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Subject: Today in the legislature

FYI...

Minister of energy appears to promise end to Fair Hydro Plan subsidies, staff walk it back

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Ontario's minister of energy has quipped a couple of times in debates at Queen's Park that he must be forgiven for not paying attention to the previous Liberal government's energy policies.

It turns out, he may not have been joking.

In Question Period Thursday morning, **Greg Rickford** appeared to promise his government would stop subsidizing electricity bills using a complex borrowing scheme the past Liberal government introduced last year dubbed the Fair Hydro Plan.

"We're committed to cutting hydro rates, not subsidizing them for future generations to take on that burden, Mr. Speaker. This is a promise made and a promise kept for today," Rickford said in Question Period Thursday, in response to a query from NDP MPP **Catherine Fife**.

"What we're going to do is fulfill our promise, our promise to reduce hydro rates by 12 per cent — to cut them, not subsidize them as this member and her party had supported time and time again when the Liberals were ruining our hydro with the unfair hydro act," he said.

However, the NDP didn't support the Fair Hydro Plan. The borrowing scheme was criticized by both opposition parties for kicking the borrowing costs down the road; the way it is structured means Ontarians' electricity bills will be higher in the coming years, as ratepayers of the future will be on the hook to pay back the borrowed cash — plus an estimated \$20 billion-plus in interest.

However, the Progressive Conservatives said during the campaign they wouldn't cancel it right away. In fact, they criticized the NDP for promising to cancel the plan, as doing so would cause hydro rates to spike.

But now that the Tories are in government, it's not clear what they plan to do.

Toronto Star's **Robert Benzie** tweeted that he was told the minister had misspoken; Rickford had been referring to green energy subsidies, not bill subsidies, and has no plan to cancel the borrowing.

It's a curious explanation, especially since Rickford had said twice before — in Question Periods on July 16 and 17 — that his government will not be subsidizing hydro bills. Green energy subsidies go to power producers, not ratepayers.

However, premier's office spokesperson **Simon Jefferies** would not confirm to *QP Briefing* if Rickford misspoke or not, or what the government intends to do with the borrowing scheme.

"Our government is committed to moving forward with the Ontario PC hydro plan — which includes reducing hydro bills by an additional 12 per cent and ending expensive green energy contracts supported by the Liberals and NDP," he said in an emailed statement.

Rickford himself said twice in Question Period that he doesn't know what the Liberals' energy police were, when asked for information about what his government intends to do about the Fair Hydro Plan borrowing.

"Can I be forgiven for not paying attention to Liberal policies on energy?" he said on July 18, when asked about details of the borrowing scheme by the NDP.

He said the same on Tuesday.

"Once again, through you, Mr. Speaker, I'll just turn to my colleagues and ask for forgiveness that I don't pay attention to Liberal energy policy — Liberal energy policy that the NDP supported time and time again, that saw their hydro rates either go up or be subsidized for the next generation, which would be my little girls **Abigail Mae** and **Poppy Kate**. We don't stand for that on this side of the house."

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