

Afternoon Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 23, 2017

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Afternoon Media Scan: March 23, 2017

Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

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[Click links below to view article:](#)

Online Coverage

[Ottawa Citizen : Platt: In an era of fake news, the Ontario Liberals are making things worse](#)
[Peterborough Examiner : Peterborough Regional Health Centre hydro bill still rose despite measures that cut energy consumption by 25%](#)
[Wawa News : Health Sciences North hydro bill up nearly \\$1 million in last five years as hydro consumption went down](#)

TV Transcripts (Noon)

[CFTO : House Speaker Rules Hydro Ad Campaign Not In Contempt Of Parliament](#)
[CKCO : Ads Promoting Hydro Plan Not In Contempt Of Parliament](#)
[MCTV : NDP Leader Continues To Criticize High Hydro Costs At Hospitals](#)

Online Coverage

Ottawa Citizen **Platt: IN AN ERA OF FAKE NEWS, THE ONTARIO LIBERALS ARE MAKING THINGS WORSE**

By: Brian Platt

Last Updated: March 23, 2017 1:55 PM EDT

<http://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/columnists/platt-in-an-era-of-fake-news-the-ontario-liberals-are-making-things-worse>

When a government picks a slogan, you never hear the end of it.

News releases, social media feeds, podium placards, radio and TV advertising, speeches by ministers — the branding is everywhere, backed by the hefty resources of the state. With the federal Liberal government, it's been “real change” and “a strong middle class,” over and over again.

In Ontario, the slogan after the 2014 election was “building Ontario up,” and, more particularly, the government's “four-part plan to build Ontario up.” Everything the government did somehow fit into those four parts. It was on every single news release for years. When the legislature cafeteria cancelled its Friday \$5 fish-and-chips special (to my lasting chagrin), I have no doubt the premier's office could have justified it with the four-part plan if asked.

This is how political messaging works. It gets repeated endlessly so it percolates through to the public, even if the media never uses it.

Premier Kathleen Wynne's Liberals now have a new slogan, with its own website and social media accounts. It's called “The facts still matter in Ontario,” and it involves a daily effort to fact check something the Opposition (almost always Progressive Conservative leader Patrick Brown) has said.

Sometimes these “facts still matter” dispatches come from the Liberal party; sometimes they come from a cabinet minister's office. It's both a Liberal party slogan and an Ontario government slogan. Expect to hear it constantly.

It's a clear attempt to exploit the concerns over fake news, and the stream of lies coming from the White House. Media organizations are fighting off attacks on their credibility, Facebook is attempting to flag fake stories and civic institutions everywhere are grappling with the dwindling effectiveness of fact-based arguments. It's a very real problem.

So now the Ontario Liberals, and by extension the government, are declaring themselves the champions of facts. You can anticipate how this is turning out. They do indeed catch some incorrect claims, but they don't stop there. No, everything must fit the message. So we get dubious political spin dressed up as fact-checking.

Here's a "fact check" they sent out the other day. The PCs called cap-and-trade, which is expected to raise \$1.9 billion a year in new government revenue, a cash grab. "Fact: Wrong again," the Liberals wrote. "Every dollar generated through cap and trade will be deposited in a dedicated account and reinvested into green projects." (It goes on to tell us how great the projects are.)

Actual fact: Many of those projects were already in the works, but are now being funded from this new revenue stream. Ontario is not off-setting carbon pricing revenue with tax breaks, as British Columbia is. Ontario is grabbing the cash and spending it on stuff. Whatever you think of these projects, it is not factually wrong to call the funding mechanism a cash grab.

At a time when the U.S. president is shamelessly using his office to spread conspiracy theories and insult those trying to respond with reason, we really don't need the Ontario government further degrading the meaning of a fact and adding to the atmosphere of cynicism.

And the Liberals have already demonstrated how they really feel about having to scrupulously stick to facts. We used to have a law — passed by Liberal premier Dalton McGuinty in 2004 — that forced taxpayer-funded government advertising to only be used for public service information campaigns. The auditor general could halt government ads whose primary purpose was obviously self-promotion of the governing party.

