

Evening Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction - November 28, 2017

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Date: Tue, 28 Nov 2017 21:00:17 -0500
Attachments: 20171128 - Media Scan - Hydro Rate Reduction (Evening).doc (84.99 kB)

MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

November 28, 2017

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Online Coverage

Toronto Star: Wynne says PC Leader Patrick Brown's hope of finding 'nonsense'
thestar.com
Tue Nov 28 2017
Section: News
Byline: Robert Benzie

In the People's Republic of China, Premier Kathleen Wynne is seeing red over the Progressive Conservative People's Guarantee manifesto.

As in red ink - and blood on the floor from anticipated budget cuts.

Speaking to the Star from Nanjing - one stop on her two-week trade mission to China, Hong Kong and Vietnam - she was incredulous about Tory Leader Patrick Brown's campaign platform unveiled Saturday.

"We've been waiting for quite awhile to see something substantial come out of Brown and the Conservatives. So we've seen those now and the thing that jumps out at me is the pretty serious cuts," Wynne said Tuesday.

"We're the leanest per-capita program spending government in the country," said the premier, who has read the Tories' 78-page platform.

"So to suggest that there's this bloated government and you can come in and slash \$12 billion and nobody will feel pain is nonsense," she said.

"He has to be held to account on this."

That's a reference to the Brown's pledge to cut income taxes, eliminate the cap-and-trade climate change plan that brings in \$1.9 billion annually, and conduct a "value-for-money" audit to find \$6.1 billion in savings across government over three years if elected June 7.

"I mean 'efficiencies' - that's the language that they use - and in my experience, 'efficiencies' has always been code for 'cuts' for Conservatives," said Wynne.

"Conservative leader after Conservative leader has talked about efficiencies so we're looking at . . . a scale of \$12 billion. In reality, it would be impossible to realize that kind of cut without cutting education

and health care in some way."

Campaigning at a Scarborough manufacturing plant, Brown insisted that "every Ontarian is going to pay less" under his People's Guarantee plan, which will also bolster services.

"Under Kathleen Wynne, you work harder, you pay more, and you get less. This is not right and this is not fair."

He is promising to reduce hydro rates by 12 per cent, invest \$5 billion in a TTC subway network that will be uploaded to the province, reduce middle-class provincial income tax rates by 22.5 per cent, and enable parents to write off up to 75 per cent of child-care costs while boosting the number of daycare spots by 100,000.

Wynne admitted some aspects of the "People's Guarantee" seem to be cribbed from her governing Liberals.

"It's great that they have now come around to acknowledging that they agree with our Fair Hydro Plan because, I mean, they want to add to that," she said, referring to the Liberals' 25 per cent reduction in electricity rates that the Tories voted against in the Legislature.

"The 100,000 child-care spaces, I mean, we're implementing that, so that's great that they agree with that. It's not an additional 100,000 child-care spaces. They're basically just doing what we're already doing."

As for the Tories' plan to return Ontario to deficit next year - with a \$2.8 billion shortfall - Wynne, who is projecting budget surpluses for the next few years, was gobsmacked.

"I'm sure there was a lively internal conversation about that - that's for sure," the premier said with a laugh, mindful of the concerns of fiscal conservatives.

"Starting to pay down the debt starts with balancing the budget - and keeping it in balance," she said.

"This document is all about having it both ways or all ways: 'so we're going to run a deficit, we're going to cut fat that's not there, we're going to start to pay down the debt.' There are all sorts of inconsistencies in what he's suggesting."

Globe and Mail Pragmatism on steroids: An Ontario PC platform that could actually work; The so-called People's Guarantee is equally comfortable borrowing good ideas from across the political spectrum and bad policies from the other side of the aisle
theglobeandmail.com

Tue Nov 28 2017, 2:29pm ET

Section: Other

Byline: Tony Keller

Pragmatism on steroids: An Ontario PC platform that could actually work; The so-called People's Guarantee is equally comfortable borrowing good ideas from across the political spectrum and bad policies from the other side of the aisle

"Patrick Brown is a different kind of Progressive Conservative. A pragmatic Progressive Conservative." So says the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party's newly released pre-election platform. And it's not lying. No, Mr. Brown's 78-page(www.ontariopc.ca), 147-promise document, the so-called People's Guarantee, is pragmatism squared and on steroids - equally comfortable borrowing good ideas from across the political spectrum and bad policies from the other side of the aisle.

