

# School board hydro costs up 40 per cent

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Ross Virgo, spokesperson for the York Region District School Board, said the board is expecting a 40-per-cent increase in its hydro costs over last year, which translates into about \$2.8 million more for the school year.

"We have a very vigorous conservation program, which we have stepped up over the past year and we'll be trying to reduce even more in the future," he said.

The board told the Education Equality Task Force in September hydro and other utility rates should be reviewed and adjusted annually. In the short term, the board is hoping the Education Ministry will "provide appropriate relief funding."

Several Conservative MPPs, mindful of the impact hydro rate hikes could have on the next provincial election, have called on their own government to impose price caps to make the transition a little less shocking.

"You know what happens to governments who don't fix things like this — they don't come around again," Tory MPP Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound) told reporters Tuesday.

However, neither Mr. Klees nor Thornhill MPP Tina Molinari agree with fellow caucus members like Labour Minister Brad Clark, who are calling for a cap on electricity rates for several years.

"I respect my colleague's right to express himself, but in all fairness, he doesn't fully appreciate the implications of what he's proposing," the Oak Ridges MPP said.

"The truth of the matter is, what we need is some initiative to deal with the short-term issues... At the same time, we also have to send some very strong signals to people across this province that our government is committed to staying the course and ensuring that we have a competitive marketplace for electricity."

That's the only way to ensure Ontarians have a stable power supply in the long run, Mr. Klees said.

"People need to know we're not going to react to the short term," he said.

"That's why we have a \$33-billion debt in Ontario Hydro. We're in a transition period and there are some bumps in the process, but in the long term, this will be in the best interests of Ontarians."

Ms Molinari added she has been in contact with the heads of both Markham Hydro and Vaughan Hydro, looking for ways in which the utilities can help respond to homeowners' concerns.

*'The Conservative government hasn't screwed up anything as badly as they have screwed up the hydro deal.'*

Both she and Mr. Klees declined to say what steps the government is considering to offer ratepayers some relief, saying only that a decision from the energy minister was "very imminent".

"We're coming up with a plan that is going to be a good plan," Ms Molinari said. "It's a plan that will address the short-term problems but also one that's sustainable over the long term, as well."

A spokesperson for Markham MPP David Tsubouchi said he is waiting for Mr. Baird to unveil his plan for relief.

Meanwhile, Mr. Sorbara is "wasting no time in casting blame."

"The Conservative government has-

n't screwed up anything as badly as they have screwed up the hydro deal," the Vaughan-King-Aurora MPP said.

Ontario is simply not producing enough energy to keep up with demand, Mr. Sorbara said, adding the Conservatives have allowed the problem to continue for the past seven years.

"Until we address the supply problem, we will have to re-intervene into the market to control prices," he said.

For their part, the Conservatives are in part



**FRANK KLEES**  
Hydro problems 'short-term' bumps, MPP says.

blaming an unusually hot summer and the resulting rise in power consumption for the chaos in hydro rates, an explanation Mr. Sorbara doesn't buy.

"I would say, with respect, that Mr. Klees is totally out to lunch on this," he said.

"For him to say, 'Oh, a whole bunch of things just came together... If we had all these problems with generating, they never should have let the market become deregulated at a time when we didn't have supply to meet the demand. That was a horrible mistake."



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