

Daily Media Note - March 14, 2017

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Good afternoon Premier,

We have three items to update you on today:

- Barrie Echo Announcement and Availability
- 401 Accident and Chemical Spill
- French and Chinese Media Update

Barrie Echo Announcement and Availability

Your echo announcement and media availability in Barrie this morning has received a lot of media attention today. As of this afternoon we have seen online coverage from the Toronto Star, CTV News, Simcoe.com, the Barrie Examiner and BarrieToday. CP24 also reported on your media availability and noted your event this morning is one of several hydro related events you have attended in the last few weeks to talk to Ontarians about Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan. Media have been reporting on your comments made to reporters, for instance, that the government's plan to reduce hydro rates isn't a campaign booster, but rather a solution to a "fairness issue".

Fergie filed a story this afternoon with the headline: "Premier Kathleen Wynne brushes aside cynicism over hydro rate cut". We have included Rob's story below for your reference:

Premier Kathleen Wynne says she hopes cynicism about the motivations behind her promised 25 per cent hydro rate cut will evaporate when they get lower bills this summer.

"People haven't seen the reduction yet," Wynne said Tuesday at a chocolate and cheese shop in Barrie where the most expensive bill the owners pay, aside from rent, is for electricity.

"This is not something that's going to happen one month and be gone the next."

Wynne brushed aside criticisms that the cut – which will cost an extra \$25 billion over 30 years as costs of modernizing the hydro system are spread over a longer period – is aimed at shoring up her sagging popularity with the next provincial election 15 months away.

"What they feel about me or my popularity is actually beside the point," she told reporters, insisting the measures are key to making life more affordable now for families and businesses.

“There will always be a political context. I’m a politician,” she acknowledged, adding “people won’t have to disproportionately share a burden that should be spread over a longer period of time.”

Opposition parties have charged Wynne is putting a long-term cost onto ratepayers in an attempt to save her political skin in the June 2018 vote.

The premier counters that it was a mistake to put all the costs of modernizing the hydro system, such as closing coal-fired generating stations and embarking on a renewable energy push with costly initial contracts, on ratepayers in the short-term.

“In order to do big things...we have to do it over a period of time. It’s got to be fair,” she said at the Barrie shop.

We have also included a story from the Barrie Examiner with the headline: “Hydro rates cut for businesses”.

Tucked in behind the coolers stuffed with 150 exotic cheeses is the \$800 hydro bill to keep those freezers and the chocolate tempering machine running.

When Premier Kathleen Wynne dropped in to the J’Adore Fine Cheese & Chocolate shop on Dunlop St. East Tuesday morning, the fresh scent of chocolate, as well as sheep and goat cheeses assailed her senses.

“This is the kind of business that builds community. The cheese and chocolate are amazing, j’adore,” Wynne said, standing in the SpeakCheesy or basement and tasting rooms of the shop.

Addressing cheese and chocolate shop owners, Bekki Martin and Jessi Fournier, Wynne turned her attention to the reason for her visit.

“You told me your hydro bill is your second highest bill after your rent, and then you said, every bill is a challenge for an entrepreneur when they come in,” Wynne said. “What we’ve heard over the last number of months and years is that there are challenges that are being faced by businesses like yours, by farms, by residents, that are seeing their hydro bills go up at a rate or a pace that’s too fast for you to keep up with and too high.”

After speaking with Martin and Fournier about the intricacies of monitoring air conditioning for the chocolate, as well as heat in a room with four cheese coolers, she said she could appreciate the specific electrical requirements of the chocolate and cheese shop.

“So what we hope is that the 25% reduction in your electricity bill will help, and it will allow you a bit more flexibility so that your business can grow,” Wynne said.

Wynne spoke about the \$50 billion investment the government has made to ensure Ontario has a clean and reliable electricity grid, and how those fees have left many small businesses and residents facing expensive bills.

“And what we determined was that we need to spread those costs over a longer period of time. Instead of a 20-year mortgage for example, we’re looking at 30-years and asking that the generation that comes next – that will use the assets we’ve invested in – to also take part in paying for those,” she said.

Additional reductions in energy charges will be made for Innisfil customers using Innpower, whose

distribution rates are “disproportionally high” she said, as well as expanding the electricity-bill support for low-income consumers.

Martin and Fournier moved into their new location at 123 Dunlop St. West last September after running their shop for more than a year in a store-front three doors down.

Fournier said they had installed a high-efficiency air-conditioner and use LED lights wherever possible.

But expanding the store to include the SpeakCheesy wine and cheese tasting rooms in the basement and adding a patio in the rear of the building (facing the lake) were expensive expansions.

“Hydro costs are scary,” said Martin and Fournier added, “As a small business owner, you feel every bill. When you have a slow month, you still have to keep those fridges running.”

