Afternoon Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 16, 2017

From: "Law, Sally (CAB)" <sally.law@ontario.ca>

To: "@OPO-Media Relations and Issues Management" <opo-mediarelationsandissuesmgmt@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "Bevan, Andrew (OPO)" <andrew.bevan@ontario.ca>, "McEachern, Gillian (OPO)" <gillian.mceachern@ontario.ca>, "Donelson, Philip (OPO)" <philip.donelson@ontario.ca>, "Bossin, Bryan (OPO)" <bryan.bossin@ontario.ca>, "Tomney, Genevieve (OPO)" <genevieve.tomney@ontario.ca>, "@CAB-Trans CO" <cab-transco@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "Baker, Carys (ENERGY)" <carys.baker@ontario.ca>, "Berry, James (ENERGY)" <james.berry5@ontario.ca>, "Bodrug, Andrew (ENERGY)" <andrew.bodrug@ontario.ca>, "Campbell, David (ENERGY)" <david.campbell2@ontario.ca>, "Coker, Meaghan (ENERGY)" <meaghan.coker@ontario.ca>, "Den Heijer, Kevin (ENERGY)" <kevin.denheijer@ontario.ca>, "DeWolfe, Julie (ENERGY)" <julie.dewolfe@ontario.ca>, "Esdaile, Trevor (ENERGY)" <trevor.esdaile@ontario.ca>, "Festeryga, Katherine (ENERGY)" <katherine.festeryga@ontario.ca>, "Foster, David (ENERGY)" <david.foster@ontario.ca>, "Iqbal, Muhammad (ENERGY)" <muhammad.iqbal2@ontario.ca>, "McGrath, Jessica (ENERGY)" <jessica.mcgrath@ontario.ca>, "Moseley-Williams, Kate (ENERGY)" <kate.moseley-williams@ontario.ca>, "Nekolaichuk, Colin (ENERGY)" <colin.nekolaichuk@ontario.ca>, "Olsheski, Mark (ENERGY)" <mark.olsheski@ontario.ca>, "Ramasra, Raynier (ENERGY)" <raynier.ramasra@ontario.ca>, "Ruttan, Craig (ENERGY)" <craig.ruttan@ontario.ca>, "Singh, Alysha (ENERGY)" <alysha.singh@ontario.ca>, "Teliszewsky, Andrew (ENERGY)" <andrew.teliszewsky@ontario.ca>, "Thompson, Rachel (ENERGY)" <rachel.thompson@ontario.ca>, "Tresise, Landon (ENERGY)" <landon.tresise@ontario.ca>, "Tretiakov, Ilia (ENERGY)" <ilia.tretiakov@ontario.ca>, "Walman, Evan (ENERGY)" <evan.walman@ontario.ca>

Cc: "Sumi, Craig (CAB)" <craig.sumi@ontario.ca>, "Di Giovanni, Robert (CAB)" <robert.digiovanni@ontario.ca>, "Law, Sally (CAB)" <sally.law@ontario.ca>, "Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)" <jeffrey.stinson@ontario.ca>, "Nutter, George (ENERGY)" <george.nutter@ontario.ca>, "Halford, Gavin (ENERGY)" <gavin.halford@ontario.ca>, Electronic Media <cab.emedia@ontario.ca>

Date: Thu, 16 Mar 2017 16:00:01 -0400

Attachments: 20170316 - Media Scan - Hydro Rate Reduction (Afternoon Scan).doc (132.61 kB)

Afternoon Media Scan: March 16, 2017

MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

March 16, 2017

Click links below to view article:

Online Coverage

National Post : *ONTARIO'S SOARING HYDRO BILLS HAVE SOME RESIDENTS BEGGING CHURCHES TO HELP THEM PAY*

By: Ellwood Shreve, Postmedia Network
March 16, 2017 10:31 AM ET

CHATHAM — Ontario's soaring electricity prices are emptying the charitable coffers of churches in the southwestern part of the province that are being tapped by parishioners unable to pay their power bills.

The problem is so bad, one cleric in Wallaceburg says his church's benevolent fund has gone into overdraft three times in the past two years — something he hadn't seen in 24 years on the job — as people ask for help.

"I know on paper, from my own accounting, I've overdrafted it three times" within the last two years, said Pastor Brian Horrobin of First Baptist Church in the town north of Chatham.

"There's definitely been a marked increase in people coming for help," said Horrobin, noting the same has happened at other churches in the area.

Horrobin said his church has either helped people pay outstanding hydro bills or given them pre-paid grocery cards because they can't afford groceries after paying for electricity.

Ontario electricity rates have essentially doubled over the past decade, with the province's auditor-general finding ratepayers paid $37 billion more than market prices for power over much of that period and will fork out more than three-and-a-half times as much in extra costs by 2032 because the Liberal government ignored its own energy experts and made political decisions that hiked the cost for consumers.

The fallout has set the stage for the next election in 2018, with the New Democrats proposing to cut power prices by 30 per cent and the Liberals, their popularity tumbling in the polls, promising to cut bills by 17 per cent this summer. That's on top of an eight-per-cent cut that took effect Jan. 1, when they removed the provincial sales tax on hydro.

Horrobin raised his concerns during an anti-poverty roundtable held by Progressive Conservative MPP Monte McNaughton, whose Lambton-Kent-Middlesex riding is almost the size of Prince

Edward Island and takes in vast rural reaches where electricity delivery rates are higher than in many urban areas.

