Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - April 27, 2017

From: Electronic Media <cab.emedia@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.emedia@ontario.ca>
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Morning Media Scan: April 27 2017

MEDIA SCAN:HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

April 27, 2017

Click links below to view article:

Print Coverage

Toronto Star: Sousa's balanced budget may boost Wynne in next election; A8; 2017.04.27

PUBLICATION: Toronto Star
PAGE: A8
DATE: 2017.04.27
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EDITION: ONT
BYLINE: Robert Benzie and Rob Ferguson Toronto Star
KEYWORDS: finance,minister,charles,sousa,tabling,balanced
WORD COUNT: 265

Sousa's balanced budget may boost Wynne in next election; Eliminated deficit means more help for Ontarians from province, premier says

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Finance Minister Charles Sousa is tabling a balanced budget with no tax hikes for Ontarians in hopes of tilting the scales for Premier Kathleen Wynne's re-election next spring.

On the eve of Thursday's financial blueprint, Wynne said eliminating the annual deficit means voters can expect more help from Queen's Park in their daily lives.

"We now, with a balanced budget, have a responsibility to make sure we tackle the needs people are confronting in this globally uncertain economy," the premier told the legislature Wednesday.

Her government has already promised to reduce electricity prices an average of 17 per cent starting in June, on top of the 8-per-cent rebate of the provincial HST on hydro bills that took effect in January. That 25-per-cent total, which she has been touting since it was unveiled last month, is part of a charm offensive to prove the Liberals understand that people are feeling pinched.

With an election on June 7, 2018, Wynne has been languishing in public-opinion polls behind Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown and NDP Leader Andrea Horwath.

That's why last week the premier announced a 16-point plan to make housing more affordable in south Ontario - with a 15-per-cent foreign buyers tax and new rent controls limiting hikes to inflation. In the first balanced budget in the province since 2008, Sousa is promising new funding for child care, health care, affordable housing and respite care, among other measures.

"We're balancing the books tomorrow. We're balancing the books next year. We're balancing the books the year after that and we're investing in the people of Ontario," he said.

Toronto Sun: Suddenly the NDP is back in the game; A17; 2017.04.27

PUBLICATION: Toronto Sun
PAGE: A17
DATE: 2017.04.27
SECTION: Comment
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Tomparkin
SOURCE: Toronto Sun
KEYWORDS: federal,disappointing,election,result,attitude,telling
WORD COUNT: 582

Suddenly the NDP is back in the game

Since the federal party's disappointing 2015 election result, the NDP's hang-dog attitude has been a telling feature.

But suddenly, in several provincial capitals, the social democrats have their confidence back - and are in the hunt to win governments again.

Without doubt, John Horgan's BC New Democrats are a key reason. After a disastrous flame-out by his predecessor in the 2013 campaign - which the NDP started with a 20 point lead - Horgan is providing the right mix of affable BBQ dad and compassionate competence. BC voters head to the polls May 9.

Many British Columbians just want to defeat the Christy Clark Liberals - and Horgan is the way to do that. But Horgan is also presenting a practical alternative focused on jobs, affordability and fixing services people depend on.

His commitment to address the opioid crisis stands out as a symbol of the humanity of his plan. And his pledge to immediately fight Trump's softwood lumber tariff contrasts with Clark's delay and praise for Trump - who she weirdly called a better "dancing partner" on trade than Obama.

In Saskatchewan, the NDP has suddenly spiked in opinion polls, nearly pulling even with Premier Brad Wall's Saskatchewan Party. During last spring's election Wall hid the ugly budget impact of low oil prices. Now, after re-election, he's cutting libraries, the provincial bus company - even a fund that gives dignified burials when the province's poorest people die. There's been anger.

Needing to distract voters, Wall picked a fight with Alberta's NDP Premier, Rachel Notley, offering to give money to Calgary oil companies that relocate to Regina. But that ploy backfired when it turned out Wall had personal investments in the very oil companies he wanted to subsidize. Oops.

Meanwhile, Notley's NDP remains the under-dog defying the pundits. True, she's back down in the polls at the mid-term mark. But her refusal to make Albertans pay for the oil price crisis by firing teachers and nurses - as her opponents demand - is a powerful narrative.

She's run a clean government for two years. In the first three months of this year, her party raised over 30% more money than her closest rival. Now Alberta is again Canada's job-creation leader, adding 20,000 new full-time jobs last month - and a glimmer of economic optimism. All those threads, and Notley's character, mean the NDP remains in the hunt.

But perhaps the biggest confidence boost is in Ontario where NDP leader Andrea Horwath is on a roll. Premier Wynne looks tired and defeated, trying one trick after another to distract from the right-wing policies she followed after winning election.

