

Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - June 2, 2017

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Date: Fri, 02 Jun 2017 08:55:56 -0400
Attachments: 20170602 - Media Scan - Hydro Rate Reduction (Morning Scan).doc (440.83 kB)

Morning Media Scan: June 2, 2017

MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

June 2, 2017

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Print Coverage

Toronto Star: Tories stun Liberals with byelection win; Capture Sault Ste. Marie for first time since 1981, handing Wynne fifth defeat in a row; A7; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Toronto Star
PAGE: A7
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: News
EDITION: ONT Replate
BYLINE: Rob Ferguson Toronto Star
KEYWORDS: progressive,conservatives,dealt,another,premier,kathleen
WORD COUNT: 577

Tories stun Liberals with byelection win; Capture Sault Ste. Marie for first time since 1981, handing Wynne fifth defeat in a row

The Progressive Conservatives dealt another blow to Premier Kathleen Wynne at the polls on Thursday, winning the key northern riding of Sault Ste. Marie for the first time since 1981.

It was the fifth consecutive byelection victory over the Liberals for PC Leader Patrick Brown and makes Sault city councillor Ross Romano the city's new MPP just 12 months before next June's province-wide vote.

His triumph in what was seen as a two-way fight with the NDP gives the Conservatives another foothold in the north, a region Brown has visited 10 times this year to woo support.

"Tonight we have won a riding that hasn't been held by the PCs for over 30 years," a jubilant Brown said in a statement.

"Voters have made it clear that it's only the Ontario PC party that will fight to make life more affordable.

The PCs will be a strong voice for Sault Ste. Marie and northern Ontario."

Romano, who took 40.4 per cent of the vote to 32.9 for the NDP, replaces former Wynne cabinet minister David Orazietti, who resigned in December to begin a new career in the Soo and be closer to his family.

Brown said the victory is another warning sign for the Liberals, in power since 2003.

"Ontario families are sending a strong message that they are tired of paying more and getting less," added Brown, who attended the University of Windsor law school with Romano.

"There is no riding in the province that Kathleen Wynne can take for granted."

The Liberals fell to third place with 23.1 per cent of the vote under the candidacy of former one-term Sault mayor Debbie Amaroso.

New Democrat city councillor Joe Krmpotich placed second in the riding, which NDP Leader Andrea Horwath had hoped to regain given that it was a party stronghold from 1981 to 2003.

In the final days of the campaign, Horwath and Krmpotich increasingly turned their attention to the Conservatives, accusing them of hiding plans for more cuts and privatization.

"The last time Ontarians put our trust in the Conservatives, they fired 6,000 nurses, closed 28 hospitals and slashed over 7,000 hospital beds," Horwath said Wednesday in the Sault.

The byelection result does not change the balance of power at Queen's Park.

The contest came as Wynne cut hydro rates, promised youth pharmacare starting next year and a \$15 minimum wage in 2019 to convince Ontarians she understands the pocketbook challenges they face.

But the NDP and PCs portrayed those efforts as a deathbed conversion as Wynne's Liberals, struggling in public opinion polls, try to improve their fortunes with the provincial election looming in 12 months.

Ironically, the byelection was held on the last day of the legislature's spring session. MPPs return to Queen's Park for the fall sitting on Sept. 11.

Wynne acknowledged more than once during the campaign that it would be "tough" for her Liberals, struggling behind the Conservatives in recent public opinion polls, to win.

While Horwath also supports a \$15 minimum wage, Brown argued Liberal plans to have it hit \$14 on Jan. 1 - six months before the next election - and up another \$1 in 2019 are "too fast."

The majority Liberals now hold 57 seats in the 107-member legislature, including Speaker Dave Levac, to 29 for the Conservatives, 20 for the NDP and 1 for the fledgling Trillium Party after Carleton-Mississippi Mills MPP Jack MacLaren left PC caucus over controversial remarks.

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Toronto Sun: Ontario's Fair Hydro Act 'a Ponzi scheme'; A19; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Toronto Sun

PAGE: A19

DATE: 2017.06.02

SECTION: Comment

EDITION: Final

BYLINE: Alanwhiteley

SOURCE: Toronto Sun

KEYWORDS: following,edited,version,address,lawyer,whiteley

COLUMN: Guest Columnist

WORD COUNT: 566

Ontario's Fair Hydro Act 'a Ponzi scheme'