“A story that hit home for me is that a number of churches in North Kent are now raiding benevolent funds to pay people’s hydro bills . . . because they can’t afford to pay those bills (since) the costs have gone up so much,” McNaughton said.

Ernie Hardeman, the MPP for Oxford, said social agencies and churches in his riding are also reporting more people coming to them seeking relief from energy bills.

“Just coming in and getting help with food just doesn’t seem to do it anymore, because their hydro bill is a bigger problem than not being able to get their groceries,” he said.

McNaughton said he plans to share the results of his anti-poverty meetings with Liberal MPP Ted McMeekin, who has struck a rural task force on poverty.

When politicians talk about poverty, McNaughton said, too often they refer to Toronto and urban areas. “It’s time Queen’s Park starts thinking outside of Toronto and outside of cities to realize that people are falling behind in small-town Ontario,” he said.

McMeekin said when it comes to the impact of hydro prices on Ontarians, “there’s no news there, that’s been evident for some time.”

Acknowledging they’ve struggled with the issue, the Hamilton-area MPP said the Liberals’ recent moves to lower costs, including reducing delivery charges that sent bills soaring, will help. By this summer, he said, no one will be paying more than the average monthly delivery charge in Toronto, which is $38.

Late last year, Wynne called Ontario’s high electricity prices her “mistake” and vowed to fix them.

But Hardeman, a former agriculture minister, is critical of Wynne’s promise, calling it a “Band-Aid” fix that doesn’t address structural problems.

“The premier says she’s solving the problem, and yet she’s done nothing about changing the system,” he said.

The Liberals have stood by their handling of the energy file, noting they closed Ontario’s dirty coal-fired power plants in favour of green energy.

But critics point out the government’s plunge into green energy since 2009, which greatly expanded wind- and solar-generated power, included sweetheart long-term contracts that guaranteed energy producers far more than what consumers pay for power, inflating the cost.

McMeekin said he’s been saying all along the delivery charges weren’t fair, and the government listened.

The Liberals inherited problems with the electricity system from the former PC government, he said, citing the frequent number of smog days Ontario had then — a problem aggravated by coal-fired power — and the 2003 blackout, when power plants across Ontario scrambled to get the province’s grid operational after 50 million North Americans were plunged into darkness.

He noted a $50-billion investment was made to upgrade the power system, and “somebody’s got to pay for that.”

The government’s plan to lower hydro costs takes the pressure off that bill, essentially spreading the pain over a longer period, like remortgaging a house, at an added cost of $25 billion in interest.

The plan also contains a delivery charge reduction for some rural customers, removing the charge entirely for on-reserve First Nations customers, and expanding a low-income support program.

Deputy Premier Deb Matthews of London said the government heard Ontarians “loud and clear” on hydro.

“Electricity prices are a big deal for the people of this province,” she said, adding “that is why we came out strongly with a significant reduction.”

– With files from Dale Carruthers and Norman Debono, Postmedia News, and The Canadian Press

- -

***Financial Post**: ONTARIO MANUFACTURERS EYE GREENER PASTURES STATESIDE AS HYDRO RATES GO THROUGH THE ROOF*

By: Peter Kuitenbrouwer
March 16, 2017 11:42 AM ET

http://business.financialpost.com/news/energy/ontario-manufacturers-eye-greener-pastures-stateside-as-hydro-rates-go-through-the-roof

Jocelyn Bamford, a white hard hat perched over red hair that curls down around her shoulders, has her hands on her hips. Behind safety glasses, her eyes flash. On the shop floor in the bustling Automatic Coating Inc. plant owned by her family, she has to shout to be heard above the squirt of compressed air nozzles, honks from forklifts, the clang of steel as it’s dipped in baths, and the hum of exhaust fans.

Bamford might be shouting regardless of the noise since the hydro bill for her Toronto-based company has her mad as hell. Once boasting one of the continent’s lowest electricity rates, Ontario today has some of the highest and that has many industrial companies planning to move at least some operations to the United States.

“The government treats us like bourgeois sweatshop operators who have to be stopped,” said Bamford, who has organized dozens of medium-sized companies into the Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers of Ontario. “All the businesses are terrified of the government. My husband said, ‘Well, do you just want to pick up and go?’ And I said, ‘Well, I guess I gotta just stay and fight.’ I feel like I’m the Norma Rae of manufacturing.”

Automatic Coating’s electricity bill has more than doubled in the past decade. Its bill for last November was $49,209.68. The first line is for electricity: $6,577.93. The second line is much harder to explain: it is the euphemistic Global Adjustment charge: 217 million kWh at 11.6 cents each for a total of $25,223.73.

The Global Adjustment contains many different costs, including Ontario’s payments to solar and wind energy makers at far more than the market rate, the cost to sell excess power to U.S. states at a loss, and even the cost of replacing light bulbs with LED bulbs.

For manufacturers, the Global Adjustment fee symbolizes all the excesses of Ontario energy policy, including headline-grabbing salaries at state-owned utilities and the wages for the armies of bureaucrats who manage what plant owners describe as the province’s Byzantine array of energy cost-abatement programs.

