Evening Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction - October 24, 2017

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Attachments: 20171024 - Media Scan - Hydro Rate Reduction (Evening Scan).doc (88.06 kB)

Evening Media Scan: October 24, 2017

Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

October 24, 2017

Click links below to view article:

TV Transcripts
- **CHCH:** Energy Minister Launches Affordability Fund in Hamilton as Part of Fair Hydro Plan

Online Coverage
- **Ottawa Citizen:** Taxpayers put up $300,000 to renovate Premier Kathleen Wynne's offices
- **CBC News:** New energy program won't bring 'ticker tape parade,' but it'll help people: minister
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- **The Province:** The number is up for Wynne's government

TV Transcripts

CHCH: Energy Minister Launches Affordability Fund in Hamilton

Source: CHCH
Oct 24, 2017 6:35 PM (18)

Anchor: The province has launched a new program to help people reduce their electricity bills. Minister of Energy Glenn Thibeault launched the Affordability Fund in Hamilton this afternoon. The new program is part of the province's Fair Hydro Plan. Ontario will spend $100 million to support the free installation of energy saving LED light bulbs, power bars, improved insulation and energy efficient air conditioners and refrigerators.

Glenn Thibeault, Minister of Energy: The fund is designed for those families, seniors, and individuals that don't necessarily have the extra money in their household budgets for energy efficiency upgrades and don't qualify for our other low income conservation programs. So whether an electricity customer rents or owns, or lives house or an apartment, it doesn't matter. They may be eligible.

Anchor: The amount of money you'll save depends on what improvements you make. For example, the province says a home energy kit with two LED light bulbs and a power bar can help you save about $10 a year, while an energy efficient refrigerator can help you save about $90 a year. To find out if you are eligible and to learn how to apply, head to chch.com and follow the links.

Online Coverage

Ottawa Citizen: Taxpayers put up $300,000 to renovate Premier Kat

By: Lorrie Goldstein
October 24, 2017 5:55 AM EDT

http://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/columnists/taxpayers-put-up-300000-to-renovate-premier-kathleen-wynnes-offices/wcm/609066fb-790f-4cd7-ac11-bfd4af0cbace

All things considered, was this really the best time for Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne to approve a $300,000 renovation of her offices?

According to a Toronto Sun Freedom of Information request for information on renovations, office improvements and furniture purchases for the premier's office since June, 2016, the $297,694.25 renovation was completed a year ago on rooms 6340 and 6522 in the Whitney Block, across from the Queen's Park legislative building.

The work included repairing and replacing water-damaged subfloors, new carpeting, "remediation of designated substances in the carpet and flooring," painting, new workstations, replacing window blinds and installing new vinyl flooring in two kitchens.

Sure the Whitney Block is old. It was built in 1926 and is the second oldest building at Queen's Park next to the legislative building.

But many Ontarians these days are making do with 15-year-old carpets and blinds (the age of those replaced) and old paint.

This while trying to figure out how to pay their electricity bills, which doubled in 10 years under the Liberals, before coming down 25% this summer under Wynne's "Fair Hydro Plan."

A plan Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says will cost hydro ratepayers (meaning everyone) almost $40 billion over the next 30 years, including $4 billion more than necessary so the government can keep it from appearing directly on its books.

Meanwhile, Wynne presides over a government that is the most indebted sub-sovereign borrower on earth, which just started hitting Ontarians on Jan. 1 for almost $2 billion a year more, courtesy of Wynne's cap-and-trade plan.

In politics, symbols matter and a $300,000 renovation in the premier's office at this time isn't a good one.

But it's a drop in the bucket compared to the hundreds of millions of dollars worth of renovations (final cost not yet determined) that the Wynne government has approved for Ontario government buildings.

Called the Queen's Park Reconstruction Project, it's a massive, eight-year renovation of the government's Macdonald Block (built in 1971) and Whitney Block office complexes, which started last year and is scheduled for completion in 2024.

When the Wynne government announced the project last year, it said an "independent, third-party expert panel" had advised it the renovation would save money in the long run and help it meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets to fight climate change.