As a result, the new PC platform contains several excellent proposals. But, for pragmatic electoral reasons, it also promises that a PC government will in some areas be more Liberal than the Liberals.

The best of the new PC pragmatism? Mr. Brown's pledge to scrap the Kathleen Wynne government's cap-and-trade system and replace it with a revenue-neutral carbon tax. Many other conservatives, in Canada and the United States, simply want to ignore the whole climate issue. They'd be happy to kill cap-and-trade and replace it with nothing. Mr. Brown has a much better plan. He's going to use the fight against global warming to lower your income taxes. And yes, that's an excellent idea - both economically and ecologically.

Instead of cap-and-trade, a complex and opaque system imposing hidden costs on businesses in the

province and leaving all of the money collected in the hands of Queen's Park, the PCs would use a tax on carbon to fund reductions in other taxes.

The idea is borrowed from British Columbia, whose former Liberal government introduced it in 2008. A revenue-neutral carbon tax is also beloved by economists, since it involves raising taxes on something our society wants less of - pollution - and using the money to lower taxes on the productive economic activities we want more of, such as paid work.

Replacing cap-and-trade with a carbon tax is also what makes Mr. Brown's fiscal projections hold together. The \$2.4-billion a year in carbon taxes that the PCs expect to be collecting by 2021 will pay for most, but not all, of their promised income-tax cuts.

Mr. Brown will cut the tax rate on the lowest income bracket, covering personal income of less than \$42,960, from 5.05 per cent to about 4.5 per cent. The next bracket, for earnings up to \$85,923, will have its rate cut from 9.15 per cent to 7.1 per cent.

It feels like an idea borrowed from the federal Liberals, one of whose signature promises in 2015 was a middle-class tax cut. Then again, the Liberals were themselves pragmatically borrowing from their own political rivals, the Conservatives.

And the Ontario PCs are partly going to pay for this tax cut with a dash of deficit spending - which also sounds like a plan borrowed from the federal Liberals, though Mr. Brown is promising just one small, \$2.8-billion deficit, for just one year. The Wynne Liberals are expected to deliver the province's first balanced budget in a decade when they bring in a pre-election budget next spring; the Progressive Conservatives will be running against them on a platform that promises to put the budget back into deficit for another year.

Economically speaking, a one-time, \$2.8-billion deficit is immaterial. It's an oversized rounding error on a budget of more than \$150-billion. It won't stop the province's debt-to-GDP ratio, the only measure that matters, from declining. But the optics of a PC party that is in less of a deficit-reduction hurry than the Liberals is surprising, and very different from the plans of the previous PC leader, Tim Hudak.

However, Mr. Hudak went down to an ignominious and unexpected defeat in 2014. He promised painful change; his signature pledge involved cutting 100,000 civil servants. In a province that is already one of the lowest per-capita spenders in Confederation, that scared many voters. And so, whereas two decades ago Mike Harris won election and re-election on a platform known as the Common Sense Revolution, Mr. Brown thinks that what Ontario voters want these days is more of a non-revolution. If they want change, they do not want it with a capital C.

As a result, the People's Guarantee guarantees that going from a Liberal to a Progressive Conservative government will bring some change, but not too much.

For example, the Liberals are bringing in free drug prescriptions for anyone under the age of 25 starting in January, a 30 per cent tuition rebate for most students, and a \$15 minimum wage by January, 2019. The PCs aren't touching the first two, and will only slow implementation of the last.

Or take hydro. The Liberals have been given a decade and a half to screw up the electricity system, and they've made the most of the opportunity. To control spiralling prices, they recently came up with a politically astute solution: ordering up a 25 per cent cut in hydro rates, paid for by taxpayers. Your hydro bill is being partly paid for by your taxes and, yes, it's quite popular.

Mr. Brown's response? A government led by him will employ similar sleights of hand to lower electricity bills by another 12 per cent.

Sweet pragmatism. It just might get him elected premier.

