

Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction - May 1, 2017

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Morning Media Scan: May 1, 2017

MEDIA SCAN HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

May 1, 2017

Click links below to view article:

[Print Coverage](#)

[The Timmins Daily Press: Budget: less for NDM; A1 / Front; 2017.05.01](#)

[Sudbury Star: Sudbury MPP defends budget; A3; 2017.05.01](#)

[Daily Miner & News \(Kenora\): Liberal investment in health care falls short of Ontario hospitals real needs; Campbell; A3; 2017.05.01](#)

[Daily Miner & News \(Kenora\): 'Good news'; Mayor Dave Canfield responds to new provincial budget; A3; 2017.05.01](#)

Print Coverage

The Timmins Daily Budget: less for NDM; A1 / Front; 2017.05.

PUBLICATION: The Timmins Daily Press

PAGE: A1 / Front

DATE: 2017.05.01

SECTION: News

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BYLINE: Ron Grech

SOURCE: The Daily Press

KEYWORDS: opposition, members, north, accusing, ontario, liberals

ILLUSTRATION: / Bisson;

WORD COUNT: 751

Budget: less for NDM

Opposition members from the North are accusing the Ontario Liberals of reneging on a commitment to help pay for infrastructure within the Ring of Fire after last week's budget saw a massive reduction in funding for Northern Development and Mines.

"The government with great fanfare in two or three throne speeches, at least four or five budgets, and two election cycles during their campaign, promised they were going to have a billion dollars for infrastructure and resolve what needs to be resolved to get the Ring of Fire going," MPP Gilles Bisson (NDP - Timmins-James Bay) told The Daily Press.

"This time, there was no mention of it and I think that's kind of significant because it's not even a placeholder anymore. It's like they've given up on that and used the billion dollars that they would have earmarked for the Ring of Fire and put it in other places where they are trying to shore up their political support, mainly in the downtown Toronto area or the GTA."

MPP Vic Fedeli (PC - Nipissing), in a statement, said it was a "serious shock to see that this year's budget removed all mention of the Ring of Fire. After three years of promises, the Wynne government has completely abandoned this critical mining project.

"The budget takes a massive cut of \$70 million out of the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines. The ministry helps to establish mining operations all over Northern Ontario, creating good well-paying jobs that help to grow our Northern economy - obviously not a concern of this government."

This sentiment was denied, however, by one of the Liberal's Northern MPPs, Glenn Thibeault, who is also the Minister of Energy.

Thibeault (Liberal - Sudbury) told The Daily Press the opposition is "poking holes" merely on the fact "we didn't put a line in our budget about our continued, ongoing support for the Ring of Fire."

Thibeault said, "We are fully committed as a government to the Ring of Fire, and our commitment has not changed.

"It remains the exact same. And even though it is not mentioned in the budget, we are going to continue to work hard to ensure that we get the Ring of Fire operational."

The Timmins Chamber of Commerce's assessment of the budget was mixed.

While praising the government for increasing the Connecting Link funding program to \$30 million, Christine Bender, president of the Timmins Chamber, in a release, stated the amount "remains insufficient" for communities' needs.

"This fund assists the 77 municipalities to which the province has downloaded the responsibility of maintaining 350 kilometres of Connecting Links - portions of provincial highways traveling through municipalities," she wrote. "The cost to repair Timmins' 21.2 kilometres of Connecting Link is estimated at roughly \$120 million" which is four times the total budget allocated by the province.

"There are some elements of the 2017 budget that stand to have some positive impact on Timmins businesses, but what's not included is a much greater issue," Bender added. "Namely, energy rates continue to be among our members' largest concerns, and while previously announced measures to reduce those rates through the Fair Hydro Plan are certainly appreciated, much more needs to be done."

Another omission that concerned Bender was the "budget's lack of specific measures to clarify the use of cap and trade revenues is unfortunate, as these costs represent a major challenge to Timmins businesses' competitiveness."

Overall, Bisson suggested the Liberals' budget on Thursday was an exercise in damage control.

"This is very much an election budget," the MPP said. "The government is very unpopular. A lot of things they've done in health care by flat lining hospital budgets for 10 years have affected places like Timmins and District Hospital or Sensenbrenner here in Kap.

"Hospitals have been trying to manage with a never-increasing budget while faced with an always-increasing demand. It's been hard. There have been people let go, there has been layoffs, it's been more difficult for people to get services.

"The government knows there have been problems. They know there is going to be an election in a year, so they had to announce something. What they announced is not a bad thing a 3% increase to the base budget (for hospitals) but I think people need to realize what this is all about. This is really about the government who for the last 14 years have caused a problem and are now going into an election cycle trying to look like they can fix the problem."

