years will share the costs of those investments that had to be made.

Mr. Patrick Brown: This scheme does nothing to end the unmitigated disaster of the Green Energy Act. It doesn't touch the generators. The taxpayers will pay in the end. Why does this scheme do nothing to end the bad contracts—why is there nothing being done about the Green Energy Act and the bad contracts? Is the reason that the government is still proceeding with more of these contracts, is the reason they're not touching any of these old bad contracts—is it because of the \$1.3 million in donations to the Ontario Liberal Party from companies that benefited from these bad contracts?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Here's what we're doing. We're putting in place relief for everyone, because what we have all heard is that everyone across the province—whether you live in the north or the south, whether you live in urban or rural Ontario—everyone has seen electricity prices go up too far, too fast. That, on average, 25% reduction will be for everyone. We also heard that people who live in some of the more rural or remote areas—are paying distribution costs that are exponentially higher than people who live in denser areas, so we are providing relief for those people as well. For people who live on low incomes, we're expanding the Ontario Electricity Support Program to help them. We're making structural change, sustainable change, because people need relief right now, and that's what we're delivering.

➤ [PC Leader Brown to Premier Wynne \(energy policies\)](#)

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. This scheme is simply robbing Peter to pay Paul, but in this case, both Peter and Paul are taxpayers. Paul may pay less next month, but Peter will be paying—hear this—\$1.83 billion a year and \$42 billion in interest for decades to come because of the mistakes of this government.

Is this scheme about making all of Ontario pay more in interest payments simply to save this government politically in the short term? Is this about their own self-interest? It absolutely is.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The changes that we're bringing in which will spread the costs of assets and investments that have been made that were absolutely necessary to upgrade the electricity system—we are going to spread those over a 30-year period. That will be about \$25 billion over the 30 years. Again, we need to deal with the numbers that are real, and that is the number. We're doing this because people need relief right now. The investments that have been made were necessary. Having clean energy is necessary. Having clean air is necessary. We are not backing away from those decisions. But what we are saying is that people need to pay now, but they also need to pay into the future. There needs to be a sharing of those costs over a longer period of time. That's fair, and that's why our plan is being brought forward.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: This is simply another Liberal shell game. We saw it in the fall with Liberal hydro plan number 17, where they just shifted the clean energy rebate with the HST. This is again simply another shell game. It's a shift. This government is not getting at the root causes. I understand why the government doesn't want to hear this: It's not in their self-interest. But the reality is, they're not looking at these bad contracts. They're still proceeding tomorrow with more bad contracts. When you have this massive surplus, when we're giving it away to our competitors in the United States, I can't understand why they're going ahead tomorrow with more bad contracts. The Premier said this morning she made a mistake. She's making more mistakes tomorrow. How can you really be remorseful when you're going to do the same thing tomorrow? Do the right thing. Stop signing these bad deals and actually help ratepayers. That's what we need to do.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Really helping ratepayers is exactly what we're doing. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I will be very honest with everyone in this House and in Ontario. We looked at everything. We looked—at every possibility. Mr. Speaker, you know, the notion of renegotiating contracts was something that we absolutely looked at. The reality is, there are hundreds of contracts. To renegotiate every one of those, first of all, would be incredibly expensive and, secondly, would take an enormous amount of time. Finally, as someone—an academic—said to me, “Why don't you just legislate the cancellation of those contracts?” That would put a chill on doing business with Ontario for decades to come. The reality is, we were not going to go down that path.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: I had hoped that in this Liberal hydro announcement, they would have at least said—okay, maybe they don't have the courage to look at these bad contracts because they're their friends; they're their donors. But I at least would have hoped they would say on Friday, tomorrow, that they're not going to sign more. They're still proceeding.

Okay, so the government doesn't want to look at the bad contracts. They don't want to take on their friends; I get that. But will they at least rein in the executive salaries? There's nothing this morning about these offensive executive salaries. We pay sometimes 10 times the amount in hydro salaries for executives that other provinces do. If you're not going to look at the bad contracts, can you at least look at these \$4-million salaries? Can you at least have some empathy for ratepayers that can't pay their hydro bills?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, we are reducing rates by 25% for every ratepayer in this province. I don't know why the Leader of the Opposition can't hear that, so let me say it again: 25% for every ratepayer in this province. Our plan provides fast, substantial, widespread and long-lasting relief. I know the PCs are struggling to agree with one another on their own schemes. On their biggest idea, of ripping up those energy contracts, let me be clear: This will lead to increased rates, lawsuits and penalties. Even the Leader of the Opposition's own energy critic knows this. Yesterday, what did he say on radio in Ottawa? "It's going to come at a huge cost to taxpayers and we're"—

➤ [MPP Singh to Premier Wynne \(Energy policies\)](#)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. The Premier has a very bad record of saying one thing to Ontarians and doing the exact opposite in reality. She promised to lower auto insurance rates by 15% before an election. But after she got re-elected, guess what? That turned out to be a stretch goal. How can the Premier expect Ontarians to believe anything that this government has to say when they promise to do the right thing before an election, but then they break that promise right after they get re-elected?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We said that we were going to reduce people's electricity bills by 8%. That is happening. We have brought forward a plan to reduce people's electricity bills by 25%. People will see those reductions by the summer. We've said further that people who live in remote and rural areas will see a further reduction because they will see their distribution charges reduced. They will see those results. It is extremely important to me that we recognize that this is about people's needs. This is about the reality of electricity prices across the province. We've brought forward a plan that will give people relief in the immediate term, and that is more than I can say for the third party.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The Premier also promised not to sell off a vital public asset before an election, but guess what happened after the government got elected? We all know where we are right now. We know this government broke that promise.

Making promises to the people of Ontario and then breaking them once they're re-elected does nothing more than make people cynical about the government. How can the Premier honestly believe, after so many broken promises, that the people will have any faith in what this government has to say?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and respond, because the first thing I get to say is that we are reducing rates for every ratepayer in this province by 25%. Also, this is more than just a proposal; this is an actual structural change that's going to see these rates continue to stay low for the next four years. We're going to continue to bring forward a long-term energy plan that will continue to make sure that we take costs out of the system. When you look at the NDP proposal and what they were talking about, their biggest idea is to re-buy Hydro One shares. That will not take one cent off of any of the bills. That's why— It doesn't take one cent off electricity bills. And it's not just us who are saying this; the Toronto Star editorial goes even further to say, "There's no evidence that keeping it public would make this particular problem any better."