A little closer to the Five-Points, Don Kellett of Donaleigh’s Irish Public House said he took advantage of a retrofit through PowerStream to offset his electricity bills.

“We were the first business to sign up for the energy refit program,” Kellet said. “PowerStream came in and changed all our lightbulbs to energy efficient ones, as well as swapped out all the motors on all our compressors in fridges and freezers with newer, more efficient motors.”

Kellet said he can’t give a dollar figure of how much money the bar saved, but said there has been a “noticeable difference.”

Joining Wynne and Barrie MPP Ann Hoggarth at J’Adore was the new president and CEO of the newly-formed Alectra electricity company, Brian Bentz.

He spoke about the merger of Barrie Hydro that brought about PowerStream and with it, annual savings of \$100/year for consumers in 2013.

The latest amalgamation of municipal hydro utilities including Barrie, parts of Simcoe County, York Region, Hamilton, Mississauga, St. Catharines and Brampton, is the second largest municipally-owned consortium in North America, he said.

“Our new company is really all about value for customers,” Bentz said. “The goal is be customer focused. We’re in a changing world of energy. We want to provide new, innovative, faster, better, more reliable electricity solutions for customers and we are committed to doing that.”

The 25% reduction to energy costs won’t just be felt by small business owners and residents.

Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre (RVH) spends approximately \$3.4 million on electricity each year to run its HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning), diagnostic equipment, cancer treatment accelerators and lighting, etc.

With the 25% reduction, RVH would save more than three-quarters of a million dollars.

“We had anticipated a 4% to 6 % increase in those costs, but with a 25% hydro rate cut, we could realize a savings of \$850,000 over the year,” said Rob Purdy, RVH’s operations director of facilities support services.

401 Accident and Chemical Spill

Media are reporting that police have confirmed a “serious collision involving transports” along Highway 401 westbound lanes early this afternoon, in which a corrosive material spilled onto the road and some vehicles involved in an ensuing pile up were reportedly trapped underneath transport trucks.

One of the transports was carrying a hazardous material “which turns into hydrofluoric acid if exposed to heat,” said the Gananoque Police Service in a Facebook post. “This event has been upgraded to a haz-mat and Mass Casualty Response. Emergency plans have been activated. Chemical has spilled on roadway and is highly toxic,” said police. “Hydrofluoric acid is a highly toxic, highly corrosive and poisonous solution which is harmful to skin, lungs and eyes.”

This collision has been closely followed by mainstream media, as well as eastern regional media, all afternoon. The OPP have issued a statement and the investigation is ongoing.

French Media Update

Radio-Canada reported today that the number of deaths due to opioid overdoses have increased by 73percent in 10 years in Toronto. To tackle the issue, Toronto Public Health has recommended larger distribution of Naloxone rescue kits and Heroin prescriptions as a treatment for addicts who are addicted to opioids.

Chinese Media Update

As its number 2 top story, Sing Tao reported that PTT alone would not curb the ever spiralling home prices. A progressive property tax should be introduced on luxurious homes bought with foreign income or capital. Apart from Vancouver and Toronto, there is no places in the country where homes have become a beyond reach dream.

FYI – Media are reporting the merging of two major weather systems will leave a huge stretch of central Canada blanketed in snow. Meteorologist Mark Schuster said a system that was originally to bring upwards of 20 centimetres of snow to much of southwestern and central Ontario has now been absorbed into a low-pressure system that's set to hit eastern Ontario and parts of Quebec and New Brunswick. As of this afternoon, Toronto's Pearson International Airport was reporting 248 cancelled arriving flights and 267 cancelled departing flights.

FYI – Andrea Horwath will be holding a press conference in the Media Studio tomorrow to contrast the NDP's energy proposal against the governments recently released Fair Hydro Plan.

FYI – The BayToday reports that staff at the North Bay Regional Hospital are bracing themselves for another round of layoffs, as the facility struggles with “insufficient provincial funding”.

FYI – CBC Windsor is reporting that Brentwood recovery home in Windsor is treating kids as young as 13 for dependency on drugs and alcohol and the issue is becoming "more serious," according to an addictions expert.

FYI – The Canadian Press reports Canada's lumber industry is in a stronger position to weather a U.S. trade battle than it was during the last major clash a decade ago, but smaller Quebec and Ontario producers would be particularly vulnerable to duties that may arrive within weeks.

FYI – Catherine McKenna, will participate in important bi-lateral meetings with her United States counterparts to strengthen Canada-US collaboration on clean air and clean water, protection of the Great Lakes and climate change. Minister McKenna will speak about Canada's efforts to reduce carbon emissions at a “Fireside Chat” with Sarah Ladislaw, Director and Senior Fellow of the Energy and National Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

As always, let us know if you have any questions.

Kate, Jenn, Gurvinder and Ronan