

Evening Media Scan - Hydro Rate Reduction - September 26, 2017

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MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

September 26, 2017

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[Canadian Manufacturing: Ontario government to spend \\$5.5M advertising hydro bill cuts, docs show](#)

[Our Windsor: Liberals spent \\$5.5 million in hydro ads to save 'political skin,' NDP alleges](#)

TV Transcripts

None

Online Coverage

Toronto Sun: Why Wynne deserves to lose

Tuesday, September 26, 2017 05:46 PM EDT

<http://www.torontosun.com/2017/09/26/why-wynne-deserves-to-lose>

We've never said Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals will lose the provincial election in June. We've said they should lose.

Two stories in Monday's Sun illustrate why.

The first is the Liberals spending \$5.5 million of tax money advertising hydro rate cuts.

The second is the Canadian Taxpayers Federation revealing Wynne got basic facts wrong in a recent U.S. speech touting free trade by claiming an Ontario firm — Leland Industries — invested \$46 million in Illinois last year.

CEO Byron Nelson said that was "completely false".

According to government documents revealed by an NDP freedom of information request, the Liberals' justification for spending \$5.5 million advertising hydro rates was that, "negative media coverage" of high rates had overshadowed, "the value of what people are getting for their money."

That referred to the Liberals rebating the 8% provincial portion of the HST from hydro bills starting January, 2017, which they publicized ad nauseam and which is included as a separate line item in Toronto Hydro bills.

By contrast, the Liberals refused to include the added cost of cap and trade in home heating bills as a separate item by hiding behind an Ontario Energy Board ruling, instead of being transparent and consistent when it comes to energy pricing.

The Liberal documents revealed the bulk of the \$5.5 million for hydro ads — \$3 million — will occur in the 2017-18 fiscal year ending March 31, in the run-up to the June election.

As NDP Leader Andrea Horwath charged, the Liberals are using tax dollars to boast about hydro rate cuts (now including a 17% reduction financed by new debt) to save their "political skin".

Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk has criticized Wynne and the Liberals for other ad campaigns she said inappropriately used millions in tax dollars for partisan ads.

Advertising she said she would have disallowed under legislation passed by Wynne's predecessor, Dalton McGuinty, that Wynne gutted.

Leland Industries' Nelson said he was "astonished" Wynne would spread false information about Leland without contacting it.

Both incidents suggest Wynne and the Liberals no longer understand, if they ever did, the difference between the public interest and their interests.

When governments forget that, it's time to defeat them.

C a n a d i a n M a n u f a c t u r i n g : g o v e r n m e n t t o s p e n d \$ 5 . 5 M a d v e r t i s i n g d o c s s h o w

By: Allison Jones
September 26, 2017

<http://www.canadianmanufacturing.com/regulation/ontario-government-spend-5-5m-advertising-hydro-bill-cuts-docs-show-202110/>

TORONTO—Ontario's Liberal government has earmarked \$5.5 million to advertise cuts to hydro bills—ads the opposition says use public money to make the Liberal party look good.

In response to a freedom of information request by the New Democrats, government documents cite "negative media coverage" of rising electricity costs as a key piece of context for why the advertising campaign is needed.

"Despite recent cost reduction actions the government has implemented, the overriding messaging from media has been unreasonably high costs associated with electricity," says the project brief, dated Feb. 2—after bills were reduced by eight per cent, but before the government announced a further 17 per cent cut.

"The value of what people are getting for their money has been overshadowed."

About \$2.5 million is allocated for the fiscal 2016-17 year and a further \$3 million is set aside for the following year, the documents show. About \$1.2 million had been spent as of March 31.

A set of radio ads this year have told listeners that people would receive an average of 25 per cent off their hydro bills this summer and rate increases are being held to inflation for four years.

Auditor general Bonnie Lysyk has said the ads likely wouldn't have been approved under previous government advertising rules because the intent is to convey a positive impression of government.

Lysyk has complained that changes the Liberals enacted to government advertising legislation in 2015 reduced her office to a rubber stamp.