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The reality is, this proposal doesn't do anything to address the mess in the hydro system, and Ontarians are right to be cynical about it. They know that, come June 8, 2018, if the Liberals win, the hydro rates will go right back up. That's what they know and that's what they expect to happen. In fact, the Premier refuses to address the real issues. They're not going to stop the sell-off of Hydro One, they won't address the unfair time-of-use pricing, the bad contracts or the fact that we oversupply electricity and then pay foreign, private companies to purchase that oversupply. This is a quick political fix to a problem the Premier ignored and her party ignored. They only care about it now because there's an election looming and the Premier has such bad polling numbers. That's the reality. Ontarians know that. Will the Premier admit today that this plan will only end up costing ratepayers more in the long run?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know the honourable member outlined quite a few points, but let us outline quite a few points. First thing: The relief we're talking about will be substantial relief—25% right across the board for every ratepayer. For those who are living in rural parts of our province, in northern parts of the province—800,000 households—they'll see that number jump up between 40% and 50%. That is significant. As I said, there are many things that we're doing. The important thing is that this relief will be lasting because it's built on real change—

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It's built on real change. It's not looking at making sure we might possibly be able to have a conversation in a few years down the road with some group that we may want to make up.

We're looking at plans. We're bringing forward relief. This 25% is coming, and it will help everyone in this province.

➤ MPP Singh to premier Wynne (Energy policies)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question again is to the Premier. Let's be honest here. Ontario families will not be fooled by this desperate— We all know that, if the government is re-elected, we'll be right back here in this same mess with hydro bills so high that small businesses are shuttering their doors and families are forced to choose between heating their homes and putting food on the table. The Premier has had 14 years in this government to fix the problem, and four years as a Premier to fix the systemic problems with the hydro system, but she hasn't done that and her party hasn't done that. When will the Premier stop kicking the problem down the road and actually address the systemic problems with the hydro system and actually help Ontario families and businesses?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know, when families see their bills in the summer, they are going to see a reduction of, on average, 25%. I believe that that is going to make a huge difference to families across the province. In addition to that, families who are living in more rural and remote areas, who have been paying exorbitant and exponentially high distribution charges, are going to see a further reduction. That is a structural change. As well, what we've said is that there were some costs that were being borne by ratepayers that need actually to be borne by the whole group of Ontarians, by taxpayers. That's a structural change that we have made. In addition, financing the payoff of those assets over 30 years: That's a structural change. Those were the structural issues that were driving costs. Structural change is exactly what we're delivering to Ontario.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, this is just a plan that doubles down on a bad plan and extends it for a long period of time. That's all it is. The people who will be the happiest with this plan are the Premier's small group of well-connected friends. They're the ones who are going to be happy about this. The Premier is hoping this plan will help her Liberal Party, but she knows certainly this is going to help her banker friends. It doesn't actually address the systemic problems with the hydro system and it doesn't actually permanently lower the bills. It just makes people cynical, and that's absolutely the wrong thing. A short-term fix is not enough. A plan that doesn't make the real, concrete changes to address the systemic problems with our hydro system is nothing more than a desperate attempt from an unpopular government to cling on to power. That's all it is. Will the Premier show Ontarians the respect they deserve, and actually come up with a real plan that addresses the real problems to permanently lower the cost of hydro in this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know the honourable member mentioned our small group of friends. That small group of friends is every single ratepayer in this province. It's a 25% reduction that they are going to see in the very near future. It's not a bumper-sticker plan, like they brought forward, that talks about just a number they brought out of air that they could maybe work with if they can get this group put together. We have substantial structural changes that we have brought forward. We are bringing forward significant changes to the RRRP. We are upgrading the OESP program. In their plan, low-income individuals were on the last page, and they were told to sit and wait. We're not waiting to help low-income individuals. We're even creating a new affordability fund that low-income individuals can access on top of the HAP program, and it's going to help many, many people get out of the perpetual cycle of not being able to pay their bills.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The problem with the Liberals' hydro system is, they continue to sell off our public asset—they're selling off Hydro One. They continue with an unfair time-of-use fee. They're doubling down on bad contracts. They're paying private, foreign companies—they're paying them for the energy we overproduce. These are the problems, and guess what? None of these problems are being solved by this plan; none of these issues are being addressed by this government. Ontarians can't trust this Premier with their hydro bills. They don't believe that stretching out the payments is in any way addressing the root cause of the problems. Will the Premier show that she's serious about tackling the mess that her government and her leadership have created, and implement a plan that will develop a real solution to this problem and permanently lower the cost of hydro in this province? The people deserve that.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: So, we've done exactly that. We've made sure that rates are coming down by 25% for every single ratepayer in this province. When it comes to those who are living in our rural remotes or even some of our smaller communities—that's 800,000 households—800,000 households will see even more than that. They'll see more than that. For those who have a hard time even paying their bills when it is a 25% reduction, we have now programs in place that will actually help them, and help more of them. The one thing that we are also very proud of is making sure that we have a new on-reserve First Nations rate, Mr. Speaker, helping out 21,500 First Nations people across our province. We will continue to listen to and work for the people of Ontario. That's why we have this 25% reduction plan.

➤ [MPP Todd Smith to Premier Wynne, Minister Thibeault \(Energy policies\)](#)

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier. Thanks to this morning's Liberal scheme, we now know that Ontarians are going to be on the hook for another \$42 billion in brand new interest costs in Ontario. The Premier said this morning she

can't even guarantee long-term relief for ratepayers. That's because they're pushing even more of these expensive FIT contracts onto the grid tomorrow. These are the same types of contracts that got us in this mess in the first place. If you're spending \$42 billion of today's money to pay for yesterday's mistakes, how much more are we going to have to pay for the mistakes that you're about to make tomorrow?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Obviously, the honourable member hasn't actually really looked at the plan, because he would then understand that what we're talking about is \$25 billion over 30 years. We're making sure that one generation does not pay for something that will be used by many generations. We're off-loading those costs and making sure that everyone will pay their fair share because we're making the system fair—a 25% reduction right across the board for every ratepayer. I know he keeps talking about our FIT contracts and all of those bad contracts that he likes to frame. But I know that yesterday, when he was talking on CFRA's show in Ottawa, out of his mouth, Mr. Speaker, he said, "Ripping up these contracts would come at a huge cost to taxpayers." We agree. We are making sure that we have a fair system in place, one that is helping 25%—

