

Hydro customer debt and disconnections soar under Kathleen Wynne

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New numbers posted by the Ontario Energy Board paint a painful picture of how hydro customers have fared under Kathleen Wynne's government.

During the past four years, under Wynne's watch, there's been a 19% increase in residential hydro disconnections, a 28% increase in arrears and a 40% increase in customer debt owed to provincial electricity distributors.

Over the same time period, those utilities saw just a 4% increase in new customers.

The numbers depressingly illustrate the degree to which Ontarians have increasingly struggled to pay their hydro bills.

They also nakedly expose the fact there's nothing "fair" about the way the Liberals are treating hydro customers.

That's a political lie and a fiction perpetuated by a desperate government that's resorted to marketing slogans in place of sound policy to address the mess they've made.

Here's what the numbers show:

- **In 2013, Ontario electricity distributors cumulatively had 4,416,713 customers, a number that grew to almost 4,598,314 customers in 2016 — a 4% increase over four years;**
- **The number of accounts disconnected for non-payment grew almost 19% from 49,130 to 58,286 over the same period;**
- **The number of accounts in arrears increased 28% from 307,822 to 392,963;**
- **And the amount of arrears debt owed by customers increased a staggering 40% from \$96,461,640 to \$134,885,199.**

Clearly, a growing number of Ontarians struggled under the Wynne government to pay their hydro bills over that time.

"The numbers are quite staggering," said PC energy critic Todd Smith. "Things are not getting better under the Liberals."

In fact, he said, former Ontario Auditor General Jim McCarter predicted with "Kreskin-like" accuracy, back in 2011, that this would happen.

At the time, McCarter raised red flags over the Liberal government's decision to spend billions of dollars on wind and solar power projects without proper oversight.

"While this helped these projects get off the ground quickly, their high cost will add significantly to ratepayers' electricity bills in the future," McCarter predicted at the time, a suggestion the Liberals scoffed at.

The consequence, over the past four years, has been escalating hydro bill problems for consumers rooted in a flawed, mismanaged and ideological Liberal government plan that wasted billions of dollars promoting and overpaying for unneeded green energy.

And although the Liberals have introduced plans to limit disconnections and reduce rates by 25%, **the reduction is temporary, will cost future customers \$4 billion and rates are poised to skyrocket after the 2018 election.** It does nothing to address growing consumer debt.

"Unless something is done to actually lower the cost to generate and produce electricity in three to four years you're going to see these numbers spike again," Smith said.

The real-world consequence is that families across the province are struggling with record debt and growing difficulty paying their bills, said Nipissing Conservative MP Vic Fedeli.

Fedeli said families are in his northern constituency office on an almost daily basis looking for help to deal with hydro bills.

"Here we are a couple of days before Christmas and we've got people in here," Fedeli said. "We have families who absolutely have to decide whether they can heat or eat." "That's real," he said. "This falls directly at the feet of Kathleen Wynne and the Liberal government of Ontario."

A request for comment from Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault's office was referred to **Hydro One** which was so far not answered.

Meanwhile, the Liberals continue to pump out "Fair Hydro Plan" propaganda suggesting they actually have a plan.

"Ontario is lowering electricity bills for all residential customers as part of a significant system restructuring that will address long-standing policy challenges and ensure greater fairness," says a current post on the Thibeault's Energy Ministry's website under the title "Ontario is cutting electricity bills."

For many Ontario families this holiday season, it sure as hell doesn't seem that way.

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