

Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - April 20, 2017

From: "Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)" <jeffrey.stinson@ontario.ca>
To: "@OPO-Media Relations and Issues Management" <opo-mediarelationsandissuesmgmt@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "Bevan, Andrew (OPO)" <andrew.bevan@ontario.ca>, "McEachern, Gillian (OPO)" <gillian.mceachern@ontario.ca>, "Donelson, Philip (OPO)" <philip.donelson@ontario.ca>, "Bossin, Bryan (OPO)" <bryan.bossin@ontario.ca>, "Tomney, Genevieve (OPO)" <genevieve.tomney@ontario.ca>, "@CAB-Trans CO" <cab-transco@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "Baker, Carys (ENERGY)" <carys.baker@ontario.ca>, "Berry, James (ENERGY)" <james.berry5@ontario.ca>, "Bodrug, Andrew (ENERGY)" <andrew.bodrug@ontario.ca>, "Campbell, David (ENERGY)" <david.campbell2@ontario.ca>, "Coker, Meaghan (ENERGY)" <meaghan.coker@ontario.ca>, "Den Heijer, Kevin (ENERGY)" <kevin.denheijer@ontario.ca>, "Esdaile, Trevor (ENERGY)" <trevor.esdaile@ontario.ca>, "Festeryga, Katherine (ENERGY)" <katherine.festeryga@ontario.ca>, "Foster, David (ENERGY)" <david.foster@ontario.ca>, "Iqbal, Muhammad (ENERGY)" <muhammad.iqbal2@ontario.ca>, "McGrath, Jessica (ENERGY)" <jessica.mcgrath@ontario.ca>, "Moseley-Williams, Kate (ENERGY)" <kate.moseley-williams@ontario.ca>, "Nekolaichuk, Colin (ENERGY)" <colin.nekolaichuk@ontario.ca>, "Olsheski, Mark (ENERGY)" <mark.olsheski@ontario.ca>, "Ramasra, Raynier (ENERGY)" <raynier.ramasra@ontario.ca>, "Ruttan, Craig (ENERGY)" <craig.ruttan@ontario.ca>, "Teliszewsky, Andrew (ENERGY)" <andrew.teliszewsky@ontario.ca>, "Thompson, Rachel (ENERGY)" <rachel.thompson@ontario.ca>, "Tresise, Landon (ENERGY)" <landon.tresise@ontario.ca>, "Tretiakov, Ilia (ENERGY)" <ilia.tretiakov@ontario.ca>, "Walman, Evan (ENERGY)" <evan.walman@ontario.ca>
Cc: "Sumi, Craig (CAB)" <craig.sumi@ontario.ca>, "Di Giovanni, Robert (CAB)" <robert.digiovanni@ontario.ca>, "Law, Sally (CAB)" <sally.law@ontario.ca>, "Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)" <jeffrey.stinson@ontario.ca>, "Nutter, George (ENERGY)" <george.nutter@ontario.ca>, "Halford, Gavin (ENERGY)" <gavin.halford@ontario.ca>, Electronic Media <cab.amedia@ontario.ca>
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Print Coverage

Toronto Star: Premier says she's here to stay despite MPP concerns; A7; 2017.04.20

PUBLICATION: Toronto Star
PAGE: A7
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SECTION: News
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BYLINE: Robert Benzie Toronto Star
KEYWORDS: defiant,premier,kathleen,wynne,going,anywhere
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Premier says she's here to stay despite MPP concerns

A defiant Premier Kathleen Wynne said she is not going anywhere despite concern within the governing Liberals that her unpopularity is hurting the party.

"I've made a decision, with the support of my caucus, to go into the next election," Wynne told reporters at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa on Wednesday.

"We have important work still to do. We're on the verge of . . . bringing in a balanced budget for the first time in nearly a decade," she said, referring to Finance Minister Charles Sousa's April 27 budget.

"That will allow us to do more of the things that are needed in this province, whether it's in health care, whether it's in infrastructure."

Her comments came in the wake of a front-page Star story on Tuesday that revealed unease within the Liberal Party because Wynne badly trails Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown and NDP Leader Andrea Horwath in public opinion polls.

The Star revealed that more than a dozen Liberal MPPs are considering not running again in the June 7, 2018, election over concern her numbers will drag them down.

"I understand that there is a political story around personal popularity, but that's actually beside the point for me," the premier said firmly.

"The point for me is to do the work that I was elected to do with the support of my colleagues," she said, flanked by Attorney General Yasir Naqvi, Community Safety and Correctional Services Minister Marie-France Lalonde and MPP Nathalie Des Rosiers (Ottawa-Vanier).

