

Evening Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - May 31, 2017

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Evening Media Scan: May 31, 2017

MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

May 31, 2017

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Online Coverage

Toronto Star: Voters in Sault Ste Marie pass judgment on Wynne government in byelection Thursday
thestar.com
Wed May 31 2017
Section: News | Toronto Star
Byline: Rob Ferguson

Voters in Sault Ste. Marie will pass judgment Thursday on Premier Kathleen Wynne's government in a provincial byelection((www.thestar.com)) that comes in the wake of her hydro rate cuts and promises for a \$15 minimum wage.

New Democrats are looking to win back the riding, taken by Liberal David Orazietti in 2003. He quit((www.thestar.com)) Wynne's cabinet in December to start a new career closer to home and spend more time with his family.

While the result won't change the balance of power at Queen's Park, it comes with politicians already gearing up for next June's province-wide election.

All three major party leaders have campaigned in Sault Ste. Marie, with New Democrat Andrea Horwath and Progressive Conservative Patrick Brown earning the most frequent-flyer points by a wide margin.

"It's going to be tough," Wynne((www.thestar.com)) said candidly when asked about her party's chances. It took the Liberals, who have been struggling in most public opinion polls, several months to nail down a candidate.

A former one-term mayor, Debbie Amaroso, is hoping to hold the seat for the Liberals against two city councillors, Progressive Conservative Ross Romano and New Democrat Joe Krmpotich.

"The message I get from the people of Sault Ste. Marie is they're not looking to re-elect a Liberal," Horwath told reporters at Queen's Park.

"They've seen jobs being lost, they've seen young people not being able to find opportunity, they've seen their hospital services erode, they've seen a real serious downturn all while the current Liberal government has been in office."

After spending last weekend in Sault Ste. Marie, Horwath flew back Tuesday to campaign with Krmpotich, turning her guns mainly on Romano and the Conservatives.

Brown, who went to law school at the University of Windsor with his candidate, moved to temper expectations at Queen's Park before heading back to Sault Ste. Marie on Wednesday afternoon for a final campaign push.

"This is a longtime Liberal-NDP seat. I don't think, frankly, since Bill Davis, have PCs elected a member here. This has been viewed as a safe Liberal seat...but I believe there is an appetite for change throughout the province," Brown said.

"Our candidate finished last time a distant, distant third and I think, like we've seen everywhere in every byelection, we're going to see significant growth for the Progressive Conservative party."

Deputy Premier Deb Matthews cautioned against reading too much into the results after the polls close at 9 p.m., but said she hopes the 25 per cent hydro rate cut and new initiatives((www.thestar.com»)) on the minimum wage and three week's vacation for people in jobs more than five years will resonate with voters.

"Byelections are always tough for government. That's a well-known fact," she said. "They are not reflective of the election that we are about to have in a year."

Advance polls in the riding saw 3,065 voters cast ballots, Elections Ontario said, down from the 3,966 who did so in Sault Ste. Marie during the 2014 province-wide election.

There are almost 63,000 eligible voters in the riding, where a total of seven candidates are running.

National Post Another multinational employer is fleeing Ontario a doesn't seem to care

National Post

Wed May 31 2017

Section: Financial Post

Byline: National Post

My hometown of Brockville, Ont. was hit with a devastating blow last week with the announcement that multinational consumer-products maker Procter and Gamble is closing its local plant, taking with it 500 jobs.

P&G is Brockville's largest private-sector employer - only the school board and the hospital employ more. The company has been a model corporate citizen for 40 years, donating millions of dollars to local causes and generally making Brockville a better place.

And I think it is fair to say Brockville made P&G a better company. The local plant has a well-educated, resourceful, diligent workforce. Although the plant made such household cleaning products as Tide and Bounce over the years, it is most famous as the site that pioneered the Swiffer sweeper.

But that's all history now as P&G joins a growing list of companies leaving Ontario for more hospitable locales, in this case, a new mega-plant in West Virginia.

The company is careful to avoid implying that government policy has anything to do with this, but you will notice these new mega-plants are always someplace other than Ontario. And it's not hard to see why. About the only thing we are competitive on is corporate tax rates and a low dollar.

P&G joins a growing list of companies leaving the province for more hospitable locales

The Liberal governments of Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne pursued an energy policy that gave Ontario one of the highest electricity rates in North America. Despite warnings from independent analyses, including from the provincial auditor, the government continued to sign long-term contracts to provide green energy we don't need at rates we can't afford to pay. We sell the surplus at a massive loss to our economic competitors across the border.

Wynne's temporary cut in electricity rates, paid for by borrowing money to reduce rates, has been exposed for the scam it is - costing at least \$45 billion, or close to double the benefit of the temporary rate cut, according to Ontario's financial accountability officer.

A P&G spokesman said electricity rates didn't figure in the Brockville plant's closure, but the company did approach Leeds-Grenville MPP Steve Clark three years ago to lobby for lower rates. Ontario's rates are high now with the worst yet to come. That fact was no doubt a consideration.

