

MEDIA EVENT: NDP LEADER HORWATH ON OPPOSITION DAY MOTION RE: HYDRO PLAN

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MEDIA EVENT: NDP LEADER HORWATH ON OPPOSITION DAY MOTION RE: HYDRO PLAN March 28, 2017

Time / Location:

10:00 a.m. / Media Studio, Queen's Park

Speakers:

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath

Media Attendance:

Print – 3
TV – 0
Radio – 0

Media Outlets:

Jones – CP; Rushowy – Star; Zochodne – QP Briefing

Statement by NDP Leader Andrea Horwath:

Good morning everyone. Later today, we'll be debating a motion in the legislature that outlines the main principles of the NDP's plan for hydro in Ontario. And this is an opportunity for the legislature to embrace the only plan that will immediately cut hydro bills for all customers, without billing them billions to pay for it. This plan pays for itself - as we've laid out before and as the motion describes, the new Democrat plan would reduce hydro rates by up to 30 percent for families and businesses. It will provide immediate relief for all. It will address the root causes of skyrocketing hydro bills; including privatization; huge profit margins; oversupply; dumping excess power below cost; and more. It will eliminate time of use - mandatory time of use premiums and punitive rural and Northern delivery charges. And very importantly it will reverse the sell-off of Hydro One, bringing it back into public hands. That will deliver not only the systemic change that we need to keep hydro bills down, but it will also deliver over \$7 billion back to the people of Ontario. That \$7 billion that can be used to fund hospitals and schools. Contrast that with the Liberal plan that shovels 25 to 40 billion dollars in interest payments away from hospitals and schools to banks over the same period. Our plan is ambitious and realistic and attainable. It will deliver real lasting savings for hardworking Ontarians. By comparison, Premier Wynne has offered only press releases and spin. She has said she will release a plan that would see as much as 40 billion public dollars funnelled into private profits for banks and investors - without fixing any of the root issues in Ontario's hydro system. And while she hasn't been able to produce any details of the liberal approach, her government has started an aggressive, publicly funded advertising campaign to promote the phantom plan. That's telling isn't it? It tells me who this approach is really about. Once again, Kathleen Wynne is acting in the interests of Kathleen Wynne and the Liberal Party. After raising the costs of hydro by over 300% since the Liberals were first elected - and almost 50% under Premier Wynne - she is now on the eve of an election - using money that could be going to health care and education, to advertise the supposed savings of a plan that will only cost people even more money. I find it hard to interpret Wynne's weak plan and cynical advertising as anything but political desperation. And of course from the Conservative leader, we have no plan at all. But we know we know that the conservative, conservative leader is a 17-year politician - straight from Stephen Harper's team, and is a cut and privatized politician. And Ontarians have made it clear that they want an end to privatization in our hydro system. Too many Ontario families are near the breaking point. Many are cutting things out of their monthly budget to cope with sky-high hydro bills. Some are even being forced to make what has become known as the "heat or eat" decision. We've heard from

individuals who haven't got enough left over for food, after paying the hydro bill. We've heard from seniors whose pension checks are being eaten up by hydro bills. Enough is enough. So let's do something about it. Today, we're asking the legislature - all parties, all parties - to adopt the approach that I've proposed. Our plan is realistic and it promises to cut bills by up to a third for all Ontarians. It fixes the problems in our hydro system, and it does what the overwhelming majority of Ontarians are demanding: it and the sale of Hydro One and returns it to public ownership. So, I want the legislature to get onside. I hope that today's opposition motion and the debate around the motion will be the beginning of the return to stability, predictability and accountability in Ontario's hydro system. And a return to hydro bills that everyday families can actually afford. I'd be happy to take any questions that you may have.

Questions:

Q: Jones: I confess I am not really clear on the root of this whole phantom plan versus real plan comparison saying they have only issued press releases when, you know, you don't have the number of pages here but I'm pretty sure when you guys released your plan it's relatively equal number of numbers of pages as to when the Liberals released their plan. What makes there's a phantom plan and yours are real plan.

We don't have an actual document that outlines the details of the Liberal plan so they may have provided one to you we certainly haven't seen one. There isn't one that's publicly available. There isn't one that's online and totally open and transparent so we don't see the details of the Liberals plan we don't see it anywhere. Our plan on the other hand when we released it, we had the copy here, we had it available to media, we have it available to the public, it's been online for weeks now. Every single detail is there. Every piece of information that we utilize to come up with our plan is available. That's not the case with the Liberal plan. You can't go anywhere and dig up the actual Liberal plan front to back with all of the information that's required to describe where they got their plan from.

Q: Jones: Have you looked at the impact of returning Hydro One to public ownership? There are many who believe it would be difficult.

We know for sure that in many situations companies have taken to an IPO, they go to an independent public offering and decide to go out to the market and then decide to pull back and bring their companies back into private ownership. So similarly the private ownership in this case is Ontario or the people of Ontario would own Hydro One once again. So the Government of Ontario has taken it out of the market and sold it off to shareholders. We would do the opposite. We would bring it back in as many companies have done in the past to you know to own it again by Ontario. We would be engaging the experts in the financial markets to help us with that process. Certainly it's not something that we have the in-house skills to be able to accomplish but we are confident that that skill is out there and that that can be achieved yes.

