

John Bozzo

From: John Bozzo
Sent: September 13, 2016 6:25 PM
To: Rosemarie Leclair; MaryAnne Aldred
Cc: Neil Brodie
Subject: Fwd: Global Story FOI's Correspondence between OEB, Minister. Just published online.

See global story below referencing the FOI. John

Sent from my iPhone

Global News just published an investigative piece late this afternoon on hydro which references an FOI request looking into correspondence between the Minister of Energy and the OEB. It's written by Andrew Russell but features some reporting from Jacques Bourbeau, Shirlee Engel and Sean O'Shea (see link to story online for video clips associated with story as well). I've included it in full below, but again, the link to the online story includes video content that may be worth checking out.

I've highlighted sentences that reference the OEB throughout.

Thanks,

Jeff

Waking up to a crisis: Ont. Liberals late to game when it came to soaring hydro bills



By Andrew Russell

National Online Reporter Global News

<http://globalnews.ca/news/2937977/waking-up-to-a-crisis-liberals-late-to-the-game-when-it-came-to-soaring-hydro-bills/>

The Ontario Liberal government has [conceded that soaring hydro bills are an “urgent issue”](#) for ratepayers, but [a freedom of information request filed by Global News showed no record of correspondence between the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Energy Board](#)

regarding rural hydro rates between Jan. 1 and July 2016.

An ongoing Global News investigation into the [soaring cost of Ontario hydro bills](#) found extreme pockets of so-called 'energy poverty' where rural residents are forced to spend hundreds of dollars a month just to keep the lights on.

Here's what the Liberals are doing: Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne called the issue an [urgent matter for Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault](#) following a Liberal loss in the Scarborough-Rouge River byelection Sept. 1.

On Monday, they announced plans to eliminate the [eight per cent provincial portion of the 13 per cent harmonized sales tax \(HST\)](#) on hydro bills for homes, small businesses, and farms, resulting in savings of \$130 a year for the average household. Rural ratepayers can apply to receive an additional \$540 annually off their electricity bills.

"Your government has listened and has heard your concerns," said Lt.-Gov. Elizabeth Dowdeswell in a speech read in the legislature. "It recognizes that the cost of electricity is now stretching family budgets."

But how long have the Liberals considered rising hydro rates to be an issue?

A Global News FOI request submitted on July 20 asked for "all correspondence between Minister and Ontario Energy Board on rural hydro rates/prices/charges from January 1 2016 to present."

But on August 26 the Ministry of Energy replied saying "the ministry has conducted a thorough search and no records were located in response to this request."

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Energy said Thibeault was appointed on June 13, taking over the file from Bob Chiarelli, with a mandate to address affordability in Ontario's clean, reliable electricity system.

"Given how quickly he and his team at the Ministry of Energy have moved to implement a plan to help people with the cost of everyday living, this is and remains an urgent issue," the spokesperson said in an email. "The Minister engages regularly in discussions with the OEB on a variety of work they have undertaken, including the implementation of the OESP, which provides eligible low-income families with up to \$75 to reduce monthly electricity costs."

Though the Ministry of Energy responded to Global News' request, they failed to answer a number of questions, including if Wynne had been in contact with the OEB regarding hydro rates, when it became an "urgent issue" and whether or not Minister Thibeault had been

briefed on the issue of rural hydro bills when he assumed his cabinet position.

Global News has previously found that 60,000 households were disconnected for non-payment last year. And Ontarians owe more than \$172.5 million in unpaid hydro bills, according to the latest data from the [Ontario Energy Board](#).

Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown said the Liberal plan to remove parts of the HST as “too little, too late.”

“When this government loses a third consecutive byelection in a riding that was a Liberal fortress held for over 20 years, now (rising electricity rates) is a crisis,” Brown told reporters Monday. “The problems of everyday Ontarians are never a problem until it’s Premier (Kathleen) Wynne’s problem.”

The HST rebate will cost taxpayers roughly \$1 billion a year and will come into effect Jan. 1 2017.

READ MORE: [Ontario won’t be able to reduce soaring hydro costs anytime soon, say experts](#)

Critics also pointed out the average household will be paying an extra \$13 a month in home heating and gasoline bills next year when the government’s new cap-and-trade system plan comes into effect.

Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath called on the Wynne government to remove the HST altogether.

“The only reason that we have the HST on our hydro bills in the first place is because the Liberals put it there. Now, six years later the premier says she’ll rebate the HST. But people are going to have to wait for four months,” Horwath told reporters. “That raises a lot of questions about how long this rebate is going to last and how exactly it’s going to work. People need real relief now.”

The Liberals have maintained hydro rates increased as the province shut down its coal-burning power plants and invested in infrastructure to make the electricity system more reliable than it was a decade ago.

“Over the last 10 years we’ve done great things with our electricity system. We’ve made it safe, we’ve made it reliable, and we’ve made it clean, and I think right now we need to take it to the next level and make it as affordable as can be for as many Ontarians as we can,” Thibeault told reporters Monday.

**With reporting from Jacques Bourbeau and Shirlee Engel*

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