“They have an open invitation to take whatever they want,” said Jerrod Rowntree, manager of a unionized, Korean-owned plant in Simcoe, Ont., that employs 110 people to make magnet wire for Tesla Inc., the Chevy Volt and transformers. “What’s their rhyme

or reason to put their hand in our pocket whenever they want?"

Case in point, Ontario on Jan. 1 brought in cap and trade, a measure the province said "is designed to help fight climate change, and reward businesses that reduce their greenhouse gas emissions." The program further hikes energy costs for businesses that burn natural gas or fuel their cars and trucks with gas or diesel.

[http://wpmedia.business.financialpost.com/2017/02/fp0316_hydro_bill_c_mf.png]

The costs and rules mean a move out of Ontario can sound mighty tempting and U.S. states have come knocking.

Automatic Coating has an offer to move to Mississippi. Plasticap Inc. of Richmond Hill, Ont., more than 50 years old and a maker of plastic lids using injection moulding, plans to expand in Ohio or Virginia rather than Ontario. Surati Sweet Mart Ltd., a busy Indian baked goods manufacturer in Toronto, has visited New Jersey, Georgia and Texas.

There are many others, but Brad Duguid, Ontario's minister of economic development and growth, doesn't fear a manufacturer exodus.

"For every business that's leaving, there are probably three or four that are coming," said Duguid, sitting in his spacious office on Bay Street, decorated with big paintings and photographs of his hero, former U.S. President John F. Kennedy. "We're leading the G7 in growth right now in Ontario."

Duguid's office later sends data that boast of the jobs Ontario has recently created in information and computer technology, fintech, life sciences and cleantech. The note does not mention manufacturing, though Ontario historically is Canada's manufacturing heartland.

Harold Bamford, Jocelyn's father-in-law, started Automatic Coating in Toronto in the 1950s, where he powder-coated the armatures of washing machines. His son Brad eventually took over, expanded the company, patented several coating techniques and married Jocelyn.

Today, the family employs 55 people on two shifts, from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., and 3 p.m. to midnight, and 20 people in the field. The company paints everything from fences to pipelines to ship parts.

One of the company's biggest clients is the U.S. Navy. One current job is painting 48 louvres — car-sized, 700-kilogram intake vents for gas turbine engines — that were pried off the USS Gridley, currently in dry dock in San Diego, and hauled by truck to Automatic Coating.

At the plant, production manager Donna White bends over a louvre. She has worked here since 1978, put her kids through school on her wages and now has grandchildren. She guides staff in white overalls, dust masks and blue Nitrile gloves to apply a powder coating to protect the louvres from salt and extend their life by 10 years.

"If anything did happen to Automatic Coating, I don't know what I would do," she said. "I have a lot of employees under me who have younger families. A lot of big companies are closing down."

Hydro rate hikes and cap and trade make the idea of relocating this business — at least for the navy contract — very attractive. Mississippi's hydro rates are about one-third those of Ontario.

"The U.S. Navy has been after us for years to move our plant down to the States,"

Bamford says. “It’s like you’re with the bad boyfriend, and you say, ‘There’s a guy down the street and he’s bringing me candy and flowers,’ and your boyfriend has been drinking all the time.”

Bamford wants to stay in Ontario. She sits on her local hospital foundation board, her three kids, aged 14, 12 and 10, all play hockey and husband Brad coaches two of the three. Even so, the U.S. looks pretty good.

“We could sell our house and buy a 4,000-square-foot house in Long Beach, Mississippi, with a gourmet kitchen for $350,000,” she said. “And 20 minutes down the road at Gulf Shores, there is an amateur hockey association.”

If Automatic Coating does move its louvre division to the U.S., it will retain the jobs in Toronto, but any future growth will be stateside, Bamford said.

Other businesses are making similar calculations. City of Toronto statistics show the city has lost 20 per cent of its manufacturing jobs in the past decade.

North of the city, three steel silos loom on an outside wall of Plasticap’s factory, which opened in 1963. The silos contain millions of plastic pellets known as raw resin.

Pipes in the factory ceiling blow pellets to injection moulding machines. The newest of these machines is a Japan Steel Works 1400H, a fast-moving collection of hydraulics, motors, pipes and conveyors.

“Whirr! Puff!” sings the machine, and it injects molten white plastic into 24 moulds. Every 14.3 seconds, 24 warm caps for Fleecy fabric softener bottles fall, each with a little “pop!” onto a conveyor belt.

“Our volumes have increased so we have to run 24/7,” said plant manager Daniel Palka, 29, whom Plasticap hired in 2010 straight out of mechanical engineering school at the University of Toronto. “We get calls in the middle of the night.”

Business may be booming, but Plasticap has a problem: it cannot afford Ontario hydro.

[http://wpmedia.business.financialpost.com/2017/02/fp0316_plasticap_hydro_c_mf.png]

Peter Gossmann and Tom Lato, Plasticap’s co-owners, in February drove to Virginia and Ohio, seeking a spot to expand. The pair left icy Ontario and arrived in southwest Virginia at night. Lato recalls, “I said to Peter, ‘I think the grass is green down here.’” In the morning they looked out their hotel windows and, sure enough, the grass was green.

“Absolutely, we are going,” said Gossmann, though he adds that Plasticap will retain existing Ontario operations. “In Virginia, they are really quite well-equipped for our industry. And 70 per cent of what we make goes to the United States already.”