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Sudbury Star/Sudbury MPP defends budget; A3; 2017.05.01

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BYLINE: Jennifer Hamilton-McCharles

SOURCE: Postmedia Network

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ILLUSTRATION: Ernest Doroszuk, Postmedia Network / Ontario Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault (also Sudbury MPP) and Premier Kathleen Wynne, in this file photo. Both are defending their government's new budget.;

WORD COUNT: 769

Sudbury MPP defends budget

Ontario Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault disputes charges the provincial budget "leaves the people of rural and Northern Ontario with less."

Vic Fedeli, Nipissing MPP and Conservative finance critic, claimed last week the Liberals are cutting \$70 million from the budget of the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines.

"Vic's claim that we cut \$70 million from MNDM is absolutely not the case," Thibeault said. "The budget for the ministry is \$100 million. The additional \$70 million was put into the budget last year and was one-time funding to decommission mines."

In addition, Thibeault said, the province has increased the budget for highway resurfacing by \$100 million to \$654 million.

"Highway 11 and Highway 534 (from Restoule Provincial Park to near Highway 11 in Powassan) are

among the highways that will see an investment."

He said the budget also includes 72 new long-term care beds for Mattawa.

Thibeault also disputes Fedeli's claim that the Liberals are abandoning the Ring of Fire chromite mining development in northwestern Ontario.

Fedeli said the Ring of Fire was mentioned in the 2014 budget, and cut and pasted into the 2015 and 2016 budgets. But this year it was removed.

MPP Gilles Bisson, the NDP MPP for Timmins-James Bay, agreed with Fedeli. "The government with great fanfare in two or three throne speeches, at least four or five budgets, and two election cycles during their campaign, promised they were going to have a billion dollars for infrastructure and resolve what needs to be resolved to get the Ring of Fire going," Bisson told The Timmins Daily Press.

"This time, there was no mention of it and I think that's kind of significant because it's not even a placeholder anymore. It's like they've given up on that and used the billion dollars that they would have earmarked for the Ring of Fire and put it in other places where they are trying to shore up their political support, mainly in the downtown Toronto area or the GTA."

"This government is completely behind this project," Thibeault responded. "None of that has changed. We recognize the importance of the Ring of Fire and how this project will benefit everyone."

Overall, Premier Kathleen Wynne has said she's "pretty happy with this budget. We've balanced it."

Conservative Leader Patrick Brown disagrees.

"It's actually a \$5-billion operational deficit, so Ontario is not balanced," he said. "That's a sham, that's a charade, that (Finance Minister Charles) Sousa is trying to present to the public, but it's misleading."

Brown said the Grits are balancing the books by using one-time money, such as the Hydro One sale, revenue from government asset sales, government land sales and double-counting the cap-and-trade money, as well as federal infrastructure money.

But Wynne said provincial revenues are up, helping balance the budget, for a basic reason.

"The Ontario economy is doing very well," she said, adding, "it is government's job to make sure" all Ontarians can benefit from the strong economy.

One such budget measure is the pharmacare program for children and youths, covering prescriptions for most acute and common chronic conditions for those age 24 and younger, with no deductions or co-payment, starting Jan. 1.

But Brown said it's not a fair plan.

"I'd like a plan that's more equitable. What I mean by that: I don't believe millionaire kids need help paying for their prescriptions," he said. "Do I think (Canadian pop music star) Justin Bieber needs to have his prescriptions paid for under this plan?" But Wynne said Ontario doesn't do a "means test" for things like hip replacement and other procedures -people just have it covered. That's what universal care is.

The 2017 budget also includes previous announcements, such as the 25 per cent cut in hydro rates by this summer.

Wynne said this is not early campaigning ahead of the 2018 Ontario election.

"For a couple of years, we've been trying to find ways to help people with their electricity bills," she said, using the Ontario Electricity Support Program, to help low-income Ontarians, as an example. "We realized that wasn't enough."

Wynne said she is used to hearing critics claim this is premature electioneering, but "that can't stop me ... from doing the things that are right."

Brown disagreed. "Most likely, the next budget will be a glorified platform," he said. "I think this one is their election budget."

The PC boss said there need to be structural changes to hydro -stop selling Hydro One shares, rein in executive salaries, stop over-generating water power and having to give it away, and stop signing new generation contracts. With files from By Bob Bruton, Nathan Taylor, Postmedia
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Daily Miner & News (Kenora) investment in health care falls : hospitals real needs: Campbell; A3; 2017.05.01

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BYLINE: Sheri Lamb

SOURCE: Daily Miner & News (Kenora)

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ILLUSTRATION: File Photo, Postmedia Network / Kenora MPP Sarah Campbell.;

WORD COUNT: 455

2017 Budget deficits; Liberal investment in health care falls short of Ontario hospitals real needs: Campbell

Ontario's 2017 budget doesn't go far enough to begin to fix problems the Liberals created when they took power 14 years ago, according to Kenora-Rainy River NDP MPP Sarah Campbell.