Her trick on hydro bills - mortgaging electricity costs further into the future - flopped. Next she's launched a guaranteed annual income pilot project. More studies like this will please policy wonks, but it won't beat the political magnetism Horwath is offering.

Horwath has gone from strength to strength. She's the protector of Toronto's transit one month and pledging a $15 minimum wage the next. She's tabled a plan to drive costs out of the electricity system. She's pushed Wynne on rent control. And she's followed it all up with a pledge to establish universal pharmacare. Ontarians have noticed - and Horwath's NDP is rising in the polls.

How this sudden burst of momentum will influence the federal NDP leadership race is anyone's guess. But here's a truth: Confidence builds confidence.

Tom Parkin is a former NDP staffer and social democrat media commentator @Tom_Parkin_

Waterloo Region Record: Ontario's first balanced budget in 10 years heavy on spending; A10; 2017.04.27

PUBLICATION:	Waterloo Region Record
PAGE:	A10
DATE:	2017.04.27
SECTION:	NEWS
EDITION:	First
BYLINE:	Allison Jones and Jessica Smith Cross
SOURCE:	The Canadian Press
KEYWORDS:	liberal,government,release,first,balanced,budget
ILLUSTRATION:	Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa, left, delivers the 2016 Ontario budget next to Premier Kathleen Wynne, right, in February of last year.Nathan Denette, The Canadian Press
WORD COUNT:	654

Ontario's first balanced budget in 10 years heavy on spending

Ontario's Liberal government will release its first balanced budget in a decade on Thursday, with a host of new spending measures focused on pocketbook issues that it hopes will resonate with voters heading into an election year.

Premier Kathleen Wynne has in the past few years focused on big-picture plans for the province, such as tackling climate change, massive infrastructure spending and pension reform.

But as her party and personal popularity have tanked in the polls, her message has shifted to that of fairness and everyday affordability.

She recently unveiled a "Fair Hydro Plan" and a "Fair Housing Plan" and in a speech Monday to announce details of a basic income pilot project, fairness was a theme she often returned to.

"In this time of turmoil, we must work harder than ever to build and preserve a fair society," she said. "We must make sure that hard work is rewarded with a decent paycheque. We must make sure that the opportunities available to our people and especially our young people not only endure, but grow."

By eliminating the deficit, Ontario is in a position to do those things, she said.

"My plan builds on the action we have taken and the investments we have made over the past five years," Wynne said. "It takes dead aim at the challenges that confront us in this new, uncertain world. It puts fairness at the heart of all we do and all we aspire to achieve for the people of Ontario."

Wynne said her approach is not to "cut back on public services, reduce taxes, slash regulations on corporations and let the results trickle down."

That wouldn't help people who are struggling, Wynne said, adding that the three main elements to her plan are creating a "fair economy," a "fair future for Ontario workers," and education.

Ontario's finance minister has already announced that the budget will contain new spending to benefit seniors, students, parents, caregivers and patients.

"I'm balancing the budget and I'm proud of that, but that's not an end in itself," Charles Sousa told The Canadian Press in a recent interview. "It's what are we doing as a result of the balance."

Sousa has announced the budget will include a public transit tax credit for seniors 65 years and older.

He has also promised a "booster shot" for health care, specifically funding to deal with the problem of overcrowded hospitals, which forces patients to be placed in hallways and other unconventional spaces.

On Tuesday, ministers also announced $20 million will go to funding to increase the available respite services for unpaid caregivers who help friends and family members.

The government is also launching an initiative to create 40,000 job training placements and internships over three years for students of all ages and recent graduates, as part of a $190-million Career Kick-Start Strategy.

In a recent speech, Sousa highlighted investments the government has made in the innovation sector, saying more of that can be expected in the budget as the government embraces, "new, potentially

disruptive technologies."
Sousa has said the budget will refer to the recent housing affordability measures the government announced. However, Sousa's office said there is "no line in the budget" attributed to a newly announced 15 per cent foreign buyer tax. It's expected to be revenue neutral, as any money coming in should offset a decrease in revenue from land transfer tax.
Cuts to hydro bills will add nearly $2 billion to the budget. An eight per cent rebate that took effect Jan. 1 is estimated to cost $1 billion a year, and more measures announced last month to help low-income and rural residents will cost taxpayers about $833 million a year.
Even with a balanced budget this year, Ontario will still have debt of more than $300 billion. In 2016-17, interest on debt was the province's fourth-largest spending area, with $11.4 billion of interest on approximately $317 billion of debt.