Duguid, Ontario’s economic development minister, acknowledges that manufacturers struggle to pay their hydro bills. But he said Ontario offers plenty of other positives to attract and retain business.

“We have the lowest effective tax rate in North America, we provide the best talent anywhere in North America in terms of workers, we have a health-care system that’s second to none on the continent, and we have a quality of life that is superior to anywhere else on the continent as well,” he said.

Duguid also cautions business against moving to states such as Virginia, which burn coal for power. “Ultimately, the global economy is going low-carbon,” he said. “There will come a time when your business will pay a price if you use dirty energy.”

Ontario wants to help manufacturers, he adds. Recent policy changes mean Automatic Coating and Plasticap now qualify for Ontario's Industrial Conservation Initiative (ICL).

Duguid said ICI "is not an easy program to explain," which is why the province pays the Ontario Chamber of Commerce to do it. Even with that help, Tim Clutterbuck, who runs U.S.-owned ASW Steel Inc. in Welland, Ont., says ICI is "very complicated."

ASW now operates nights, 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., to avoid high-cost power, but under ICI, he said, his factory also has to completely shut down when Ontario hits peak hydro use.

"The best way to avoid high Global Adjustment charges is to avoid the five highest hours of electricity consumption," Clutterbuck said. "But they don't tell you that until six weeks after the fact. It cost me 50 hours of production to make sure I don't hit them."

Government officials have suggested that companies could, alternatively, buy natural-gas-powered generators to switch on during consumption peaks.

Rowntree, the wire-maker in Simcoe, calls that suggestion ridiculous. "This initiative is encouraging manufacturers to burn fossil fuels," he said. "From a moral standpoint, I won't burn fossil fuels."

Last October, Kathleen Wynne, Ontario's Liberal premier, told the Niagara Chamber of Commerce that Ontarians are "very bad actors in terms of our per-capital creation of emissions" in explaining her push for a cap-and-trade system.

The comment enraged Bamford. Her plant switched its curing ovens to electricity from natural gas to reduce emissions, "but now electricity is so outrageous that we are wondering whether it was the right thing to do," she said.

"When the premier said, 'You're all bad actors,' I threw the gloves down. I was ready to go. We have to now band together and stand up for our rights. It's time for us to get the attention we deserve."

--

North Bay Nipissing Wynne criticized over forced job cuts at North Centre

By: Andrew Mendler

http://www.northbaynipissing.com/news-story/7191829-wynne-criticized-over-forced-job-cuts-at-north-bay-regional-health-centre/

NORTH BAY — Nipissing MPP Vic Fedeli blasted Premier Kathleen Wynne on Tuesday over the continued job cuts at the North Bay Regional Health Centre.

On March 14, president and CEO Paul Heinrich revealed the hospital will be eliminating another 30 to 40 jobs, including several management positions. These losses are in addition to the 350 jobs cuts the Health Centre made over the last three years.

Fedeli believes the province's new hydro scheme is to blame, saying hospitals across Northern Ontario are being forced to cut jobs to pay for increasing hydro costs.

"The Wynne Liberals have created a hydro crisis in Ontario where our hydro bills are the fastest rising in North America. This is hurting hospitals across Ontario," said Fedeli. "But, the Wynne Liberals' expensive hydro Band-Aid does absolutely nothing to reduce the cost of electricity for hospitals. Electricity bills are going to continue to soar, and nurses and front-line staff will be let go."

This year, the Health Centre is projecting their energy bill to increase by 12 per cent, or more than $200,000. But according to Heinrich, the hospital doesn't qualify for the new hydro rebate — something that is true for many hospitals across the province.

The Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre in Barrie is also expecting a $200,000 increase in their energy bill, which forced them to eliminate 56 full-time positions in 2016.

The Sault Area Hospital's electricity bills have increased by $800,000, or 45 per cent, in the last four years. In 2015, they cut 35 jobs.

Hydro bills are expected to top $1.2 million for the Timmins and District Hospital, which is $375,000 more than what they were paying one year ago. In 2014, they eliminated 40 positions.

"Our hospitals are being forced to do more with less. For years they've been forced to deal with Wynne Liberal cuts, and now they're being forced to pay for Wynne Liberal mismanagement of the electricity sector," said Fedeli. "Hospitals are going to be faced with no other option but to cut staff as electricity rates continue to soar."

The continued cuts to jobs and services at the North Bay Regional Health Centre are sounding alarm bells across the province.

Over 350 jobs have been lost at the hospital over the last three years, including 158 positions being chopped in September 2015, which resulted in 30 beds closing.

NDP leader Andrea Horwath issued an open letter to the premier on Wednesday, calling for immediate action to stop the slashes being made to the services in North Bay.

"As premier, you can finally do the right thing and stop cutting health care in North Bay and across Ontario. I ask you to work with the North Bay Regional Health Centre to prevent the layoff of 30 to 40 additional health care workers," states Horwath.

"It's your job to protect those jobs — and protect the care that people need in North Bay. Communities across Northern Ontario deserve nothing less."

--

CTV News PROPOSED HYDRO BILL CUTS HOPED TO HELP WINDSOR SMALL BUSINESSES

By: CTV Windsor
Published Thursday, March 16, 2017 3:47PM EDT

http://windsor.ctvnews.ca/proposed-hydro-bill-cuts-hoped-to-help-windsor-small-businesses-1.3328136

The Liberals have started a tour to explain the province's recently announced plan to slash electricity rates.