"It's kind of a theme with this budget, the Liberals haven't done anything to undo the damage they've created over the past 14 years so we're still in a worse situation then we were when the Liberals took over," said Campbell.

The 2017 Ontario budget confirmed the province will invest \$518 million in hospitals in 2017-2018, a three per cent increase in spending, and invest \$9 billion over 10 years in capital grants to support new hospital projects. Campbell said the announced investments falls short of hospitals' real needs.

"The commitment the Liberals have made in this budget is about \$300 million short of what hospitals say that they need and the government has essentially pinned hospital funding down to the annual rate of inflation of two per cent," said Campbell. "This would only help hospitals keep things as they are, but it does nothing to recognize and address the nine years of cuts and the four years of frozen budgets that hospitals have had under the Liberals."

But, it's the Liberals "fix" for high energy costs that is most disappointing to Campbell.

The budget proposes Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan to start in the summer, which suggests household electricity costs will be lowered by an average of 25 per cent and rate increases will be capped to inflation for the next four years.

According to Campbell, the energy relief appears to be a dressed up distraction and won't solve the real problem of overwhelming hydro costs.

"People are telling me they don't want something gimmicky, which is kind of actually what the Liberals have offered," she said. "They're looking for real, permanent, meaningful change. What the Liberals have offered is essentially a 30-year hydro mortgage with a four-year fixed rate, that does nothing to address the underlying costs and reasons hydro is as high as it is."

"If the government doesn't take a hard look at what it's doing and how it's contributed to high hydro rates, we're not only not going to get them under control for now, but we're just downloading these costs and amortizing them over many years onto the backs of our kids and the next generation," she added.

Even though there are some positive benefits for northern Ontarians in the budget for travel expenses related to OHIP medical trips and for providing prescription drugs for people under 25 free of charge, Campbell said she was disappointed there was no mention about funding for the long-promised Highway 17 twinning project and the cleanup of the river system in Grassy Narrows.

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Daily Miner & News (Kenora) News'; Mayor Dave Canfield responds to new provincial budget; A3; 2017.05.01

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BYLINE: Kathleen Charlebois

SOURCE: Daily Miner & News (Kenora)

KEYWORDS: ontario,first,balanced,budget,decade,mayor

ILLUSTRATION: File Photo / Mayor of Kenora Dave Canfield.;

WORD COUNT: 453

'Good news'; Mayor Dave Canfield responds to new provincial budget

Ontario has its first balanced budget in a decade and Mayor Dave Canfield said that's one of the many good things about it.

The Kenora mayor responded to the provincial budget for 2017, which was released on Thursday, April 27, and how it will affect the municipality and the surrounding region.

Many people were listening for news of relief from high hydro bills. Finance Minister Charles Sousa announced that the Fair Hydro Plan would lower eligible household electricity costs by an average of 25 per cent starting in the summer. Families living in remote, rural and onreserve First Nations communities would also receive additional relief.

"It appears some of our residents are paying quite a bit more for electricity and they'll be getting somewhat of a break," Canfield said, and added it's "obviously a good thing" and will bring their bills more in line with Kenora Hydro customers.

"I think that's going to make some of our residents happy," he said.

The budget also included increased supports for home renters and buyers through the Fair Housing Plan, and Canfield said "we'll have to see how it shakes out."

Another positive for Canfield in the budget is the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, which will reach \$300 million per year by 2018-19. "That's going to be forming a base, and that means on an annual basis we're going to be getting quite a bit more money for infrastructure," he said.

The mayor noted that the infrastructure funding that will go towards public transit is "not a big deal" for most communities in Northwestern Ontario, aside from Kenora and Thunder Bay, and he said the city's transit system is already sufficiently funded.

One item that wasn't in the budget was the inter-community bus transportation project for Northwestern Ontario. "We were kind of hoping it would be there and it's not there yet," said Canfield, who said he is still dealing and talking about the project with the government.

"It's definitely not a dead issue."

A lobby issue that the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association had been pushing for was with railway taxation, which came through in the budget.

"We had been asking because it's taxed differently in the Western provinces than it is here," said Canfield, who is now past president of the association.

According to the budget, the province will take action to address concerns in regards to rate variation and set a minimum of \$80 an acre for property tax rates.

"It's not everything we wanted, but it's getting us there. It's opened the door, and that's been on our lobby sheet for the last year or so," Canfield said. He added that it will help municipalities "somewhat" if a rail line goes through it.