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Subject: Hansard: Horwath to Thibeault (Sandals) -- Hydro Advertising

INSTANT HANSARD

>> Andrea Horwath: My next question's also to the acting **Premier**, Mr. Speaker. This ad campaign has been funded -- go figure -- right through the 2018 election year. And because of the sneaky changes this government made to the advertising act, the Liberals get to run their partisan political ads about this costly scheme right during the election next spring without any oversight with the auditor general, Mr. Speaker. Does the acting **Premier** honestly think that using public money on partisan ads for their \$40 billion borrowing scheme is going to win them and their government enough good favour with Ontarians to keep them in office come next June?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So let's talk about the fair hydro plan. Right? 25% reduction for all families right across the province. 500,000 small businesses and farms, Mr. Speaker. And then we talk about the programs. The oesp program offers significant support -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, the oesp offers significant support to low-income House holds across the province. Nearly 300,000 Ontarians have already applied since last year, Mr. Speaker, and we've been doing everything we can on this side of the House to get enrollment even higher. We've put the inserts directly in people's bills, created advertisements, Mr. Speaker, as we're talking about and even more. We're working with the ministry of community and social service to talk about Ontario works automatically qualifying, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, let's talk about using public dollars for partisan purposes. Speaker, let's talk about that. The auditor general himself said that the Liberal government's changes to the advertising laws give them a partisan advantage. And we know from the F.O.I. Documents on my desk right now that the reason for this ad campaign in the first place was, quote, negative media coverage for the **Premier** and her Liberal party. Has this **Premier** not yet learned her lesson about these sneaky kind of tactics as in Ontarians are fed up with this kind of behaviour by this Liberal government.

>> Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, twox only be the party opposite that sees giving families an additional \$1,000 off their electricity bill as sneaky, Mr. Speaker. It would only be the party opposite that's making sure that every family sees a reduction in their bills as sneaky, Mr. Speaker. You know what's sneaky? They actually voted against that, Mr. Speaker, and then don't publicly say that. Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we make sure that we've brought forward a plan that is going to actually help every single House hold. Going to continue to find ways to help businesses, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to continue to work to ensure that the message gets out so more and more people that qualify for the oesp program can get on it, Mr. Speaker, unlike the opposition party.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker this advertising campaign is expensive. It was clearly thought up to help the **Premier** and her Liberal party bounce back in the polls. It is touting the so-called benefits of a program that the F.A.O. Says will be bad for Ontario families. And the **Premier** is running these ads without any oversight from the auditor general because her party decided to change the rules to favour the sitting government. This all amounts to the exact same thing, Speaker. Why is this Liberal government once again prioritizing their political future over the needs of Ontario families?

>> Minister Sandals: Yes, thank you very much. Speaker, I would like to remind everybody that Ontario is the only jurisdiction in Canada that actually has a government advertising act, which gives the auditor general oversight. The party opposite voted against the original legislation in 2004, and they voted against the update in 2015. And let me tell you what is in that updated legislation, which they opposed. What is in that updated legislation is an explicit legislation government advertising when there is a scheduled general election, which we will have in June of 2018. There is an explicit prohibition. Government advertising 60 days before the writ drops. We will not be writing fair hide -- running fair hydro ads during that --

N.B.: Transcripts are captured by a closed captioning system and may contain errors.