Officials say Ontario is lowering electricity bills by 25 per cent on average for all residential customers as part of a significant system restructuring that is hoped to address long-standing policy challenges and ensure greater fairness.

Speaking at an event at EnWin Utilities today, Bob Delaney, parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy, explained that starting this summer, Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan would provide households with this 25 per cent break.

He says many small businesses in the City of Windsor would also benefit from the initiative.

People with low incomes would receive even greater reductions to their electricity bills. As part of this plan, rate increases over the next four years would be held to the rate of inflation for everyone.

These measures include the eight per cent rebate introduced in January and build on previously announced initiatives to deliver broad-based rate relief on all electricity bills.

“Electricity costs rose because Ontario made $50 billion in capital investments in the future of our reliable electricity system,” said Delaney in a news release. “The Province reduced household electricity costs by moving electricity-related social assistance programs off the monthly electricity bills, and by paying for the generation and transmission assets in our electricity system over their full useful lifetime.

He says these moves have allowed Ontario to lower electricity bills by an average of 25 per cent for residential customers, and ensure rates remain stable in the future.

--

Northern News: VANTHOF WANTS ANSWERS REGARDING HYDRO COSTS

Thursday, March 16, 2017 11:59:25 EDT AM

http://www.northernnews.ca/2017/03/16/vanthof-wants-answers-regarding-hydro-costs

KIRKLAND LAKE - Timiskaming-Cochrane MPP spoke in the legislature about the impact of high hydro rates on small businesses in Northern Ontario.

He gave the example of Leis Wood Products, located in the Cobalt area.

“Leis Wood Products takes shavings from our local planning mill, puts them in bags, and the bags are distributed throughout Ontario to horse farms and other people. It’s a family business. Bruce helped out his kids, Andrea and Jason. It’s a thriving little business, but it has the problems that other businesses in the province and in the riding share. I’d like to explain one of them.” He went on to say, ``Leis Wood Products takes shavings from our local planning mill, puts them in bags, and the bags are distributed throughout Ontario to horse farms and other people. It’s a family business. Bruce helped out his kids, Andrea and Jason. It’s a thriving little business, but it has the problems that other businesses in the province and in the riding share. I’d like to explain one of them. They need some answers.``

Meantime NDP Leader Andrea Horwath is calling on Premier Kathleen Wynne to table her promised hydro bill on Monday.

“Premier Wynne, has issued a news release and delivered talking points – now it’s time to deliver a plan,” said Horwath. “Ontario families, businesses and municipalities have a right to know what will happen to their bills and who will pay the price for $40 billion going to pay interest rather than investing in hospitals, schools, transit and roads.”

Horwath said the media appearances and talking points have raised more questions than answers. There’s confusion throughout the province on whether Wynne’s borrowing deal will help all Ontario businesses, whether there will be any relief on time-of-use premiums or if hospitals, schools and municipal facilities like community rinks will qualify for relief.

Plus, noted Horwath, there have been no details around repayment of interest costs that could amount to as much as $40 billion.

"If Wynne is planning to sign Ontarians on to a $40-billion borrowing deal, she owes us all one heck of an explanation. That's why I'm calling on her to table a bill Monday – so it can be properly debated by the legislature, by the public, and by experts."

Horwath is concerned that the Liberals plan on tabling their bill close to the end of the legislative session, undercutting scrutiny and debate. "Kathleen Wynne might think such a strategy will be good for her and the Liberal party but it is yet another affront to the people of Ontario".

Unlike the Wynne government, Horwath has already publicly released her plan to lower hydro rates by up to 30 per cent. The extensive NDP plan includes immediate bill-cutting measures like scrapping time-of-use premiums and unfair higher delivery charges; and it repairs the hydro system for the long-term by reversing the selloff of Hydro One.

Horwath's plan will bring an additional $7 billion in dividends to the province – money that can be used in schools and hospitals – while Wynne's borrowing deal is expected to cost Ontarians as much as $40 billion more in interest payments.

While the Wynne plan appears to benefit bankers most, the Conservatives haven't provided any sort of a plan at all to deal with sky-high hydro bills.

--

Northern News: NEOMA WANTS LOWER ELECTRICITY COSTS

Thursday, March 16, 2017 11:51:58 EDT AM

http://www.northernnews.ca/2017/03/16/neoma-wants-lower-electricity-costs

KIRKLAND LAKE - The Northeastern Ontario Municipal Association is imploring the province to reduce the price of electricity.

The association, which is headed by Kirkland Lake Mayor Tony Antoniazzi says the increased costs "has resulted hospitals, schools, municipalities, businesses, farms and industry being faced with unbedgeted and unanticipated increases in costs for this essential utility and forcing many residential users to actual ration the use of electricity."

They also say that in the District of Temiskaming it has also resulted in "valuable farmland being covered in solar panels and denied the vital agricultural crops that it would provide because of the excessive prices paid for this 'green energy' produced by these panels.

They go on to say the district has to pay the highest rate of delivery charge because of the low density levels in many areas of the district. The association is also asking MPP John Vanthof for support on this resolution.