Mr. Todd Smith: You know, on a radio interview a couple of weeks ago, the energy minister for the Liberals called London listeners "dumb." That's what he's done. It's \$42 billion in new interest costs and the big power company friends who gave \$1.3 million to the government aren't going to be out of a dime. Sixty-four per cent of the costs in the electricity sector come from generators, and guess who's not going to be affected? Their Liberal friends. The generators are not going to be affected as a result of this scheme today. In fact, a bunch of them are getting new approvals for plans tomorrow to build more of these things. Six times in her press availability, the Premier said that she made a mistake. But if you keep doing the same thing, it's not a mistake; it's negligence, and it has been negligence from this government for years now. Will the government fix the underlying problem, or are we going to continue robbing Peter's grandkids to pay Paul's grandkids by 2030?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It's actually this government that is making sure we look after Peter's grandparents and Paul's grandparents and their grandkids by reducing rates and eliminating coal. They forget about that. There are substantial reductions we have made to ensure that our children have clean air to breathe. That's something that they never worried about. They actually left the system in tatters. When they are talking about renewable energy, they completely forget about 42,000 jobs that were created in this sector. They forget about billions and billions of dollars that were made in investing in this province.

Of course, we have now brought forward a plan that will make sure that we have an affordable system, that we have a clean system and we have a green system, something that is the envy of not only this country, but the world.

➤ **MPP Martins to Minister Thibeault (Hydro rates)**

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is to the Minister of Energy. I would first like to congratulate the Premier for listening to Ontarians, caring enough to act and make people's lives better. That's what leadership is. Mr. Speaker, over the course of many, many months, families and businesses in my riding of Davenport have expressed concern over the rising cost of hydro. They don't understand why hydro rates have gone up, and they're frustrated by the bills delivered to their door. People are worried about the price they're being asked to pay and the impact it is having on their household budgets. For some of them, it's reached a point where they are choosing between keeping the lights on and keeping food in the refrigerator. This is unacceptable. I know you'll agree that that's unacceptable. North or south, rural or urban, this issue affects us all. While I know our government has already taken concrete steps to help, we all agree more is needed. Can the Minister of Energy tell us about what we're doing to ensure electricity prices are fairer for Ontario families and businesses?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I want to acknowledge the member for her important question and, of course, her hard work in her constituency. I know, Mr. Speaker, that electricity is an essential part of our life. Everywhere I was able to travel in this capacity over the last eight months, I heard from people worried about the price they pay for electricity. Over those past few months, I know the Premier, myself and many of our colleagues, MPPs, have made a point of connecting with those individuals. We've either gone to visit them or we've called them. People want to know three things: First off, that substantial relief is on its way, and it is; second, that that relief will go to everyone, and it will; and third, that the relief will be lasting, because it is built on real change, that bills won't just jump back up in a couple of months or a couple of years. I was very pleased to join the Premier this morning in making that announcement. I will start doing so by making sure those bills come down as soon as possible.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I would like to thank the Minister of Energy for his response. I believe most of us are aware of today's announcement and are keen to learn more about what it means for families and businesses. I know that this is especially true for my constituents in Davenport. Earlier this week, the NDP released their own proposal for addressing hydro costs. Ontarians are still waiting on the Conservatives to produce a realistic proposal to bring down rates. While we welcome new ideas on ways to help people struggling with energy rates, I believe it's important for Ontarians to understand the differences between these approaches. My question to the Minister of Energy is, can you provide more details on our plan and how it compares to the others?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: We're moving forward with the largest cut to electricity rates in Ontario's history. We are tripling the size of the cut we're making to people's electricity bills from 8% to an average of 25%. For those living in rural communities or with low incomes, the break will be even greater. How does this compare to the opposition parties, Mr. Speaker? Right now, neither party has a credible approach to dealing with rising electricity costs. While our plan provides fast, substantial, widespread and long-lasting relief, the PCs are struggling to agree with one another on their own one-off schemes. Their biggest idea, ripping up energy contracts, will lead to increased rates, lawsuits and penalties. The other idea, halting the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One, won't take one cent off of electricity bills. Meanwhile, we're actually acting. We're reducing bills and we're helping people right across this province.

➤ **MPP Miller to Minister Thibeault (Hydro rates)**

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Jeff lives in Hamilton and is behind on his hydro bill. Had he listened to the Premier, Jeff might have thought he was now safe from winter disconnections. But Jeff pays his hydro bill to a private company that sub-meters his apartment building. The Minister of Energy said on Tuesday that the OEB's winter disconnection ban included such companies, but yesterday the OEB said the exact opposite, stating in an email that "the OEB's decision and order does not apply to unit sub-metering providers." Can the Premier explain what's going on?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, I'm pleased to stay standing and rising to address this issue. We are going to work with the OEB to address this, because we do recognize that this is something that needs to be addressed. When we talked about no winter disconnects right across the province, we meant everybody. So we're going to continue to work with the OEB on this. When it comes to where we have seen these issues arise, we recognize that some families, some individuals, were having a hard time paying their bills. That's why today we've announced that we're reducing all rates by 25%.

Mr. Paul Miller: Well, Speaker, Jeff allows ODSP to manage the payment of his bill, so he can handle it. But Jeff's hydro bill has been going up so quickly over the last year that ODSP, through no fault of their own, can't keep up. They pay a predetermined amount each month, based on Jeff's typical hydro costs. But it hasn't been enough because bills are going up so quickly. Each time they increase, the monthly payment falls behind. They're still behind the curve, and arrears are spiralling. Jeff's neighbours are in the same situation. Many in Hamilton are. Today's announcement won't help Jeff or his neighbours.

I'd like to announce today that I'm taking out a second mortgage on my house so my grandkids can pay their hydro bill. What will this government do to help people climb out from the hole that is being dug by this province and this Premier?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: The plan that we announced today is actually going to help families and individuals like the honourable member mentioned. The affordability fund, for example, will actually help these individuals get out of that perpetual cycle of always being behind because of many reasons. Let's say they have electric heat and they haven't invested in insulation or upgrading their windows, because they haven't had the necessary pocket money to do that. This affordability fund will allow them now to access those dollars, to making the necessary upgrades to their home. That way, they will see their bills lower even more by conserving, which then, on top of that, has a benefit for everyone across the province, just like the benefit that we announced today, Mr. Speaker. That 25% reduction that everyone will be getting across the province is something that we should all be proud of, because we're helping every family in this province.