Wynne's Liberals gutted that law in the spring of 2015. They didn't want ads filled with dry facts; they wanted ads that sold their message to voters. And now we have a blitz of taxpayer-funded advertising promoting Wynne's new plan to reduce hydro rates. For the Liberals, as with all political parties, a fact is only worth mentioning when it makes them look good.

Brian Platt is the deputy digital editor for the Ottawa Citizen. Previously, he was based at Queen's Park as a policy reporter.

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Peterborough Examiner PETERBOROUGH REGIONAL HEALTH CENTRE HYDRO BILL STILL ROSE 1
MEASURES THAT CUT ENERGY CONSUMPTION BY 25%

By: Jason Bain, The Peterborough Examiner
Thursday, March 23, 2017 12:49:16 EDT AM

<http://www.thepeterboroughexaminer.com/2017/03/23/peterborough-regional-health-centre-hydro-bill-still-rose-despite-measures-that-cut-energy-consumption-by-25>

Reducing energy consumption at Peterborough Regional Health Centre by 25 per cent from 2010 to 2016 - while the hydro bill rose eight per cent - allowed the hospital to continue to focus on why it's here, says president and CEO Dr. Peter McLaughlin.

"And that is to provide excellent patient care," he said Wednesday after the Ontario New Democratic Party released the statistics obtained through a Freedom of Information request to media outlets, stating that hospitals are doing more with less.

PRHC confirmed and released the electricity usage information from Jan. 1, 2010 to Dec. 31, 2016, but to put it in perspective, McLaughlin pointed out that the cost of energy represents less than one per cent of the hospital's entire budget.

While the NDP claims health care is underfunded and at a tipping point, the hospital wasn't about to weigh in on any political perspectives, the doctor said. "We know what our job is here."

As for the Mar. 2 announcement that the Ontario Liberal government will slash hydro rates an average of 25 per cent, McLaughlin said officials are looking forward to seeing savings.

PRHC is a large hospital that is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"With that comes the need for energy support," he said.

The hospital found the 25 per cent in energy savings through a variety of measures, McLaughlin said before pointing out a pair of examples.

First, it uses machines known as "chillers" to cool air and during the shorter, cooler seasons, it turns on its smaller, more energy efficient units, he said.

Second, the hospital also introduced software that automatically turns lights off and turns the temperature down in parts of the hospital when they are unoccupied.

Premier Kathleen Wynne announced rates would be cut by 17 per cent, starting this summer, on top of the eight per cent HST rebate which began on Jan. 1. The province will increase the amortization of the electricity system's mortgage to get the savings.

"Over time it will cost a bit more. That's true," she said when detailing the plan. "And it will take longer to pay off. That's also true. But it is fairer because it doesn't ask this generation of hydro customers alone to pay the freight for everyone before and after."

Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown called the plan a "scheme" that will cost Ontarians \$14 billion in new interest payments over 30 years.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath said it will cost taxpayers as much as \$40 billion in interest.

The NDP recently released a plan that would cut residential hydro bills by as much as 30 per cent and put Hydro One back into public hands, while returning an additional \$7 billion to the province to be invested in services such as hospitals, it stated.

The reductions come after costs had ballooned far more than they should have in the first place, activist Roy Brady of the Council of Canadians Peterborough Chapter said earlier this month. The government made errors in the past "and we're being asked to pay for them," he said.

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W a w a N e w s HEALTH SCIENCES NORTH HYDRO BILL UP NEARLY \$1 MILLION IN LAST FIVE YEARS
HYDRO CONSUMPTION WENT DOWN

<http://wawa-news.com/index.php/2017/03/23/health-sciences-north-hydro-bill-up-nearly-1-million-in-last-five-years-as-hydro-consumption-went-down/>

The hydro bill at Sudbury's Health Sciences North has soared by almost \$1 million over a five-year period at the same time as their hydro consumption has gone down, all while the Wynne government is underfunding health care across Ontario – putting even more pressure on patient care.

"Health care is at a tipping point in Ontario," said Horwath. "There have already been frontline workers laid off at many hospitals, and with skyrocketing hydro bills, hospitals are being squeezed tighter.