--

Durham Region: DURHAM RESIDENTS HAVE HAD ENOUGH OF PAYING FOR KATHLEEN WYNNE'S MI ON THEIR HYDRO BILLS

By: Jennifer French, MPP Oshawa

http://www.durhamregion.com/opinion-story/7187652-durham-residents-have-had-enough-of-paying-for-kathleen-wynne-s-mistakes-on-their-hydro-bills/

Hydro rates have reached crisis levels in Ontario. I know this because every day I hear from families that are struggling to get by. After more than a decade of mismanagement by the Liberal government, Ontarians have had enough of paying for Kathleen Wynne's

mistakes on their hydro bills.

A few months ago I began collecting local hydro bills to share with the premier so that she could see the reality for families in our community. The response was overwhelming.

I heard from seniors in Oshawa that set an alarm to do their laundry in the middle of the night, and I heard from families that had to lower their food budget just to keep the lights on. I even heard from a man named Jeff who told me that his plan for the winter was to turn his thermostat down, and rely on a heavy housecoat and warm slippers.

This is the reality for families in our community, and Ontarians are at a breaking point.

It doesn’t have to be this way.

Last week the NDP released our plan to lower hydro bills by up to 30 per cent. It includes ending time-of-use pricing, scrapping unfair delivery charges and several other measures that will deliver immediate savings for everyone on their hydro bills.

Our plan fixes the system for the long-term by returning Hydro One to public hands, bringing back an asset that generates billions of dollars in revenue every year that can be used to pay for hospitals, schools and other critical services.

We would make changes that will lower bills and fix the system for generations to come.

Kathleen Wynne has a different plan. It’s a borrowing scheme that promises an additional $40 billion in interest payments to bankers. That’s $40 billion that Ontarians will pay for, one way or another.

The system is a broken, tangled mess and it’s being held together with electrical tape. Wynne’s plan doesn’t fix it. Rather than tackling the root problems, she wants to kick the can down the road. We are all going to pay for it.

We all know that we have to address the cost of hydro in our province. However, the contrast between the plans couldn’t be more clear. Our plan helps people. Premier Wynne’s plan helps bankers. Patrick Brown and the Conservatives have no plan at all.

The NDP plan will actually fix the system today, and for generations to come. It will lower rates immediately, and repair the mess the Conservatives and Liberals have made with their privatization and bad contracts. That is what Ontarians deserve. Electricity isn’t a luxury, and it shouldn’t be priced like one. To learn more about our plan and share your thoughts on hydro, visit ontariondp.ca/hydroplan or give my office a call at (905) 723-2411.

--

Blackburn News LIBERALS EXPLAINING HYDRO REDUCTIONS

By: Maureen Revait
March 16, 2017 2:25 PM

http://blackburnnews.com/windsor/windsor-news/2017/03/16/liberals-explaining-hydro-reductions/

Representatives from the Ontario Liberal government traveled to Windsor today to explain how they plan to reduce hydro bills by 25%.

Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Energy Bob Delaney says payments for investments made in energy infrastructure will now be made over a longer time period.

These investments total $50-billion in generation, transmission and distribution assets that Delaney says puts Ontario in a better position than many other jurisdictions in North America.

“Is it not more fair to take an asset, a generation or transmission asset, that’s going to be used 20, 30, 40 or longer years and pay for it over the years that it’s actually in service,” Delaney proposes.

In addition he says the government has shifted social assistance programs for hydro payments from hydro bills to the overall tax rate.

“Some of the programs that assist people with affording electricity really shouldn’t be on the electricity bills, they should be part of social services, so we should move them off of the electricity and on to social services costs,” says Delaney.

Residents should expect to start seeing reductions by the summer months.

Yesterday the leader of Ontario’s New Democrats Andrea Horwath asked Premier Kathleen Wynne to officially table this new plan in the legislator on Monday.

--

Farms.com OFA PRESIDENT TALKS HYDRO, LAND PRICES AND SCHOOL CLOSURES

Keith Currie comments on three of rural Ontario’s most pressing issues

By: Jennifer Jackson

http://www.farms.com/ag-industry-news/ofa-president-talks-hydro-land-prices-and-school-closures-334.aspx

Farmers across rural Ontario has been hit with some hurdles in business operations and ensuring community strength.

Last October, MPAC valuations of farmland significantly increased farm owner’s assessments.

Many rural communities face and are fighting school closures.

Farmers have also been struggling with soaring hydro rates. In early March, Premier Kathleen Wynne announced a forthcoming reduction in hydro bills by some 25 per cent – perhaps welcome news across farming and rural communities.

These factors can affect both farmers’ families and the way they manage their operations.

Farms.com recently caught up with Keith Currie, president of the OFA, to discuss these pressing rural issues and the OFA’s advocacy work.

Farms.com (Farms): How is the OFA working with municipalities amidst the rising land value assessments and tax rates?

Keith Currie (KC): Our members are having to deal with an increase in property tax assessments that have come as a result of farm values going up. In some cases, it’s anywhere from 70 to 100 per cent per year over the next four years. (This increase) is putting a fairly large burden on the taxes farmers are having to pay.

(We are) working with municipalities to understand how that is impacting the budget in a

positive way. (We are) working with them to try and lower their farm property tax rates from 25 per cent down to a level that they can handle and that's fair for those municipalities and the farmers.

We are also making sure members understand their tax assessment (so) that they are fair. If (the assessments) are not fair there (is a) process in place (where farmers) can work with the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation to get the correct value of their farms in place.