➤ [MPP Yurek to Minister Thibeault \(Energy policies\)](#)

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Energy. I received a copy of a bill from one of my constituents this past week who paid \$295 for electricity, but at the same time was charged over \$2,000 in global adjustment fees. The high global adjustment fee is directly related to their green energy policy, which is bankrupting Ontarians. The government today is forcing the municipality of Dutton Dunwich to accept a wind farm, even though 84% of the population voted against it. This wind farm will add to the skyrocketing global adjustment fees all Ontarians are paying. The minister has made a mistake. He's announced it previously. Will he announce another mistake today and cancel the Dutton Dunwich wind turbine farm?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and talk about green energy and the importance of green energy in making sure that we have clean air to breathe. We haven't had a smog day in this province since 2014, and that's thanks to the investment that this government has made in green energy. I know I've talked a lot about the 25% reduction when we're talking about residential families, but let's talk about that 25% reduction for those mom-and-pop shops on Main Street. They're part of the retail price plan. They're also going to see this reduction when it comes to the global adjustment. We're actually helping many of our small businesses right across the province. On top of that, the one thing that the opposition hasn't talked about is the important and successful ICI program. We're making that even bigger, even greater, by lowering that threshold to 500 kilowatts, having thousands of more businesses qualify to save a third on their bill.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Minister, Liz Clarke has been pushed to the brink by the Premier's hydro prices. She can't afford this government's energy shell games anymore. Ms. Clarke, who is 83 years old, lives alone in her home in Courtright, Ontario, the only home she has known most of her life. She has no TV, no computer—only the basic necessities. All winter long, she keeps the temperature in her home below 16 degrees Celsius, but Ms. Clarke has electric baseboard heating in rural Ontario, so she regularly sees hydro bills between \$500 and \$600. Ms. Clarke has emptied her savings to pay her bills, but she still finds herself hundreds of dollars in arrears, and now has nothing to put away for a rainy day. Minister, what do you have to say to Ms. Clarke today? How is it acceptable in this day and age to treat seniors like this in Ontario?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I hope the honourable member tells this fine woman that her bills are going down 25% at a minimum. It's going to be going down more, because he mentioned she lives in a rural area, and depending on if she's an R1 or an R2 customer—with Hydro One, I'm assuming—those rates are going to go down even more. And she would obviously qualify for the OESP program, which has been enhanced. But it's not just us now who is talking about the significant reductions that we've announced today. Let me quote Francesca Dobbyn, the executive director of the United Way of Bruce Grey: "This shows that the Premier's government is listening to people. With these positive changes, our rural community will now truly benefit from the low-cost power it produces." I agree with her, and so will everyone in this province.

➤ [MPP Hatfield to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Speaker, I'd like to tell you and the Premier about my constituent Ron. Ron contacted my office recently because he was under the impression that the Premier and her Liberal government were actually going to do something about his skyrocketing hydro bill before. So imagine his surprise come January 1 when he saw the promised temporary 8% rebate on his bill, but the bill was actually higher than it was the month before. Why doesn't the Premier get that people like Ron—people from all over this province—can tell when she puts forward solutions that only address the Premier's sticky political situation and don't actually fix the mess that she has made in our hydro system?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and address the concern that the honourable member brings forward. Of course, it's great when we all can talk to our constituents and talk about the issues that are affecting them and the programs that are out there to help them. Knowing the honourable member, I'm sure he told them about many of the programs that we do have out there. That 8% reduction did take effect January 1, but depending on how their bill structure was in place, that will change. As now we're moving forward, that would come into full effect. But let's not forget, Mr. Speaker, 25% is what this individual will now see when he gets his bill, come

summertime—a reduction of 25%. That is something that is very important. That is a significant reduction for people like Ron, and everyone like Ron across the province.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Yesterday, it was immediate relief; now it's in the summertime. It's not just people like Ron who are suffering under this government's political manoeuvres. The Greater Essex County District School Board saw hydro costs increase by \$50,000 in 2015 and \$431,000 in 2016. How can the Premier honestly say to this school board that the plan she released today will actually keep their hydro costs down permanently? Speaker, doesn't she understand that people like Ron and school boards all across this province see this plan for what it actually is: a desperate party playing political games with a hydro system that they made a mess of in the first place?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: We had to clean up the mess that was left by previous parties when they were in power, never investing in the system, never investing in conservation, using cheap power with coal. We've made sure that we've made those investments. When it comes to the substantial, structural changes that we have made by taking all of these social programs that we've talked about—we've taken that and pulled it off the rate base and now put that onto the tax base, where it should be, and rightfully so. That will now see our rates reduced for all of those types of schools and arenas. Those will be a significant cost reduction for these organizations and these facilities as well. In the announcement that we made today, when they finally read it all, they will see that there are reductions for every person and every business in this province.

➤ [MPP Toby Barrett to Minister Thibeault \(Hydro rates\)](#)

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Premier: During pre-budget hearings, Canada's iconic Maple Leaf Foods told the finance committee that their company's electricity bills skyrocketed 18% last year to \$19.7 million across all their Ontario plants. As a result, Maple Leaf calculated its potential electricity costs if it were to move to other jurisdictions; savings ranged from \$7.5 million to \$12.8 million a year. If they moved to Manitoba, a 65% savings on electricity; if they moved to Alberta, a 60% savings. Maple Leaf could move their 5,100 employees to New York state and save 47% on electricity. Canada's leading retailer of packaged meats could go to Michigan and save 39% on hydro. Premier, the numbers don't lie. How can you argue with these figures?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Exactly: Numbers don't lie. That's why the reduction in the ICI program from one megawatt to 500 kilowatts is going to help Maple Leaf Foods exactly. They're going to save up to one third of their electricity costs, and that will ensure that they have money to again create jobs. I know the Minister of Economic Development and Growth has been talking about how well our province has been doing with foreign investment and creating new jobs. I know they don't like hearing about that, but on this side of the House, we are doing everything to create a business climate that now has very affordable electricity rates. When it comes to all people and all businesses in this

province, we're reducing rates by 25%, and we're making sure significant reductions are happening for businesses as well.

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Minister of Energy. You made the mess; now you're only cleaning up a portion of it, and you want to be the hero. It doesn't work. Life is getting harder and harder under your Liberal government, as skyrocketing hydro bills are pushing hospitals and other public institutions deeper and deeper into debt. Grey Bruce Health Services, in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, saw its hydro bill rise by \$350,000 a year, a 40% increase in just one year. Sadly, because of your disastrous energy schemes, Grey Bruce Health Services may have to make bold cuts, such as to close the operating room in the Meaford hospital, and other cuts to surgical services. I want to know, Speaker: Will the minister guarantee here and now that your newest hydro shell game will prevent such dangerous cuts to patient services?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: As I've said throughout questions, residents are going to see their rates cut, and all other businesses and institutions are going to see rate cuts. That's something that we made sure as a government to look at all aspects of. But I know the member from Bruce-Grey is talking about individuals in his riding often. I know Francesca Dobbyn, the executive director of the United Way there, has been a very vocal critic of the government. It's now great, when we come forward with this plan, that she's quoting: "The changes announced today, along with the changes already announced, along with the changes that are still coming will go a long way in addressing the affordability issue that people in this province are seeing."