"It's clear that hydro costs are hurting families in more ways than one – it's hurting people every month when the bill comes, but it's also hurting the services we count on, like hospitals, schools and city services like community centres."

Health Sciences North's electricity costs increased by almost \$1 million in five years at the same time as they reduced their hydro consumption by 9 per cent. That information was revealed in documents obtained by the NDP through access to information laws.

"Hospital staff are doing the best they can, but they're being asked to do more with less by Premier Kathleen Wynne and her Liberal government," said Horwath. "Wait times are already too long. Staff are already run off their feet. How can the hospital be expected to continue

provide high quality patient care when Premier Wynne is squeezing them like this?" Horwath recently released an NDP plan to cut hydro bills by as much as 30 per cent, which includes putting Hydro One back into public hands – a move that will return an additional \$7 billion to the province, which can be invested in Ontario services like hospitals. The NDP plan is in stark contrast to the Wynne government's band-aid approach – a borrowing deal that will force people to pay as much as \$40 billion in interest to bankers. Horwath has also said an NDP government would stop the Wynne hospital cuts, and properly reinvest in health care. "By focusing on herself and her party, Premier Wynne has driven Ontario hospitals to their breaking point," said Horwath. "I know we can do better for the people of Hamilton and for every Ontarian. The NDP hydro plan is an important first step."

TV Transcripts (Noon)

CFTO HOUSE SPEAKER RULES HYDRO AD CAMPAIGN NOT IN CONTEMPT OF PARLIAMENT

Source: CFTO

Mar 23, 2017 12:20 PM (14)

Anchor: The Wynne government has dodged a potentially damaging ruling. The Speaker of the Legislature has shot down opposition claims the Liberals are in contempt of Parliament. The claim was made by the Progressive Conservatives. They are furious the Liberals are using taxpayers' money to buy ads on radio that promote their plan to cut hydro bills. The PCs argue the legislation to enable the hydro discounts hasn't even been tabled yet, and that's an affront to the democratic process. The Tories urged the Speaker to punish the Liberals with a contempt ruling. Well, today, he announced his decision.

Dave Levac, Speaker of the Legislature: It does not alter this limitation to my authority or sphere of jurisdiction. It is not open to me to interpret or presume what might be in that possible legislation. Consequently, I cannot find a prima facie case of contempt has been established.

Anchor: So it's case closed on the contempt accusations. The Energy Minister told CTV News that we can expect to see television ads soon promoting that hydro bill reduction.

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CKCO ADS PROMOTING HYDRO PLAN NOT IN CONTEMPT OF PARLIAMENT

Source: CKCO

Mar 23, 2017 12:12 PM (11)

Anchor: The Wynne government has dodged a potentially damaging ruling, the Speaker of the Legislature has shot down opposition claims the Liberals are in contempt of parliament. The claim was made by the Progressive Conservatives. They are furious the Liberals are using taxpayers' money to buy ads on radio that promote their plan to cut hydro bills. The PC's argue the legislation to enable the hydro discounts hasn't even been tabled yet, and that's an affront to the democratic process. The Tories urged the Speaker to punish the Liberals with a contempt ruling. Well, today, he announced his decision.

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MCTV NDP LEADER CONTINUES TO CRITICIZE HIGH HYDRO COSTS AT HOSPITALS

Source: MCTV

Mar 23, 2017 12:09 PM (9)

Anchor: The Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath continues to draw attention to skyrocketing hydro costs for hospitals around the province, including those here in the north. Horwath says Sudbury's hospital, Health Sciences North, has seen quite a spike, \$1 million in its hydro bills over the last five years. And as she said in Sault Ste. Marie earlier this month, she is concerned that hospitals will have to divert patient care funding and possibly cut jobs to pay their electrical bills.

Andrea Horwath, Ontario NDP Leader: Whether that's front line staff, whether that's forcing the hospital to make decisions around privatizing of services, all of the hospitals across Ontario are facing similar decisions because they're being squeezed by the provincial government.

Anchor: Andrea Horwath says she and the NDP if elected next year will cut hydro rates by 30 per cent and also stop the sale of Hydro One.