If you think you can take advantage of cheap natural gas and oil to power your operation, Kathleen Wynne's escalating cap-and-trade program will take care of that.

In the inevitable push-pull between labour and capital, the Ontario government has made it clear which side it is on. The millions of dollars Big Labour has spent keeping the Liberals in power in Ontario has had an effect.

It's how we ended up with the Ontario College of Trades, which is a needless barrier to entrepreneurs and small business. And now we have the likelihood of a host of burdensome new labour laws and a \$15 minimum wage - all of which will destroy jobs and discourage investment.

The inescapable conclusion if you're a company looking to set up shop is that Ontario is too expensive and it is going to get worse. Is it any wonder companies like Procter and Gamble are closing facilities?

It's as if Kathleen Wynne doesn't know capital is mobile and is oblivious to the fact the U.S. has a president who, like him or hate him, is likely to reduce taxes and regulations.

Ontario's government thinks it can increase the regulatory burden and hike energy costs while maintaining or improving its economic standing, as long as it sprinkles around a little corporate welfare.

The world doesn't work that way, as 500 Brockville families found out the hard way.

Bob Runciman, now a senator, served as interim leader of the Ontario PC Party and as minister of Economic Development and Trade.

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Ottawa Citizen ~~Denley~~: Here's how the Ontario Liberals are clawing their way back into contention

By: Randall Denley

May 31, 2017 12:03 PM EDT

<http://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/columnists/denley-heres-how-the-ontario-liberals-are-clawing-their-way-back-into-contention>

The Liberals have been delivering a flood of election promises that is even more torrential than Ontario's spring rains. The sheer volume is unusual a year before an election. So are some of the promises.

The one that stands out is a "plan" for a \$21-billion high-speed train that would run from Toronto to Windsor. It's never going to happen, but when a party resuscitates that old idea, it has truly scraped the gunk from the bottom of the election promises barrel.

Tuesday, Premier Kathleen Wynne had her promise machine out again, vowing to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and give workers longer holidays.

Wynne has been touring the province making promises that include free college and university tuition, pharmacare for those under 25, a 25 per cent reduction in electricity bills, more money for hospitals, more child care, rent control, a basic income plan and Ontario Municipal Board reform.

There has to be a reason for this early onslaught of promises, and there are two theories. The first is that Wynne is desperately trying to get the poll numbers up so that she doesn't get booted out by her own party.

If so, the strategy might be working.

A poll earlier this month by Campaign Research shows the Liberals ahead with 37 per cent support, followed by the PCs at 33 and the NDP at 22. The margin of error for the online poll is plus or minus four per cent. Polling from the same company shows the pharmacare and basic income plans are pushing up Liberal numbers.

The second possibility is that the Liberals intend to call the election for late August or early September of this year. Strategically, this would be a smart move and if there is one thing the Ontario Liberal party is good at, it's election strategy.

Rationally, one could argue that the promised spending orgy from a party that has taken a decade to

balance the budget is like celebrating one's first week of sobriety with a pub crawl, but rationality doesn't have much to do with Ontario politics.

The bottom line is that Liberal candidates have plenty of attractive-sounding free stuff to talk about at the door. The bill will come some other time and history suggests Ontarians don't much care.

A late August election would also get the vote over before two separate trials involving senior Liberal staffers. Those begin in early September and are unlikely to produce any good news for the Liberals.

Wynne also has the chance to catch the Progressive Conservatives unprepared. The party says it will be ready if a quick vote is called, but it has no platform and only about half of its candidates are nominated. Its policy process has been glacial and is to culminate in a convention in late November.

While the Liberals have been wooing voters with loveable promises, PCs haven't given voters a single reason to support them, other than not being the Liberals.

PC leader Patrick Brown likes to talk about high hydro rates, the economy and red tape but the only policy he is really known for is a carbon tax, something his own supporters really, really hate.

Voters not only don't know what Brown stands for, they don't know who he is. A Forum Research poll earlier this month indicated that 54 per cent of those polled don't know enough about Brown to offer an opinion on how he's doing.

The Ontario Liberals have not governed well and people still don't like their leader, but that hasn't held them back in past elections. The Liberals are skilled campaigners and have a gift for promising a magical future.

In fact, they are already campaigning on just such a plan while the PCs spend all their energy on nomination controversies. The election might be a lot sooner than most think.

Blackburn News: Bill Walker Says Liberal's Fair Hydro Act Is A
By: Ryan Drury
May 31, 2017 4:03PM

<http://blackburnnews.com/midwestern-ontario/2017/05/31/mpp-bill-walker-says-liberals-fair-hydro-act-deferral-debt/>

Bruce-Grey Owen Sound MPP Bill Walker responded today to the Liberal Caucus release regarding the Ontario PC's voting against Bill 132, the Fair Hydro Act.