The old rules banned ads as partisan if the intent was to foster a positive impression of government or a negative impression of its critics, but the new rules say an ad is partisan only if it uses an elected member's picture, name or voice, the colour or logo associated with the political party, or directly criticizes a party or member of the legislature.

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said the ads are necessary to inform people about bill reductions so they can adjust their household budgets.

"Still people don't know about the 25 per cent reduction," he said. "They were having a hard time, as they said before, choosing between heating and eating and so now as we're moving forward into those winter months they can plan for this."

But NDP Leader Andrea Horwath says people can tell their bills have gone down simply by looking at them.

"The \$5.5 million should be invested in helping people get their hydro bills down, not in partisan government advertising that wouldn't pass the smell test if the government hadn't changed the laws," Horwath said.

Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown said the government has "completely abused the public trust" when it comes to public advertising.

"You're supposed to use government advertising for a broader good," he said. "What we don't need is partisan vanity ads using taxpayer monies to advance the interests of the Liberal party."

Part of the Liberals' hydro plan is increasing the benefits available under the Ontario Electricity Support Program for low-income ratepayers, which Thibeault cited as another reason the advertising is important, because the program requires people to sign up.

But despite the advertising so far, not as many eligible people have signed up as the government was hoping.

Thibeault estimated that 500,000 people would be eligible, but his office said that 232,115 customers are benefitting.

"We're seeing the numbers increase month to month and that's something, I think, for us to be pleased about, but I'd still like to see more people sign up for it," he said.

Canada Revenue Agency requirements mean that people need to enrol in the program with a physical signature on paper, instead of just via the internet, but Thibeault said the government is working with the CRA "to find ways to help with that." As well, the government is working to automatically qualify people on welfare or disability, he said.

The low-income benefits were increased as part of the hydro plan, so that someone who qualifies for the smallest credit—a single person earning less than \$28,000—would save \$45 a month instead of \$30.

Our Windsor Liberals spent \$5.5 million in hydro ads to save 'political skin'

By: Kristin Rushowy
September 26, 2017

<https://www.ourwindsor.ca/news-story/7576920-liberals-spent-5-5-million-in-hydro-ads-to-save-political-skin-ndp-alleges/>

The Ontario government is spending \$5.5 million on hydro ads amid its concerns about its hydro rate cut being overshadowed by "negative media coverage of rising electricity bills," say documents obtained by the NDP.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath accused the Liberals of trying to save their "political skin" and boost their standing in the polls with ads detailing the 25-per-cent rate cut — one that in the long run is estimated will cost Ontarians \$21 billion.

"The number is eye-popping," Horwath said Monday of the price tag for the two-year advertising campaign. "The premier has allocated \$5.5 million from the public purse to sell this boondoggle for bankers to the public.

"Can the Liberals tell us why they are more concerned about spending public money to save their own political skin than they are about helping families get relief from soaring hydro bills?" said Horwath, whose party obtained the documents via a freedom of information request.

But Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said the ads for the Fair Hydro Plan provide information that Ontarians need to know, especially with winter on the way.

"What's also important . . . is that they know about the programs that are available, like the Ontario Electricity Support Program," he said. "This is a program that has increased the refund that many families who qualify will get for it. We have prepared and have a budget to help 500,000 families through the

OESP and we're nowhere near that number yet."

So far, 232,115 people are receiving the additional hydro credits, though 300,000 have applied. The government is now working with other government ministries to automatically provide the rebates to those on social assistance.

When asked why only some ads give details on the additional subsidies, Thibeault said it's important for all families to be able to budget for the upcoming months.

Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown blasted Premier Kathleen Wynne "for using taxpayers' monies to advance the interests of the Liberal party."

"You're supposed to use government advertising for a broader good," Brown added. "What we don't need is partisan vanity ads."

Horwath also noted that the ad campaign "has been funded — go figure — right through the 2018 election year."

– With files from Robert Benzie