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➤ [PC Leader Brown to Minister Sousa \(Energy Policies/Hydro\)](#)

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Again, as the Liberals always do, they play a shell game. The latest shell game is shifting hydro bills around. We saw it with the clean energy rebate being replaced with the HST rebate, while people's bills still go up. The latest leaked plan suggests that costs from your hydro bill will shift to your tax bill. Mr. Speaker, HST, income tax, the fees: The money needs to come from somewhere. Will this government come clean and acknowledge that, in their leaked plans, taxes are going to go up? They're simply playing a shell game.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm very proud to say that we're balancing the books. I'm proud to say that we've reduced our deficit, as of December, to \$1.9 billion, \$2.5 billion above plan. We're taking every step necessary to protect the interests of all Ontarians and taxpayers to ensure that we invest in the things that matter for the long term to make us competitive.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Finance. Rather than answer a question on hydro, the government chooses to cheer their government talking points. I will once again try to ask a question about hydro. Ontarians are struggling with their hydro bills, and I'd appreciate an answer to a question on hydro.

Mr. Patrick Brown: This is the government that introduced the global adjustment. This is the government that for those 30 bad contracts that they're now saying they might look at, they received \$1.3 million in donations. My question is: Will the Minister of Finance come clean and acknowledge that this latest leaked plan is simply a shell game of shifting funds from the hydro bill to the tax base?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member opposite hasn't produced any plan whatsoever. What we have done is invest over \$50 billion to \$60 billion in new hydro construction: more transmission facilities, more clean power plants, enabling us to get off dirty coal and ensure we protect our environment. At the same time, we now have greater integrity in the system, which we didn't have when the Conservatives were in power. We had blackouts and lots of brownouts. We are ensuring that in the future, that does not happen. We're investing to protect the interests of all Ontarians and ensuring that our electricity rates go down to protect and mitigate those increased costs.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance brags that there are less brownouts, but the reality is there are more. Since 2012, there have been 275% more power outages. So the system is not more reliable. You signed bad contracts. This government signed bad contracts. They brought in the global adjustment. They have created a mess. Rather than simply giving the government talking points, what I'd like is for the Minister of Finance to apologize to the people of Ontario and say he's going to return the donations that the Liberal Party got for these bad contracts. Will the Minister of Finance at least encourage the Premier to return those donations for those bad contracts?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to stand and speak to this, of course, Mr. Speaker, because Ontarians do remember those rolling brownouts and the blackouts and the smog days. Those are a thing of the past, thanks to this government. We invested \$50 billion in generation and transmission—I know the PCs forget what it was like when they were in government. You know what, they're desperate to create a problem when there is none—

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pointing to power outages from falling trees and dump trucks hitting lines—we've actually made sure that we've built a system that is reliable, one that we can rely on. That's what we've seen right across the province with the \$50 billion of—

➤ MPP Singh to Minister Thibeault (Energy)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Acting Premier. On Monday, the Premier indicated that she believes that there is no link between public affordable hydro and lower hydro rates. The Premier also claims to like to make decisions based on evidence. So let's look at the facts: Manitoba has a publicly owned hydro system, and their rate per kilowatt hour is 7.38 cents. Ontario's system is, of course, a private system, and during mid-peak times our rate per kilowatt hour is 13.2 cents—almost double. Even during off-peak hours, Ontario families and businesses pay more than Manitoba.

Can the government indicate now, looking at these facts, that there is absolutely no link between public ownership and lower hydro rates?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise and respond to that question because, of course, Quebec and Manitoba are blessed with geography. They have legacy hydro. Going back and talking about Manitoba— Speaking of Manitoba, when they were in power they cancelled the Conawapa program and made sure they cancelled the conservation program as well. We've actually rebuilt a system that we can be proud of and that is reliable and clean. We're making sure that we take it to the next level and make it as affordable as possible for as many people in this province as we can. When we're looking at broadening the ownership of Hydro One, we're on track to raise the \$9 billion that we intended to put into infrastructure to continue to build Ontario up..

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It looks like the government is unconvinced. The government mentioned Quebec. Let's talk about Quebec. A family across the border, our neighbour in Quebec, if they look at their bill—they also have a publicly owned system—they would see a rate of just 5.71 cents per kilowatt hour—5.71 cents. If an Ontario family looked at their bill and they did something as wild as trying to cook dinner for their children before off-peak hours set in at 7 p.m., they could see rates as high as 18 cents per kilowatt hour—18 cents. How can the government deny the connection when the facts state very clearly that public hydro systems are more affordable and more cost-beneficial than the private systems that we've seen so far?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It's obvious to me now that the NDP has no idea how our energy system in this province works. We actually need to generate power. We don't have the benefit of geography like they do in Quebec and like they do in Manitoba. We need to build our generation. We do have some hydroelectric power, but there is a cost to nuclear, there is a cost to wind, there is a cost to solar—and we built that. We've done it, making sure that we can be clean and green and reliable. The one thing that is very important for us, as a government, is that, when we rebuilt this system, one that

governments of all stripes forgot about and never invested in, we actually made sure that we can now rely on this system. It cost us significant money, but we're going to make it as affordable as possible for people.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Lower hydro bills start with public ownership and public control of our electricity system. It's a fact. But here's the problem for the Liberal government: The problem for the Liberal government is that public ownership of the hydro system benefits everyday Ontarians, and it benefits all of us. But all the evidence, all the facts point to this government and this Premier wanting to only help well-connected insiders. Their policies have only benefitted a small group of insiders on Bay Street, not the rest of Ontarians.