To wit: "The panel advised that the government's average current expenditure, including operating expenses and capital expenses required to maintain the buildings in their current state, would be reduced from an annual average of $144 million to $121 million over 50 years. This results in an estimated return of all costs invested in the renovation and an average annual net savings to the province of more than $20 million for the next 50 years. Those savings will be achieved through reduced operating costs, lower energy and capital maintenance expenditures, and the reduction of over 380,000 square feet of third-party leases across the downtown Toronto core. The project will also support the government's efforts to fight climate change."

Many Ontarians will be no doubt be skeptical, given this government's record, that we're going to save money in the long run.

And heaven forbid this government, the world's most indebted sub-sovereign borrower, should have to make do with working in unrenovated offices.

CBC News: *New energy program won't bring 'ticker tape parade,'*
CBC.CA News
Tue Oct 24 2017, 2:34pm ET
Section: Hamilton
Byline: CBC News

Ontario's energy minister says he doesn't expect a "ticker tape parade" for how the Liberals have handled the hydro file. But a new program helping low and middle-class homes with energy-efficient upgrades is still the right thing to do.

Glenn Thibeault launched the Affordability Fund in Hamilton Tuesday. The $100 million program will give residents LED lights, heat pumps and even energy-efficient appliances to offset their energy costs.

The program is available to those who don't already qualify for low-income energy conservation programs. Thibeault foresees it helping "tens of thousands" of people.

Electricity rates have shot upward under Premier Kathleen Wynne. By Wynne's own admission, they've become hard for most homes to manage.

This year, the Wynne government launched the Fair Hydro Plan, which has reduced the average Ontario household electricity bill by 25 per cent from the peak in the summer of 2016. The Affordabilty Fund is part of that.

Thibeault said he knows the program won't fix people's anger over energy rates.

"Am I expecting a ticker tape parade down the main street of Hamilton? Absolutely not," he said.

"But is this the right thing to do, in many instances, for the people of Hamilton and right across the province? Yes, it is."

Under the new program, Alectra and other utilities will install LED light bulbs, power bars, better insulation, energy-efficient refrigerators and other tools for free to people who qualify.

?Some will qualify for home energy kits, which includes light bulbs, power bars and/or faucet aerators they install themselves.

Others qualify for in-home visits, and possible energy-efficient appliances, thermostats and even heat pumps.

In a report this month, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk criticized how the program is being financed, saying the province is "improperly" accounting for the $26 billion in debt it's taking on to cut hydro bills in the short term.

The Liberals called the controversy an "accounting dispute" with the auditor.

"There were no fast ones being pulled at all," Thibeault said this month. "We always said it's going to take longer to pay off and it's going to cost more."

Ontario PC energy critic Todd Smith called the Liberals' financing method this month "deceitful, dishonest and shady."

In May, NDP leader Andrea Horwath said Ontarians can't afford the plan, and called on the government to release all of its projections about how much the hydro plan will cost in the long run.

With files from Mike Crawley

CHCH New energy program

October 24, 2017 04:27:33 PM

http://www.chch.com/new-energy-program/

The province has launched a new program cost to help people reduce their electricity bills.

Minister of Energy Glenn Thibeault launched the Affordability Fund in Hamilton Tuesday. The new program is part of the province’s fair hydro plan. Ontario will spend $100 million to support the free installation of energy saving LED light bulbs, power bars, improved insulation and energy-efficient air conditioners and refrigerators.

“The fund is designed for those families, seniors, and individuals that don’t necessarily have the extra money in their budgets for energy-efficient upgrades, and don’t quality for our other low-income conservation programs. So whether an electricity customer rents or owns, or lives in a house or apartment, it doesn’t matter, they may be eligible.” Glenn Thibeault.

The amount of money you’ll save depends on what improvements you make. For example, the province says a home energy kit with two LED light bulbs and a power bar can help you save about $10 a year; while an energy efficient refrigerator can help you save about $90 a year.

To find out if you’re eligible and to learn how to apply visit: affordabilityfund.org
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Northumberland Today: Letters to the editor, Oct. 24, 2017

By: David Piccini
Tuesday, October 24, 2017 7:34:14 EDT AM

http://www.northumberlandtoday.com/2017/10/24/letters-to-the-editor-oct-24-2017

More transparent government needed

This week, Ontarians found out the true cost of Kathleen Wynne's Unfair Hydro Plan. Just when we thought it could not get any worse, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk unveiled another damning report that revealed Ontarians will pay up to $4 billion more in interest over the next 30 years.