Walker says the Liberals plan is simply deferring the rates, and the costs will skyrocket later for rate payers.

"The rates are merely being deferred. This is like you not paying your credit card for 2 or 3 years, and moving it out, and then saying 'I did a good job.' You still have to pay the piper, there's no getting away from this. At the end of the day, it's going to be 12 percent higher to pay that back at this point."

Walker says he couldn't vote for the bill to temporarily relieve hydro rates and then dump more debt on rate payers later.

"I just can't accept that. We're here in our backyard closing rural schools, but they can find 25 billion to borrow to give you a bit of rate relief, which they created. They caused this challenge. I just can't in good conscience put more debt on the backs of our kids and grandkids."

The Liberal caucus release yesterday asserts the PC's have no alternatives to the bill, but Walker says that's a deflection of responsibility.

"They have been government for almost 14 years. They've doubled our debt in 12 years, more debt than we've ever had in the history of our province. They have created this colossal nightmare in our whole hydro field. They're borrowing and borrowing, they're overspending. They're desperate to cling to power, they'll do anything."

Walker says it makes no sense to borrow 25 billion in temporary relief when services and rural schools suffer and Ontario municipalities are struggling.

"We spend over a billion in interest payments alone today, and they just added 25 billion, and yet they can't find any money to keep our schools open. Our hospitals are being challenged now, many of our municipalities are struggling because their funding is getting cut. This is purely a budget, and they're trying to use this as a wedge."

Blackburn News North Perth Mayor Says Municipality Is Prepared For

By: Ryan Drury

May 31, 2017 4:15AM

<http://blackburnnews.com/midwestern-ontario/2017/05/31/north-perth-mayor-says-municipality-prepared-hydro-spike/>

North Perth Mayor Julie Behrns is concerned about the potential hydro spike that is forecast for after the next election in Ontario.

Behrns says with already high hydro rates in rural Ontario, all that municipalities like North Perth can do is prepare as best they can with what they have from a municipal standpoint.

"In rural Ontario, yes the delivery charges are significant," she says. "As the municipality is concerned, we don't know what's going to happen after any election, whether it's provincial or federal, all we can do is deal with what we know."

Behrns says while it's hard to predict just what might be on the horizon, North Perth has made efforts to be more energy conscious to help offset rising costs.

"We all suspect, or should suspect, that hydro costs or energy costs of all sorts may be on the increase," she says. However, how we deal with that or react in our own way, the municipality of North Perth is making sure that our energy consumption is within reason."

Mayor Behrns pointed to things like the solar panels on the new Steve Kerr Memorial Complex and their carbon initiative as positive steps toward municipal-level energy reduction to save money.

Global News Provincial hydro bill subsidy program goes largely unnoticed by

By: Devon Peacock

May 31, 2017 2:03 pm

<http://globalnews.ca/news/3492154/provincial-hydro-bill-subsidy-program-goes-largely-unnoticed-by-londoners/>

London Hydro says thousands of Londoners eligible for a subsidy to assist with rising hydro bills haven't applied for relief.

A year after it was first offered by the province, hydro officials say two-thirds of Londoners haven't applied for the Ontario Electricity Support Program.

"Seven thousand customers have made use of it, but we think there may be as many as 20,000 customers in London that could make use of it and we would like all of them to apply," said London Hydro CEO Vinay Sharma.

How much a household is eligible to receive from the program depends on their total income and how many people live in a home.

Sharma says he's "concerned and surprised" so many Londoners haven't applied for the hydro bill help. "The beauty of it is it isn't help, traditional low-income help, it's help for working folks," he said.

Most Londoners could save \$30-\$50 per month if they're eligible, although some could see as much as \$75 per month in savings.

Sharma says customers may not be aware of the subsidy despite marketing efforts.

Londoners who think they are eligible can call London Hydro or seek help at Salvation Army Centre of Hope. The subsidy is separate from recently announced plans by the province to reduce hydro bills by 25 per cent.

The city-owned utility has also managed to provide a small amount of relief for all in the Forest City. The typical household in London will see savings of 51 cents per month, which works out to about \$6 a year as a result of "program efficiencies."

While the number is small, London Hydro is responsible for only 20 per cent of the local hydro bill. Sharma says there are three reasons for the slight decrease.

"The wires and poles that you see on the street are becoming more efficient as we invest, our customers are helping us by using electronic media to interact with us, and paperless billing means we are reducing our mailing costs," he said.

In an annual report delivered to city politicians on Monday, Sharma said London Hydro is in good shape.

The utility, which is 100 per cent owned by the city of London, has increased in value to \$450 million and is the largest utility in the region.

London Hydro provides an annual dividend of \$5 million to the city and is currently the subject of an asset review by city hall. Last year, officials came close to a merger with another utility from the region. Sharma says eventually, he thinks London Hydro will merge with other utilities.

"I think the region has to come together one day because that's the only way to deliver better service for all stakeholders," he said.

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TV Transcripts

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