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Sent: 2017-04-03 11:45:40 AM
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Subject: Hansard: Vernile to Leal (Thibeault) --Small Business and Hydro Fees

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INSTANT HANSARD

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister responsible for small business. By contrast to what the opposition has been telling the public, the facts show that small businesses in Ontario are continuing to thrive under the government's watch. Ontario has created 700,000 new jobs since the recession and the unemployment rate has dropped to 6.4%, the lowest in eight years. In the first three quarters of 2016, Ontario LED all G-7 nations in economic growth but sadly, we've heard the opposition talking down Ontario's economy rather than promoting all the advantages our province has to offer. From our highly educated workforce, clean air, clean water, renewed roads, bridges and transit, and our nation-leading health care system. On this side of the House, Speaker, we understand -- The important contribution small businesses make in the province. Speaker, could the Minister please update this House on the state of the small businesses in Ontario?

>> Minister Leal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Kitchener Centre for the question this morning. Interesting enough, Mr. Speaker, our daughter Shanay was in Kitchener over the weekend checking out Laurier University as a possible destination for a school this fall. She said, dad, I want to pass on you. Make sure you tell the member from Kitchener Centre that things are booming in Kitchener these days. Things are booming. And let me say, with over 500,000 small and medium-sized enterprises in Ontario, S.C.M.s mainly make up 99.7% of all businesses in Ontario. Kitchener year. Between 2012 and 2014 69% of S.T.M.S in Ontario reported increased average yearly growth of sales. Through eastern Ontario development fund and northwestern development fund. We have funded over 200 projects, 35,000 jobs, more than \$1.7 billion in investment.

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to thank the Minister for his response. Should his daughter choose to attend Wilfrid Laurier University, we would welcome her with open arms. Speaker, we know that development funds are having a major impact across the province in helping owners grow their businesses and we've certainly seen this in Kitchener Centre. But, Speaker, business owners must deal with a number of input costs and pressures when trying to manage their bottom line. Recently the cost of electricity has been of particular concern. There's no doubt that the investments that we've made in cleaning up and improving our electricity grid puts serious pressure on small businesses as it did for households. The government has taken action to help Ontarians across the province with the cost of electricity through the fair hydro plan. We know this is going to help not only households and small businesses as well. Speaker, could the Minister please clarify how the fair hydro plan is going to impact small businesses in the province?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for that question. Of course our plan to lower bills across the province by 25% will help every single household, Mr. Speaker, but it will also help a half a million small businesses, Mr. Speaker, and farms. The **Premier** has recently had the opportunity to visit many of these businesses, Mr. Speaker. Businesses like the bookshelf in Guelph which own both a bookstore and restaurant in the same building, Mr. Speaker. This bookstore and restaurant will be saving about -- more than, Mr. Speaker, more than \$1,000 a month under our plan. Door finds cheese and chocolate located near Barrie, Mr. Speaker. They will save as much as \$350 a month during the summer. So, Speaker, this is a business -- the leader of the opposition's own riding.

Ontarians are beginning to wonder, Mr. Speaker, will the opposition be supporting our plan to lower rates for homes and businesses? Or will they simply continue to throw mud and offer no credible plan on their own, Mr. Speaker ?

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