The Hamilton Spectator: Budget balanced, Ontario ready to spend; A12; 2017.04.27

PUBLICATION: The Hamilton Spectator
PAGE: A12
DATE: 2017.04.27
SECTION: Canada / World
EDITION: First
BYLINE: Allison Jones and Jessica Smith Cross The Canadian Press
KEYWORDS: liberal,government,release,first,balanced,budget
ILLUSTRATION: Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa, left, said he's proud of balancing the budget, but 'that's not an end in itself.'Nathan Denette, The Canadian Press
WORD COUNT: 480

Budget balanced, Ontario ready to spend

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Ottawa Citizen: 'Fair society'expected as focus of budget; N4; 2017.04.27

PUBLICATION: Ottawa Citizen
PAGE: N4
DATE: 2017.04.27
SECTION: News
EDITION: Early
BYLINE: Allison Jones and Jessica Smith Cross
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
KEYWORDS: liberal,government,release,first,balanced,budget
ILLUSTRATION: Veronica Henri, Toronto Sun, Postmedia Network / Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa is expected to reveal a balanced budget on Thursday.;
IMAGES: Veronica Henri, Toronto Sun, Postmedia Network / Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa is expected to reveal a balanced budget on Thursday. [OTCT_20170427_Early_N4_03_I001.jpg];
DATELINE: TORONTO
WORD COUNT: 519

'Fair society'expected as focus of budget; Ontario Liberals Balanced first time in decade

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Additionally, $200 million will go toward creating 24,000 child-care spaces and subsidies for families for about 60 per cent of those spots - as part of the government's promise last year to create 100,000 more licensed spaces.
Cuts to hydro bills will add nearly $2 billion to the budget. An eight-per-cent rebate that took effect Jan. 1 is estimated to cost $1 billion a year, and more measures announced last month to help low-income and rural residents will cost taxpayers about $833 million a year.
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London Free Press: A balanced budget, with benefits; Ontario Liberals focus on affordability issues, while opposition questions their math; A6; 2017.04.27

PUBLICATION: London Free Press
PAGE: A6
DATE: 2017.04.27
SECTION: Ontario
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Allison Jones And Jessica Smith Cross
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
KEYWORDS: liberal,government,release,first,balanced,budget
ILLUSTRATION: Canadian Press File / Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa presents his budget today at Queen's Park, as he did last February, above, next to Premier Kathleen Wynne. The Liberals are pledging to balance the books, despite new spending.;
DATELINE: TORONTO
WORD COUNT: 889

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No further such housing measures will be unveiled in the budget, Sousa said Wednesday, but there will be measures on social housing for low-income residents.
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The official opposition maintains the Liberals will achieve only "fake" balance in the budget as a political ploy ahead of the 2018 election. The Progressive Conservatives have even created a "Chef Charles Sousa" online caricature who talks about "cooking the books." PC Leader Patrick Brown said he believes the Liberals can only balance the budget by dramatically cutting services or raising taxes, or by using accounting "tricks." He's watching out for two such tricks: counting public pension surpluses as assets, against the advice of the province's auditor general, and counting revenue from the partial sale of Hydro One against the deficit, when the money is intended for a separate trust for infrastructure projects.
"It's Chef Sousa cooking the books to look good in an election year," said Brown.
Ontario's NDP also sees politics in the budget.
"The government's had 14 years to address the problems that we've seen in this province, and they're now scrambling at the last minute to save their own political skin, as opposed to really being concerned about the realities of life for Ontarians," said Deputy Leader Jagmeet Singh.

Windsor Star: 'Fair society'expected as focus of budget; Ontario Liberals Balanced first time in decade; N4; 2017.04.27

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SECTION:	Canada
EDITION:	Early
BYLINE:	Allison Jones and Jessica Smith Cross
SOURCE:	The Canadian Press
KEYWORDS:	liberal,government,release,first,balanced,budget
ILLUSTRATION:	Veronica Henri, Toronto Sun, Postmedia Network / Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa is expected to reveal a balanced budget on Thursday.;
IMAGES:	Veronica Henri, Toronto Sun, Postmedia Network / Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa is expected to reveal a balanced budget on Thursday. [WIST_20170427_Early_N4_03_I001.jpg];
DATELINE:	TORONTO
WORD COUNT:	519

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PUBLICATION:	Ottawa Sun
PAGE:	A15
DATE:	2017.04.27
SECTION:	Comment
EDITION:	Final
BYLINE:	Tom Parkin
SOURCE:	Ottawa Sun
KEYWORDS:	federal,disappointing,election,result,attitude,telling
WORD COUNT:	582