The Premier has purposely ignored people on Main Street to the benefit of the people on Bay Street time and time again. Why doesn't the government understand that when people pay for electricity, they don't expect to pay for the profits of private companies?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: The system that we have built in Ontario, the system that we've invested in—\$50 billion in terms of generation and rebuilding transmission—benefits every single Ontarian. When we're saving \$4.3 billion in health care costs, that benefits everyone in this province. When our air pollution deaths have dropped 23%, that is significant and benefits everybody in this province. When we have our air pollution hospitalizations drop by 41%, that benefits every single Ontarian. So we'll take no lessons from the party that has no idea about putting forward a plan that makes sure—all they're talking about is pushing ideas to the future. We're going to bring forward immediate relief to help—

➤ [MPP Singh to Minister Del Ducs \(Infrastructure program funding\)](#)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question, again, is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, the Premier said that she didn't believe that Ontario could have an affordable, public hydro system and, at the same time, build infrastructure. She said it was an either/or; she couldn't stop her decision to sell off Hydro One. I'm sorry to bring facts into this argument, but we've been doing that for a long time, actually. We've been building infrastructure and at the same time maintaining a public, affordable hydro system. When the Yonge subway line was built in Toronto, the government didn't have to sell off hydro. When the University subway line was built, we also had public, affordable hydro systems. When the Bloor-Danforth line was built, there was no sell-off. Even Mike Harris built the Sheppard line before trying to sell off Hydro One. It's not a surprise. In this province, we have built public infrastructure, transportation infrastructure and maintained a public, affordable hydro system. So why does the government think that it can't be done, when it's been done so many times before?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm delighted to have the chance to speak about the incredibly ambitious and unprecedented transit projects that our government is investing in currently. No other government in Ontario history has invested as much and as consistently in public transit right across the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, in Waterloo, in Ottawa and in the 99 communities across this province that have public transit systems. Those are communities that, by example, are benefitting from the doubling of the gas tax program that the Premier recently announced just a couple of weeks ago, which is great news for all those communities. I've said this before in this Legislature: Just for once, I would be delighted to hear a member of the NDP caucus stand up and provide people in this chamber and those watching at home with any sense of a plan to build public transit in the GTHA or beyond. They've never presented that plan. Perhaps in the follow-up question, that member from Brampton will provide some semblance of a plan.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, the first step of that plan will be to win the election and to remove the Liberals from power. For 100 years, Ontario has had public, affordable—People in Ontario don't buy the Liberals' false choices, that we can't have a public hydro system and still build infrastructure. For 100 years, we've had affordable public hydro. We built highways. We built bridges. We've connected Kenora to Ottawa and Timmins to Windsor. We can build infrastructure and maintain a public, affordable hydro system. How can the Premier continually state that Ontario can't do this when we've done it so many times before?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think everybody in this province knows that in the last election campaign the people of Ontario had a chance to review that very thin platform from that party. They rejected it: nothing on transit; nothing on transportation. Two and a half years later, we see they still present nothing. Every single project we brought forward—the Eglinton Crosstown; support for the Scarborough subway; building the Finch West LRT; the Hurontario LRT; the Hamilton LRT; support for Waterloo's ION LRT, support for the LRT in Hamilton; support for doubling of the gas tax and so much more that we are doing in every corner of Ontario, including Bramalea–Gore–Malton—that party consistently rejects our plan to move the province forward, to build more transit, put more transit into service, providing a stronger economy and a more positive quality of life for the people who we, on this side of the House, are damn proud to represent.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: All across Ontario, we built schools, we built hospitals, we built libraries, we built public pools, courthouses, waterworks, all without—So we built schools, we built hospitals. We built all this infrastructure, all without selling our affordable public hydro system. We've done it all. When the Premier states that Ontario can't build public infrastructure, can't build transportation infrastructure, can't build public transit without selling off affordable public hydro, how does she expect the people of this province to believe that?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I have to say on behalf of everyone on this side of the House that I want to thank the member from the NDP caucus for belatedly recognizing what everybody in Ontario knows: Premier Kathleen Wynne and our government are consistently building the province up, investing in infrastructure. Hopefully with their support we'll continue to be able to do that. Thank you so much. It's greatly appreciated. At the end of the day, what the people of Ontario expect is, they expect a government that's able to do more things than one thing at a time and do it well. That member referenced health care infrastructure. He mentioned education infrastructure. I'm very proud, as Minister of Transportation, to be working with my colleagues to invest more in transit and transportation. We're going to keep doing it.

I hope this new spirit of openness and honesty and forthrightness in this chamber from that caucus will continue in the months ahead. Perhaps working together and maybe even working with the Tories, Speaker, we'll get more done for the people of Ontario.

➤ [MPP Todd Smith to Minister Thibeault \(Energy policies\)](#)

Mr. Todd Smith: Ontarians are tired of these vague cabinet leaks and shell games with their hydro bills. If you believe the leaked story this morning in the Star, the Liberal government is about to make all Ontarians pay for the colossal failures of this government over the last eight years and the electricity crisis that they've created. Is the government extending the payout period for electricity companies that donated \$1.3 million to the Liberals? We want to know, yes or no. Is that going to happen in their plan? Why don't you deal with the actual crisis in electricity, which is the skyrocketing costs that go along with these fixed contracts that you've signed with renewable energy companies? Is this government committed to no longer signing expensive, fixed-rate contracts?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know on this side of the House, we're very proud of the work that we've done with our renewable energy sector. I know CanWEA is here today. We've ensured that we've built a system with a supply mix that relies on renewable, that relies on nuclear, that relies on gas and water. We have a system that is the envy of North America. We have the States, we have many subnationals and we have many of our partner provinces calling us up and asking us to help them with the system that we've built. We're going to continue, though, to find ways to reduce rates for people, families and businesses that are having a hard time making those payments. We will continue to work hard, but right now we're going to make sure that we bring forward this plan. We'll make sure that we have immediate relief for Ontarians in the very near future, but no decisions have been made at this time.

Mr. Todd Smith: One day the minister is saying, "What a great job we did;" the next day he's apologizing for the crisis they've created in electricity; and the next day he's saying he did a great job again. If you stick a quarter in this jukebox, you're going to get

one of those records. That's what you're going to get from this Liberal minister. If it was as easy as this morning's vague cabinet leak to fix this problem, then why didn't you do it years ago? Why didn't you fix the problem when Xstrata left Timmins to go to Quebec? Why didn't you do it when the greenhouses in southwestern Ontario went to Michigan? Why didn't you do it when businesses were telling you that their electricity prices were going up by double digits year after year after year? Why did you wait until a year out from an election to announce that you suddenly have a plan to solve the crisis that you created in electricity—