Farms: Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario, announced her program for hydro relief recently – what is the real impact of this for farmers?

KC: In general terms, (the relief) is positive – any time there is relief of some kind, it is positive. We certainly got the HST rebate/discount last fall, and coupled with the 17 per cent announcement for residential last week, that makes it 25 per cent. For rural Ontario businesses and farmers (however), the real benefit we will see isn't just the amount of hydro relief, but it is (also) going to be the relief coming from the (discounted) distribution charges. Depending on your service type and the amount (of electricity) you use, we were told by Ontario's minister of finance (that relief from distribution charges) could potentially be as high as 60 per cent. The distribution (charge that can be very) burdensome on the bill is (now) going to show some signs of relief.

We will have to wait (until the relief takes effect) sometime in June to really understand what the (value is), but we will take (the relief) for now … we have been asking for (it) for quite a while.

(This announcement) still doesn't address the long-term energy issues that are out there. That's why we are still working with government for our natural gas push. But, for the time being, hydro relief is welcome … let's keep working with (the government) to make sure our businesses stay competitive.

Farms: How is the OFA working with the municipalities, school boards and the government to address the school closures?

KC: (School closures are) impacting areas right across the province. We have been talking with the minister of education on how to go about changing the funding formula so they are having actual counts of bodies in the school, and making sure that those numbers are not skewed. (We are also trying to) make sure the ministry is talking with school boards because I think there's some miscommunication on how money is to be used, what money is for and where money goes.

We've been working with an alliance – basically a parent alliance across the province that's looking at school closures – supporting them and their push to make sure that there's fair assessment of our schools out there. Some of the closures just don't make sense.

We need those schools in rural Ontario because they are not just schools for us – they're day cares and areas of community centres for us. In some cases, it might be (the) local library (or a) meeting centre. It's very important for all of us in rural Ontario to maintain those schools. On top of that, we don't want our kids riding for hours and hours on a bus. (A long commute) takes away from their extracurricular (activities) after school which are an important social part of their lives.

We need to take a holistic look at this and see what we can do. We're certainly working with the groups involved to make that happen.

- -

Thunder Bay News Watch: RAFFERTY TO RUN PROVINCIALLY FOR NDP

Former NDP MP confirms he'll take another run at provincial politics in 2018.

By: Leith Dunick

https://www.tbnewswatch.com/local-news/rafferty-to-run-provincially-for-ndp-563099

SLATE RIVER, Ont. – Former NDP MP John Rafferty is taking another stab at provincial politics.

The 63-year-old Rafferty on Thursday confirmed he'll be seeking the party's nomination in Thunder Bay-Atikokan, seeking to unseat long-time Liberal Minister of Municipal Affairs Bill Mauro in next year's Ontario election.

Rafferty, who served seven years in the House of Commons before being beaten in the 2015 federal election by Liberal Don Rusnak, said rising hydro costs are one of the main reasons he's looking to re-enter the political ring.

"It's a battle that needs to be fought," said Rafferty, who two times previously ran unsuccessfully for the NDP at the provincial level, losing to Mauro in 2003 and 2007, when he came up just 36 votes short of his Liberal oppoenent.

"I have decided to seek the provincial nomination for the NDP. It's not a done deal yet, but we'll see what happens in the next couple of months."

Rafferty said living in Neebing, he's seen first-hand how hydro costs are forcing Ontario residents to struggle to pay bills and keep food on the table. His own most recent monthly bill was $300. That's unacceptable, he said.

"Is it really fair that someone that is quite elderly now, retired from Bell Telephone 25 years ago, had a full pension, worked hard all their lives, but it was a fixed pension and not indexed, and they can't afford to pay their hydro? There's something wrong with that, when you work all your life and you can't afford to pay the hydro and keep the lights on in your house."

It's time for Ontario to move in the right direction, he said, pointing to a decade-and-a-half-old idea calling for cheaper power from Manitoba to be imported into Northern Ontario when needed.

"It's never been looked at seriously and it needs to be looked at seriously," he said, spending the day with Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwarth during a whirlwind trip to Thunder Bay.

"We hardly get any electricity from the nuclear power plants in southern Ontario, yet we've been paying all of those costs. There are huge costs upcoming from those nuclear power plants. I don't Northwestern Ontario or Northern Ontario should be part of that. I don't think we should be paying."

Mary Kozorys, who worked in Rafferty's federal constituency office, ran for the NDP in Thunder Bay-Atikokan in 2011 and 2014, finishing second both times. The Liberals have held the riding throughout it's 18-year history.

--

NetNewsLedger: POLITICAL BATTLE LOOMS IN THUNDER BAY ATIKOKAN

By: NetNewsLedger in Featured

Posted 16 March 2017

http://www.netnewsledger.com/2017/03/16/political-battle-looms-thunder-bay-atikokan/

Bill Mauro and John Rafferty Set to Do Battle

THUNDER BAY – POLITICS – Two political foes are setting up to do battle again. John Rafferty, the former New Democrat MP for Thunder Bay Rainy River is preparing to run for the provincial New Democrats. Rafferty will likely be the NDP candidate in Thunder Bay Atikokan challenging Liberal Cabinet Minister Bill Mauro.