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Her trick on hydro bills - mortgaging electricity costs further into the future - flopped. Next she's launched a guaranteed annual income pilot project. More studies like this will please policy wonks, but it won't beat the political magnetism Horwarth is offering.
Horwath has gone from strength to strength. She's the protector of Toronto's transit one month and pledging a $15 minimum wage the next. She's tabled a plan to drive costs out of the electricity system. She's pushed Wynne on rent control. And she's followed it all up with a pledge to establish universal pharmacare. Ontarians have noticed - and Horwath's NDP is rising in the polls.
How this sudden burst of momentum will influence the federal NDP leadership race is anyone's guess. But here's a truth: Confidence builds confidence.
Tom Parkin is a former NDP staffer and social democrat media commentator @Tom_Parkin_

Wallaceburg Courier Press: County zapped by electricity rebate criteria; A7; 2017.04.27

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County zapped by electricity rebate criteria

Ontario's much-hyped electricity rebates don't appear to be helping cash-strapped rural municipalities as much as anticipated.
The County of Lambton is anticipating it'll save just about $165,000 in energy costs this year as a direct result of the province's eight per cent rebate that came into effect Jan. 1.
And despite the introduction of a new 17 per cent rebate - anticipated to come into effect this summer - the county is just projecting an additional $170,000 in savings through that rebate this year.
Those savings come from the 60 different county-run locations with electrical services.
"I was kind of amazed that you've indicated we're only saving $170,000," Brooke-Alvinston Mayor Don McGugan told county finance staff during an April 19 committee meeting.
The County of Lambton hasn't seen more savings so far because only some of its buildings qualify for the eight per cent rebate, said John Innes, the county's general manager of finance.
Under provincial rules, the eight per cent rebate is only available to residential customers, multi-unit dwellings in a residential complex, general service customers using less than 50 kilowatts and general service customers using more than 50 kilowatts if their annual usage is less than 250,000 kilowatts per hour per year.
For the County of Lambton, that means most of its social housing units and smaller properties, like ambulance bases, are receiving the rebate but not its larger non-residential locations, according to a staff report prepared for the meeting.
McGugan said his municipality is also struggling to capitalize on the electricity rebate.
"My arena isn't covered, but my water and sewage plants are," he said.
Innes said municipalities are essentially being asked to prioritize their electricity usage.
"From the province's standpoint, you can choose to not run your arena, but you can't not run your water plant," he said.

County finance staff are trying to find out the province's criteria for the 17 per cent rebate, Innes noted, but details have so far been scarce.
McGugan said it's also been a struggle for his municipality to get more information about the rebate criteria directly from the province.
"I don't think anyone knows what's going on except the premier."

Sarnia This Week: County zapped by electricity rebate criteria; A13; 2017.04.27

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Hanover Post: United Way reaching out to community regarding electricity charge

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United Way reaching out to community regarding electricity charge changes

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May 1 will bring changes to electricity files for the United Way of Bruce Grey.

The United Way is reaching out to the community and reminding residents who are in arrears on their electricity bills, that the winter disconnection ban is lifting on that date.

"Consumers who are behind can find themselves disconnected if they have not made payment arrangements or resourced communities supports" said United Way executive director Francesca Dobbyn. "We encourage everyone who is behind to call 211 to connect to community services".

Applying to the LEAP (Lowincome Energy Assistance Program) puts a 21 day hold on a disconnection and gives applicants time to complete the application. If an applicant has already accessed the LEAP program there may be other resources to assist with arrears. Consumers can find out about those programs by calling 211.

May 1 also marks significant changes to electricity rates across the province.

· Off peak charges are dropping to 7.7 cents kwh (11% reduction) · Mid-peak is dropping from 13.2 cents kwh to 11.3 cents kWh (14% reduction) · On-peak is dropping from 18 cents kWh to 15.7 cents kWh (13% reduction).

The OESP (Ontario Electricity Support Program) a rebate for eligible low income consumers will see a 50% increase in the monthly rebate. A consumer who has a $30 monthly rebate will automatically go to $45 a month. Consumers heating with electricity will have a base rate change from $45 a month to $68 a month.

"The OESP is a simple mechanism to increase supports to a cohort of consumers already verified as low income" Dobbyn said. "Applying for the OESP is fairly simple and there are many agencies in the community, including the United Way that can assist with an application for qualifying households".

To qualify the electricity bill has to be in the applicant's name and meet income guidelines. The income guidelines are available by calling 211.

"As the provinces implements the various components of the Fair Hydro Plan, we expect electricity bills to further drop" Dobbyn stated, "there are more changes coming on the delivery side for our most rural residents, but I don't have a clear timeline on those changes, and the degree those changes will affect consumer bills."

Since October 1, 2016, the United Way has processed over 160 applications for electricity support with another 50 files in the application process. This represents $83 000 in support provided to assist with $122 000 in arrears with $40 000 in arrears to be processed.