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, I'm very pleased to rise to answer the question, because the one thing that the opposition member forgets about is it's this government that had to rebuild that system that actually had businesses shut down. They forget about that so quickly. I know the Minister of Economic Development and Growth will want to talk about the constant growth we're seeing in this province, thanks to the efforts we're making to ensure that we can keep high-paying jobs in this province. The one thing that the opposition member also forgets, and there are a lot of things that they forget to talk about, is that 42,000—42,000—high-paying, clean-sector jobs are now in this province thanks to the investments that we have made, which they voted against every single time. I know the honourable member forgets a lot of the things that we do as a government, but I know the people of Ontario won't. I know our industry players don't forget that we are the party that's invested in—

➤ [MPP Teresa Armstrong to Minister Thibeault \(Energy policies\)](#)

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Acting Premier. I've been meeting with seniors in my riding who live on fixed incomes. They tell me they are forced to make tough choices while they're at home during the day. They are being forced to turn off the heat; they can't cook their meals. They can't stay up all night to shift their hydro usage to off-peak hours. For seniors, hydro is not a luxury the way it is for the Premier. Will the Liberal government scrap their ineffective time-of-use hydro pricing policies, as the NDP has proposed, and reduce hydro bills for seniors?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, I'm pleased to rise. The whole reason why we're actually bringing forward a plan is to make sure that those families, those seniors who are struggling, who aren't seeing the benefit of our economic rebound, who don't necessarily see the benefit of us rebuilding the system—that we can actually find ways to help them even more. We've done that with the 8% reduction, but we know we can do more. The Ontario Electricity Support Program is something that seniors can use and that many other families can use: those that use electric heat and those that need medical devices. That's why we recognize that we can find a way to do more. That's why we're actively working right now to find immediate relief. I know the member opposite talked about the NDP proposal. There was nothing in that proposal that had immediate relief. We're working on finding a relief package that will be immediate.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, the Liberal government's own report shows that time-of-use pricing does not encourage conservation or shift away the demand that the government has hoped for. All it has done is punish ratepayers who can't use hydro during off-peak hours, like seniors, like stay-at-home parents and like businesses. The Premier can reduce the bills of these ratepayers immediately by scrapping time-of-use pricing, as the NDP has proposed. Will the Liberal government scrap their ineffective time-of-use pricing policies now?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Absolutely not. What the NDP doesn't see is that by scrapping time of use, the rates for every single ratepayer in this province will go up. We're making sure that that's not going to happen. That's why we recognize that there are some families that actually could benefit from a different type of plan rather than time of use.

We've worked for the last six months with our system operator on having them come up with some alternatives for that type of program, but that type of program, that type of change, won't be immediate. That's what we're working on: immediate relief for families. They're talking about maybe some things that possibly might add up in the very, very far distant future. We're working right now for immediate relief.

➤ [MPP Peter Milczyn to Minister Chiarelli \(Infrastructure program funding\)](#)

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. On this side of the House, we know that infrastructure is about more than just bricks and mortar; it's about creating and sustaining jobs, growing the economy and enhancing the quality of life for all. That's why I'm proud that our government is making the largest investment in critical public infrastructure in this province's history: building the schools, the hospitals, the roads, the bridges and the public transit that Ontarians need to thrive in the 21st century in communities all across Ontario, including my own of Etobicoke–Lakeshore. This is not just putting shovels in the ground; it's putting people to work. The opposition has been claiming that we just pay lip service to this. This is simply not the case. The Leader of the Opposition, in repeating it in speech after speech, is hoping nobody is paying attention to the facts. Facts still matter in this province. My question to the minister: Can he share the facts about our infrastructure investments?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Thank you to the member for the question. There are over \$14 billion in major projects under way in this province as we speak, and Infrastructure Ontario is in the process of procuring \$11.8 billion more. We have delivered 29 brand new schools; new courthouses in Durham, St. Thomas and Thunder Bay; the Herb Gray Parkway; the Union Pearson Express, and Highway 407 East. We have finished 100 major hospital projects, including a \$474-million mental health facility in the Leader of the Opposition's own riding. Now he has been telling everyone who will listen that this

government can't get shovels in the ground. In the last three years of the Harris government, they spent just \$2.2 billion a year on average in infrastructure.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Now they have the gall to lecture us when we're spending six times that amount. Our investments in infrastructure are at historic levels.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's unfathomable to me that anyone paying attention could claim this government isn't getting shovels in the ground when there's over \$14 billion of projects under construction as we speak. But perhaps the opposition isn't paying attention. If they were, they would know that in their leader's riding, the government is providing more than \$10 million in formula funding this year alone. It's of great importance to the Premier and to the minister to ensure that we are building up communities in every region of the province, from small towns to big cities. I know there are many funding programs, such as the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund and the Clean Water and Wastewater Fund, in place to help municipalities of all sizes. Could the Minister of Infrastructure please explain what our government is doing to ensure that communities everywhere, including the leader's riding, are benefiting from this historic infrastructure investment?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The member mentioned OCIF and water, programs we are very proud of and that have been warmly welcomed by our municipal leaders. We are investing \$100 million in expanding natural gas access to underserved areas in the province, something that party has never done. We are tripling our community infrastructure fund to \$300 million, and we negotiated with the federal government to ensure that clean water and waste water funding flows to every municipality in Ontario. That means every member in this House, including every member opposite, will see investments in their riding. Everywhere you look in our great province, there's evidence of a major investment that is getting shovels in the ground and putting Ontarians to work. The Leader of the Opposition should look in the mirror and vote for Kathleen Wynne.

➤ **MPP Natyshak to Minister Thibeault (Energy policies)**

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Acting Premier. A constituent of mine from Amherstburg, Mrs. Linda Eaton, shared her hydro bill with me. Last year, her bill was \$372 for January. The Premier promised that bills would go down for rural ratepayers like Mrs. Eaton, but that's not what happened. This year, her January bill was over \$500 for roughly the same amount of energy used, and her hydro delivery charge has doubled in two years. Will the Premier provide real relief for ratepayers like Mrs. Eaton and reduce her rural delivery rates to what urban ratepayers pay, as New Democrats have proposed?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and respond because those Hydro One R2 customers, which are 330,000 households, have seen a \$60 reduction off of their delivery line. That's because we acted when we heard that many in rural, remote and northern parts of our province are paying a higher amount. We do recognize that we need to do more. That's why we're looking and working on a plan right now to provide more relief to specifically like the person that the honourable member mentioned, because R2 only provides that relief to 330,000 households. They do get that 8%, and we do recognize that those folks who do live in rural, remote or northern parts of our province do pay a higher proportion on their bills.