Q: Zochodne: The Liberals say that buying back the shares of Hydro One wouldn't reduce hydro bills in any way. How are they wrong?

There are a number of pieces to our plan that will reduce hydro bills immediately and right away. That includes the end of mandatory time of use pricing; that includes getting rid of the delivery charges for rural that are unfair for rural and Northern Ontario residents; that includes the HST of course is another issue. But look, one of the things we know for sure is privatisation has been driving up electricity rates in this province for you know decades now since the Conservatives first started privatizing and selling off the generation of electricity. We know that the other shoe has not fully dropped with the privatisation of Hydro One and in fact the Liberal plan will lead to more and more increases in our electricity costs as that privatisation plays its way out in our system. So what we're saying is the privatisation has to stop. We've got to bring that back in house and eventually not only will we see more revenues because we'll be bringing \$7 billion back into the public purse in terms of the full dividends coming to the people once again and not going off to shareholders. But we'll also be in a situation where we won't see the pressure of increasing costs to pay for shareholder profits in a privatized Hydro One. So in fact the Liberals are absolutely wrong on that score. The immediate reduction in rates is something that we've quite clearly set out and we expect to see an even better situation over time as we weed out the privatisation in our system and provide better value for the people of Ontario.

Q: Rushowy: Can I ask what the issue with the time of use pricing is? Cause, doesn't that encourage conservation?

Well, in fact, you know that the government had put together quite a significant, ah, you know, plan - in terms of targets and, and the moving of the consumption off of peak hours. They didn't come anywhere

near, anywhere near the goals that they set around conservation or, you know, changing of the load or taking the load out of peak hours and, and moving it to other times. But, in the meantime what we did see, is people who tried their best to do their laundry at 2 o'clock in the morning and shift their lifestyle - weren't able to save anything on their bills, and so they became very unhappy about the fact that they tried their hardest and couldn't get their bills down. And on the other hand we saw many, many families in many situations where people simply have no choice, both in terms of private individuals - you know families and, and everyday folks - as well as businesses, particularly businesses that have no way of serving their customers outside of those peak hours. And so, the entire system was a failure. And that's why we're saying for those people that were able to, you know, to make the changes - they can stay on time of use pricing if that's what they desire. But, I believe that there are other ways to encourage conservation, to help people make the right decisions and, and make good decisions around their energy consumption. But I don't believe the stick approach, where you, you know, basically force people into a situation that they are not able to deal with - it doesn't work - particularly when they don't see the results; when they don't see the bills going down. So, for example seniors; they're in their home homes everyday - they don't have the opportunity to shut the heat off or keep all the lights off, particularly in the winter. Young families with toddlers the same, very similar situation - I mean you can't not make lunch for the kids when you're home each and every day. So, these are the kinds of situations that we know for sure have been very very difficult for folks. And these are the kinds of families that have not been able to, you know, shift their consumption low to other hours, and therefore their bills continue to be very very high.

Q: Zochodne: The Liberals say they're gonna table some legislation in the spring that's gonna outline their plan they have; but what they've told us so far is that this plan is pretty far reaching. That it's going to involve a lot of costs being shifted. How confident are you that if the NDP were to form government in 2018, they would be able to do whatever it is the liberals have up their sleeve?

Well, I mean, that's an interesting question. I mean, this this government has done a lot of damage. Kathleen Wynne has done a lot of damage to the province of Ontario. We're at a tipping point now, and we have to see some big changes. I'm hopeful that the liberals will stop any further sell-off of hydro one, knowing that - first of all they had no mandate to do it in the first place - and also, the fact that over 80 percent of Ontarians don't want hydro One to be privatized or sold off. I don't know what the liberals have in store. I don't know what they have up their sleeve; and that's the very point of this press conference today, as well as the motion that we're debating in the House this afternoon. People know very well where New Democrats stand. Our plan is clear. Our plan is achievable. Our plan puts people back in the center of our electricity system. It stops the privatization. It reduces people's financial costs, in other words, your bills go down. These are fundamental that, ah, the fundamentals that people need to see in a plan. And again, I think it's interesting with the liberals continue to say they have a plan. They continue to advertise with public dollars about this plan, but they've also acknowledged that they don't have an actual written plan; that they're going to come up with something sometime between now and the end of the session. That's not good enough. The last thing we need is some liberal plan dropped on our desks at the very end of the session; and then MPPs being pressured into pass something that the Liberals have manipulated to their own political advantage. That is absolutely despicable that they would do such a thing. And so, that's why we've been demanding for weeks now that the liberals table their plan. Let's see it; let's give it the light of day and let's debate it in a way that provides opportunity for, for a very very clear review and for input from people through the public hearings process of, of the committees. Thanks.

N.B.: Comments captured are not verbatim quotes

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