Follow this link to view this story on globeandmail.com: Pragmatism on steroids: An Ontario PC platform that could actually work(www.theglobeandmail.com))

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Toronto SEUDN:TORIAL: Nov. 29 — No hidden agenda, Brown's a

By: Lorrie Goldstein
November 28, 2017 6:33 PM EST

<http://torontosun.com/opinion/editorials/editorial-nov-29-no-hidden-agenda-browns-a-red-tory>

Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown's "People's Guarantee" election platform is a strategic political document that helps him in two key ways.

First, by releasing it seven months before the vote, Brown has kept his promise that Ontarians would have plenty of advance notice about what a government under his leadership would do.

Second, Brown has defined himself before his opponents could — as a red Tory in the tradition of former Ontario premier Bill Davis, not a "common sense revolutionary" like former premier Mike Harris.

This has effectively blunted attempts by Wynne and her union allies to portray him as a Canadian Donald Trump with a "hidden agenda."

On issues ranging from tax cuts for the middle class, to financial help for young families, to lowering hydro bills, to almost non-existent debt reduction, Brown's platform could have been written by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

It could almost have been written by Wynne.

Not only will Brown keep Wynne's 25% reduction in electricity rates — which he denounced when it was passed as fiscal flimflammy based on massive borrowing — he's promising to reduce them 12% more. Nowhere in Brown's 147 promises is there anything for social conservatives.

For example, no mention of reforming Wynne's sex-ed curriculum, which Brown floated when he was running for PC leader.

To his credit, Brown has tackled the third rail of politics for Conservatives — man-made climate change — saying he will cancel Wynne's \$6 billion cap-and-trade political slush fund and replace it with a revenue neutral carbon tax, verified by the auditor general, based on Trudeau's compulsory carbon prices.

Brown's promise to quit after four years if he hasn't fulfilled five key promises is unnecessarily gimmicky. What if he wins a minority and the Liberals and NDP combine forces to stop him, for example?

We don't think Brown is being forthright enough with voters about the economic pain Ontarians will have to endure to undo the economic damage caused by 14 years of Liberal rule, that has left the province as the world's most indebted sub-sovereign borrower.

That said, Brown is clearly preferable to the politically corrupt Liberals, who drove us into that ditch by repeatedly doubling down on fiscally reckless, billion-dollar boondoggles like their green energy disaster.

Nugget funding reduces hospital hydro costs

Tuesday, November 28, 2017 5:37:20 EST PM

<http://www.nugget.ca/2017/11/28/funding-reduces-hospital-hydro-costs>

West Nipissing General Hospital will receive more than \$2 million from the province under the Hospital Energy Efficiency Program to use more renewable energy technologies.

The North Bay Regional Health Centre will receive \$337,159 under the same program.

The program is part of an effort to improve energy efficiency, reduce greenhouse gases and redirect savings into patient care.

Altogether, the North East Local Health Integration Network will receive \$7.4 million for 20 energy-efficiency projects.

"Reducing Northeastern Ontario hospital energy costs will help the environment, our hospitals and ultimately Northerners as savings can be directed to frontline patient care," said Kate Fyfe, interim CEO of the North East LHIN.

Fifteen hospitals will receive provincial funding.

The province is funding 180 projects at 98 hospitals across the province, including 117 heating, ventilation and air conditioning projects, 35 lighting projects and 28 projects that address other energy efficiency needs at hospitals.

Both West Nipissing and North Bay hospitals will be involved in the HVAC projects.

The province estimates almost five megatons of carbon dioxide equivalent gases are expected to be eliminated from the environment by 2050, the equivalent to taking about 40,000 vehicles off our roads. By 2020-21, it is estimated that over \$60 million will be generated in annual energy-related savings.

The program is an initiative of the Climate Change Action Plan and uses proceeds from Ontario's carbon market to modernize facilities such as hospitals, universities, and heritage buildings.

Improving patient care at hospitals across the province is part of a plan to create fairness and opportunity during this period of rapid economic change. The plan includes a higher minimum wage and better working conditions, free tuition for hundreds of thousands of students, easier access to affordable child care, and free prescription drugs for everyone under 25 through the biggest expansion of medicare in a generation.