Rafferty made the announcement today in Slate River during a visit with provincial party leader Andrea Horwath.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath and former NDP MP John Rafferty met with Gerry Muller, owner of AJ's Trading Post outside of Thunder Bay to discuss how the NDP plan to reduce rates by up to 30 per cent will benefit small business owners like him.

"It's time for the people of Thunder Bay to pay less for – and own more of – our hydro," said Horwath. "Affordable, reliable public power will be the backbone of the electricity system under an NDP government." said Horwath.

The NDP's plan will lower hydro bills by reversing the Liberal and Conservative governments' costly selloff, as well as through a number of immediate steps and long-term fixes to the hydro system. AJ's Trading Post owner Gerry Muller said that NDP plan makes the most sense to him.

"My dream has always been to open another location, to use this place as a stepping stone, but that's really hard to do when you're spending too large a portion of your revenue paying the hydro bill," said Muller. "The NDP has a good solid plan and I liked what I heard today from Andrea."

Horwath noted that the NDP plan is in stark contrast to Liberal press releases and PR stunts about the government's band-aid fix to high hydro rates that hasn't even been tabled yet in the legislature.

"If Wynne is planning to sign Ontarians on to a $40-billion borrowing deal, she owes us all one heck of an explanation. That's why I'm calling on her to table a bill Monday – so it can be properly debated by the legislature, by the public, and by experts."

Horwath's plan will bring an additional $7 billion in dividends to the province – money that can be used in schools and hospitals – while Wynne's borrowing deal is expected to cost Ontarians as much as $40 billion more in interest payments.

While the Wynne plan appears to benefit bankers most, the Conservatives haven't provided any sort of a plan at all to deal with sky-high hydro bills.

Horwath – Rafferty Move Draws Fast Response from Bill Mauro
Thunder Bay-Atikokan MPP Bill Mauro is calling on NDP leader Andrea Horwath to come clean with residents and fully explain how her proposal to reduce energy costs would offer any meaningful and immediate relief for residents in North Western Ontario.

"The NDP's hydro scheme is short on details and long on hollow promises," said Mauro. "Many of their proposals rely on a vague and yet-to-be-determined "expert panel" that will be convened in the future, as well as pie-in-the-sky negotiations with the federal government. These offer little to Ontarians in the short-term, compared to the real and meaningful relief our government's Fair Hydro Plan will provide to everyone."

Mauro said the NDP's most expensive idea – buying back more than $4-billion in shares of Hydro One – will not take one cent off electricity bills.

"The OEB regulates energy rates and Horwath knows this, but the NDP, as usual, come to the game late with a plan that won't do anything to reduce rates today," said Mauro. "Buying back shares of Hydro One, over an eight year period, would use money that's already earmarked for education, health care, and infrastructure in Thunder Bay-Atikokan, and would create a significant fiscal gap without any impact on electricity rates."

Through Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan, the government is cutting electricity bills by 25 per cent on average for all families, with 8 per cent cut already and the rest to follow this summer.

It is the single largest rate reduction in the province's history, helping families, small businesses and farms in the Thunder Bay area, added Mauro.

"The reductions will be even greater for rural R1 and R2 customers, who will see an ever larger reduction – up to 40 per cent – on their bills," said Mauro. "This is action we are taking today to reduce the cost of electricity. My constituents have told me they need immediate relief, not a vague promise that offers nothing practical or substantial when it comes to reduced electricity costs."

The Liberal plan will also keep rates consistent, holding them to inflation over the next four years.

"We will introduce legislation this session, with time for debate and public hearings at committee, ensuring real relief for Ontarians and a way to ensure greater fairness in our electricity system this summer," said Mauro.

The last time Rafferty and Mauro ran against each other in a provincial race, it was one of the tightest races in the region's political history with Mauro eking out a slim win over Rafferty.

TV Transcripts (Noon)

MCTV *NDP Insists Their Hydro Plan Is Better Than Liberal Plan*
Source: MCTV
Mar 16, 2017 12:10 PM (10)

Anchor: Continuing with the news, it could be duelling electricity plans heading into the 2018 provincial election and the Wynne government is cutting hydro bills by 25 per cent this year but the NDP's Andrea Horwath says her party would cut your electricity bill by 30 per cent. CTV's Paul Bliss has more.

Reporter: The NDP are trying to score points by taking shots at the blockbuster Liberal plan to cut hydro bills 25 per cent this calendar year.

Andrea Horwath, Ontario NDP Leader: We will end mandatory time-of-use pricing. Wynne won't.

Reporter: The NDP say they can cut bills 30 per cent so we have duelling electricity discount proposals but the Premier has in some ways short-circuited the opposition hopes of surfing rising hydro rates into the election campaign. While many Ontarians are still fuming over their hydro bills and the cuts won't kick in until June, new government polling indicates the Premier's plan is a relatively popular one. Internal government

polling reveals 49 per cent strongly support the hydro reductions, 33 per cent somewhat support. That's a majority 82 per cent in favour of the plan. But the NDP say the devil may be in the details and the billions in interest payments will cost Ontarians in the long run. Horwath also took aim at the PCs.

Horwath: Wynne's phantom plan is an attempt to help herself and her party while making a lot of bankers happy. The Conservatives have no plan at all.

Reporter: According to the poll, nearly a quarter of Ontarians hadn't even heard of the news. Government sources say you can expect radio and TV ads in the coming months explaining the plan to cut hydro bills. Paul Bliss, CTV News.