We all recall when the Wynne Liberals announced with great fanfare last spring that hydro bills would finally be reduced after years of skyrocketing and punishing increases. How could we not know? They had the audacity to spend $5.5 million in taxpayer dollars on government advertising to promote the apparent reduction.

But where are we getting the money to pay for this short-term discount? The Wynne Liberals did this by saddling Ontario Power Generation (who are responsible for generating approximately half the electricity in Ontario) with even more debt. Or, in other words, you'll pay less now so you can pay even more later.

The Auditor General's report shows just how dishonest the Wynne Liberals have been on hydro bills. They have hidden these extra costs (not to mention the billions more in interest payments) so they can falsely claim to have a balanced budget. Because the Ontario Power Generation trust will have to borrow money at a higher interest rate than the province pays, the Auditor General estimates there will be an extra $4 billion in charges over 30 years for a total of approximately $40 billion. Add $40 billion to zero and you'll get a true picture of Ontario's finances.

Ontarians deserve better than accounting tricks designed for pre-election treats. Just in time for Halloween, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk has ripped the mask of this latest Wynne scandal.

As life gets increasingly unaffordable for Ontario families trying to make ends meet, for students trying to pay for tuition, books and apartments and for seniors on fixed incomes, the Wynne Liberals will go to any length to play politics with our tax dollars. It has to stop.

It's time for change in Ontario. A more honest and transparent government is a good place to start.

David Piccini

Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario candidate

for Northumberland - Peterborough South

The Province: The number is up for Wynne’s government

By: Ben Eisen
October 24, 2017 3:56 PM PDT

http://theprovince.com/opinion/columnists/the-number-is-up-for-wynnes-government/wcm/b74d0bf9-04e0-41bd-8cc8-2547742afbb2

Ontario’s Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk issued a scathing report last week about the Wynne government’s Fair Hydro Plan, which will lower electricity costs for consumers by pushing those costs (and resulting interest payments) into the future.

Lysyk pulled no punches in her assessment, stating that “in essence, the government is making up its own accounting rules” surrounding the plan, to make the province’s finances look healthier than they are.

Premier Kathleen Wynne’s government pushed back, stating it “does not agree” with Lysyk’s conclusions.

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said no “fast ones” were being pulled.

It’s not the first time Wynne’s government has tangled with the the auditor general over the province’s books.

Last year, the government and the auditor general publicly disagreed over the appropriate way to treat assets held by public pension plans.

That dispute had implications for the important question of whether the government would post a balanced operating budget, or a deficit, this year.

Lysyk is keeping a close eye on government accounting methods and calling out mistakes and improprieties.

However, because of the technical nature of the accounting disputes and the complexity of the issues, it’s easy to get bogged down in the details of the disagreement of the day and lose sight of the bigger picture.

That is that, even relying on the government’s preferred accounting methods, Ontarians are saddled with a large and growing public debt load that burdens taxpayers today and threatens the prosperity of future generations.

Consider that the government’s last budget showed that since 2008/09, Ontario has seen its net debt increase every year by an average of $15.5 billion.

That’s more than $1,000 in new debt per Ontarian per year.

Setting aside disputes about whether the operating budget today can properly be described as balanced, it’s important to recognize that, by the Wynne government’s own accounting, the provincial debt burden will grow by $34.1 billion over the next three years.

That’s another $2,500 per person in new debt by the time this decade is up.

As a result, the government now spends about $1 billion per month on debt interest— money therefore unavailable for important priorities such as health care, education or tax relief.

None of this is to say the ongoing disputes about the annual budget balance or precise size of the debt burden don’t matter — of course they do.

But they should be considered within the indisputable context that Ontario’s debt burden has approximately doubled over the past decade, with no end in sight.

Accounting disputes between the government and the auditor general are somewhat dry and technical, and it can be difficult for even engaged and informed citizens to determine who’s right.

But regardless of how pension assets should be treated, or how new debt incurred by the government’s Fair Hydro Plan should appear on the books, the stark reality is that Ontario taxpayers are carrying far more public debt than a decade ago and that burden is growing quickly, every year.

That’s why it’s important to step back and look at the bigger picture of Ontario finances.

It’s not a pretty one, no matter what accounting method you use.

Eisen is director of the Fraser Institute’s Ontario Prosperity Initiative.