"Of course, there are political calculations along the way. There always are.

"I've been in this office since 2013. We won a majority in 2014 and we have been doing the work that we were elected to do."

Asked why her personal popularity appears to be down - the economy is performing well and residential electricity rates are being cut by 25 per cent this year - Wynne smiled gamely.

"I'm going to leave that to the pundits and to the press . . . to analyze."

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The Hamilton Spectator: Defiant Wynne says she'll lead party into next election; A7; 2017.04.20

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Defiant Wynne says she'll lead party into next election

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The Star disclosed that some Grits are worried about continuing organizational challenges in the Ontario Liberal Party.

One senior Liberal admitted the revelations in the Star were a "wake-up call" for a party that has been in power since October 2003.

To that end, the Grits are touting the skills of campaign co-chairs David Herle, and prominent lawyer Tim Murphy, as well as campaign director Chad Walsh, a rising star in the party.

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Waterloo Region Record: Wynne insists she's not going anywhere; A4; 2017.04.20

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Collingwood Enterprise-Bulletin: Liberals spin fake news to hide energy debacles; A4; 2017.04.20

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Liberals spin fake news to hide energy debacles

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne and her cabinet ministers excel at alternative facts and fake news. The latest example was Finance Minister Charles Sousa's speech Thursday to The Empire Club, part of which boasted about how the Liberals saved Ontario's electricity system.

As a result, Sousa said, Ontario's electricity grid is now "the envy of North America" because the Liberals restored "integrity and reliability" to it, unlike neighbouring Canadian provinces and the rust belt states. Simply put, what on Earth is Sousa talking about? Hydro One controls the transmission of electricity through 29,000 km of hydro lines in Ontario and provides electricity to 1.3 million customers. In her December, 2015 annual report, Ontario Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk said between 2010 and 2014, Hydro One customers experienced 24 per cent more power outages, lasting 30 per cent longer, while costs to run the system increased by 31 per cent. She described Hydro One as "consistently one of the least reliable among large Canadian electricity distributors."

She said its maintenance backlog increased by 47 per cent and power outages by seven per cent, between 2012 and 2014.

Lysyk reported the risk of power failures was increasing because Hydro One hadn't replaced \$4.5 billion in transmission assets, "that have exceeded their planned useful service life."

In 2014, former Ontario ombudsman Andre Marin reported that trying to get straight answers out of Hydro One on its horrendous customer billing practices, following complaints by 10,000 customers, was like, "wrestling with a slippery pig."

He said Hydro One had issued more than 100,000 incorrect bills, covering everything from unexplained billings, to "catch-up" bills, "estimated" bills, multiple bills and over-billing.

Wynne is now selling 60 per cent of Hydro One to the private sector, putting it beyond the scrutiny of the auditor general and ombudsman.

Sousa said the government now realizes electricity rates are too high, which is why it's cutting them by a total of 25 per cent in June (by increasing the province's debt to subsidize them).

While Sousa didn't mention it, prior to this announcement, the Liberals claimed electricity pricing in Ontario was in the middle of the pack compared to Canada and the U.S.

Hydro Quebec does an annual comparison of electricity rates in major cities, standardized for a monthly consumption of 1,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh), with all prices in Canadian currency.

Its 2016 survey found electricity prices for residential customers in Toronto of 17.81 cents per kilowatt/hour and in Ottawa of 16.15 cents per kilowatt/hour.

That was higher than in Vancouver (10.70 cents per kilowatt/hour); Calgary (10.40); Edmonton (10.37); Regina (14.65); Winnipeg (8.43); Montreal (7.23); Halifax (15.88); Moncton (12.50); Charlottetown (16.02); St. John's (11.96); Seattle (13.62); Portland (13.94); Chicago (15.19); Nashville (14.28); Houston (11.25) and Miami (11.67).

The Toronto and Ottawa rates were lower than in San Francisco (31.05 cents per kilowatt/hour); Detroit (20.24); Boston (27.69) and New York (29.52).

Thus, according to Hydro Quebec's major cities survey, Ontario's residential electricity rates are the highest in Canada and only in the mid-range when you add in American cities.

An accurate statement in Sousa's Empire Club speech regarding hydro was that the system needed upgrading when the Liberals came into power in 2003 because of past neglect by governments of all stripes, including Liberals.

But much of it was firmly in the realm of alternative facts and fake news. Igoldstein@postmedia.com