That's why we're continuing to act. They're seeing the benefits of a clean system, a reliable system and a green system. We're now going to make sure that we can make it as affordable as possible.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, forgive me, but it sounds like another Liberal stretch goal, like the 15% off auto insurance that we never saw. We won't hold our breath. Mr. and Mrs. Eaton are seniors living on fixed incomes. They don't have access to natural gas and they don't have a choice but to heat with hydro. They've done everything that the Premier has told them to do in order to lower their bills. They do their laundry and their dishes during off-peak hours. They keep their living room temperature at 18 degrees. They even keep their kitchen temperature at 13 degrees. But their hydro bills keep going up, even though the Premier has promised that they would go down. Will the Premier get rid of unfair rural delivery rates and reduce the bills for families like the Eatons?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: There are two parts within that question. The first one I'd like to respond to. It relates to natural gas. I think it's important to also highlight that our government is investing \$100 million in a grant program to make sure that we can get natural gas out to as many communities as possible. I know that the Minister of Infrastructure has been spearheading that and doing a great job with that.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Yes. When it comes to doing more for families like the honourable member mentioned, we do agree that more needs to be done. That's why we're working very hard right now on a plan that will provide immediate relief. We will make sure that we work on this plan and roll it out as quickly as possible because we do understand that, while we've invested in the system and while we've made it clean and while we've made it green, it needs to be as affordable as possible. That's why we're working very, very hard to ensure that we can get this done as quickly as possible, to do just that.

➤ MPP Laurie Scott to Minister Leal (Hydro rates)

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of Energy. Last month, the Leader of the Opposition and I visited the Cedarvilla farm in Selwyn township in the riding of Peterborough, where we heard from local dairy farmer Randy Bullock that his hydro bill has tripled over the past 10 years. He still has the same number of cows that he did a decade ago, he has been improving the efficiency of his business and he even milks the cows by hand to save on hydro costs, but still those costs have skyrocketed, and the government's 8% rebate is nothing but a drop in the bucket. The hard-working farmers across rural Ontario are tough and proud, but as Randy puts it, it is just too much. My question to the Minister of Energy is, when will the Liberal government stop forcing agriculture, one of our main economic drivers, out of the province with their irresponsible hydro policies?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the honourable lady from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for her question this morning. Just to give you a little insight, particularly in the dairy industry in the province of Ontario, over the last two years, the dairy industry quota in the province of Ontario has increased by 6% each and every year. What does that tell you, Mr. Speaker? That tells you—that the dairy sector is growing significantly in the province of Ontario. Agriculture and agri-food processing contributes \$36 billion to Ontario's GDP each and every year.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, at 5:30 a.m. this morning, 800,000 Ontarians woke up to pursue their careers in agriculture. The honourable lady says that the quota increase has nothing to do with us. Yes, it has absolutely everything to do with us. We work with the dairy farmers each and every day—

Ms. Laurie Scott: The cost to agriculture because of the rising costs of energy is real. You can't ignore that. The government's response to the ongoing hydro crisis has been something to behold. For years, they denied there was a problem. Then, they blamed the problem on anyone else but themselves. Finally, they admitted that they are responsible for the hydro mess but offered Ontarians a weak and tone-deaf response. Ontarians saw through the government's actions and told them that they were doing far too little, far too late to respond to the growing energy poverty in the province. Today, we hear that they're once again scrambling to try to buy back Ontarians' trust. But how can Ontarians trust this government to do anything to solve the mess that they themselves created over 14 years of mismanagement? Tell that to the dairy farmers. Interjections.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Well, thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I just want to reply to the supplementary. The honourable member should know, of course, that the dairy quota in Ontario is worth about \$6 billion, and it's growing each and every year. The party opposite, when we proposed a risk management program for everybody else outside of the supply management sector, didn't support it. But in the back concessions in Ontario,

we're hearing now that the Leader of the Opposition— may be endorsing Maxime Bernier as the next federal Conservative leader. Mr. Speaker, you know what mad Max wants to do? To get rid of supply management—

➤ **MPP Norm Miller to Minister Thibeault (Hydro rates)**

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Speaker, we know that the effects of hydro prices on our rural communities are placing a strain on families and businesses. Unfortunately, this new reality of living in Ontario is now threatening our arenas and curling rinks as they become increasingly expensive to run. In Bala, the arena has been the staple of the community and has seen generations of figure skaters and hockey and ringette players learn on its ice. The hydro bill for the facility has continued to rise and now comes in at about \$50,000 per year. Combined with other maintenance costs, the municipality is seriously considering closing the arena.

Speaker, will the minister explain how he expects communities to keep their arenas open in Ontario with Ontario's outrageous electricity costs?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Again, I'll reiterate many of the things I've been saying today and for the last eight months, since I've been minister. We are continuing to find ways to put rates in a position of being lower, not only for ratepayers and families but, of course, for municipalities and for arenas. Yesterday, I know that the MPP from Timiskaming—Cochrane talked about his curling rink. Many of us have these facilities in our ridings. It's very important for us—especially as this government, as we continue to invest in infrastructure and building Ontario up—that we continue to find ways to lower rates for those institutions, Mr. Speaker. I used my example yesterday of the curling club in Greater Sudbury that was able to save thousands of dollars by actually utilizing the programs that we put in place to actually help them reduce their rates and bring their rates down. That's something—in which they're able to lower their rates.

Mr. Norm Miller: Again to the Minister of Energy: Speaker, it's truly hard to believe that we're even having a conversation about how to save recreational facilities in our small communities. Like the Bala arena, the Huntsville Curling Club is a community staple. The club recently hosted their annual Family Day open house to allow young curlers to get introduced to a new sport. It's sad to say, however, that even if they really enjoyed it, the increasing costs to play has brought fears that this will be a barrier to new members. One third of the current membership fee already goes to keeping the lights on. The fact is, curling clubs don't have many tools to offset rapidly increasing hydro costs. As costs to play rise, organizers fear that membership numbers will continue to decline over time. Speaker, would the minister please explain how hydro prices were allowed to get this out of control under his government's watch?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know in most parts of the province the great work that our minister of tourism and sport is doing to encourage people to play sports, and curling is one of those sports, Mr. Speaker. We're seeing more and more people actually engaging in this sport. That's a great thing. When it comes to making sure that we have this conversation, the one conversation that they overlook is that they actually left our system in a shambles. We actually had to build the system back up; \$50 billion we had to spend, to invest in transmission and to invest in generation. Now what do they want to do, Mr. Speaker? They want to rip up all of our renewable contracts and stop renewable energy in this province. That is not something that we, on this side of the House, agree with. That brought in billions in investment and created tens of thousands of jobs. We'll continue to invest in the province and in our recreation facilities.