The following is an edited version of an address made by lawyer Alan Whiteley on May 23 before the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, regarding the Ontario government's Bill 132, the Fair Hydro Act. Residents of Ontario cannot afford electricity at current rates. Some families have to choose between electricity and food. Industries faced with exorbitant charges are relocating to the U.S. Jurisdictions that offer much lower rates are taking jobs with them. An urgent remedy is required. Bill 132 is no remedy. It is a Ponzi scheme. It does not address the root cause of unaffordable electricity rates. Ontario consumers can afford to pay the spot price for electricity they consume. They can even afford to pay the delivery charges, if levied on an equitable basis. What they cannot afford is the global adjustment charge, the difference between the price the government promised to any particular electricity generating company and the "market price" of electricity. Simply put, the government buys high-cost electricity from operators of renewable energy projects, authorized under the Green Energy Act, at multiples of the market price, and then adds that excess to consumer prices. The solution to the problem is patently obvious: Buy electricity only at market prices. The grid is awash with electricity at market prices. Every day, hydro generating stations spill water and nuclear power generating stations steam off heat because their carbon-free electricity is not required. In addition, Quebec exports huge amounts of power from its northern hydro dams, all at market rates. But instead of recognizing that the current crisis in electricity is the direct result of the disastrous Green Energy Act (2009), this government seeks to defer the problem by inflicting it on future generations. Citizens of Ontario expect better than such unethical, unfair and underhanded machinations from their Legislature. Bill 132 states that the "fair allocation amount" is a method of measuring and allocating estimated clean energy costs and estimated clean energy benefits among consumers. But it doesn't address the "clean energy costs" imposed unilaterally and discriminatorily on residents of rural Ontario by the Green Energy Act. Because of setbacks, noise levels, etc., IWTS (industrial wind turbines) can only be erected in rural areas. They are erected in contravention of municipal bylaws, official plans and assessment rights against local objections and are damaging communities economies, human health, land values and environments across rural Ontario. The County Coalition for Safe and Appropriate Green Energy (CCSAGE) is seeking judicial review of the Green Energy Act and a declaration that by imposing all of the non-monetary costs of IWTS on rural Ontario, the act violates Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in that it deprives residents of rural Ontario of the benefit of sound land use planning principles and amounts to discrimination that has the effect of demeaning the human dignity of residents of rural Ontario. CCSAGE fully expects to win this case, in which event every IWT erected in Ontario will be illegal. The \$28 million that the World Trade Organization recently ordered Ontario to pay to (a wind developer) for imposing a moratorium on offshore IWTS will fade into insignificance compared to amounts demanded by IWT operators to compensate for (their) operating permits. Bill 132 won't solve that problem. Whiteley is counsel to CCSAGE which is seeking judicial review of the Green Energy Act and opposing the indiscriminate industrialization of rural Ontario

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Sudbury Star: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A10; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Sudbury Star
PAGE: A10
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final

BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: Sudbury Star
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

Ontario election could be sooner than you think

Ontario's next election will be held June 7, 2018, the Liberal government says. Don't bet on it. 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 younger than 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 trying to get the poll numbers up so 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 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 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, Liberal candidates have plenty of attractivesounding 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 also would 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 electricity rates, the economy and red tape but the only policy for which he is really known 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.

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PUBLICATION: Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake)
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake)
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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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. - Randall Denley is an Ottawa commentator and former Ontario PC candidate. randalldenley1@gmail.com

Welland Tribune: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A4; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Welland Tribune
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: Welland Tribune
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
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The Timmins Daily Press: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A4; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: The Timmins Daily Press
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: The Timmins Daily Press
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
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Peterborough Examiner: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A4;
2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Peterborough Examiner
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
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BYLINE: Randall Denley
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Niagara Falls Review: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A4; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Niagara Falls Review
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: Niagara Falls Review
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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North Bay Nugget: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A4; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: North Bay Nugget
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: North Bay Nugget
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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Cornwall Standard Freeholder: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A6; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Cornwall Standard Freeholder
PAGE: A6
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: Cornwall Standard Freeholder
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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The Brockville Recorder & Times: Ontario election could be sooner than you think;
A6; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: The Brockville Recorder & Times
PAGE: A6
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion

EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: The Brockville Recorder & Times
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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PUBLICATION: Brantford Expositor
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: Brantford Expositor
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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The Barrie Examiner: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; C2;
2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: The Barrie Examiner
PAGE: C2
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: The Barrie Examiner
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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St. Catharines Standard: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A4;
2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: St. Catharines Standard
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: St. Catharines Standard
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
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Daily Observer (Pembroke): Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A5; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Daily Observer (Pembroke)
PAGE: A5
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: Daily Observer (Pembroke)
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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The Chatham Daily News: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A4; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: The Chatham Daily News
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: The Chatham Daily News
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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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.

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There has to be a reason for this early onslaught of promises, and there are two theories. The first is that Wynne is trying to get the poll numbers up so 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.

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Strategically, this would be a smart move and if there is one thing the Ontario Liberal party is good at, it's election strategy.

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The bottom line is, 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.

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Woodstock Sentinel-Review: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A4; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Woodstock Sentinel-Review
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: Woodstock Sentinel-Review
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 672

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Stratford Beacon-Herald: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A5;
2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Stratford Beacon-Herald
PAGE: A5
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: Stratford Beacon-Herald
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
COLUMN: Randall Denley
WORD COUNT: 671

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The Sault Star: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A7; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: The Sault Star
PAGE: A7
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final

BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: The Sault Star
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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PUBLICATION: The Sault Star
PAGE: A1 / Front
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Elaine Della-Mattia
SOURCE: The Sault Star
KEYWORDS: sault,marie,first,progressive,conservative,ramsay
ILLUSTRATION: Bambang Sadewo, For The Sault Star / Ross Romano gives his victory speech after leading the byelection in Sault Ste. Marie on Thursday, June 1, 2017. He's accompanied by his wife, Heather Mendes, and their three children, and the Ontario's PC leader Patrick Brown.;
WORD COUNT: 881

Ross Romano wins

Sault Ste. Marie has its first Progressive Conservative MPP since Russ Ramsay lost his seat in 1985. "Tomorrow we start day one of the 2018 campaign trail and day one of me keeping my promise that I will fight for the people of Sault Ste. Marie," Ross Romano told reporters just after making his victory speech to a huge crowd of supporters. Romano said voters wanted change, and his single promise to fight for the people of Sault Ste. Marie resonated, he said. "People have long awaited change in Sault Ste. Marie and they see that opportunity in me," Romano said. Romano pulled in front of what had been anticipated to be a tight three-person race with less than a quarter of the 174 polls reporting. Unofficial results peg him with 40.3 per cent of the vote, or 10,391 votes, a victory by more than 1,800 votes over second place finisher NDP Joe Krmpotich. Krmpotich finished with 8,535 votes, or 33 per cent of the ballots cast. Liberal candidate Debbie Amaroso placed a distant third with 5,919 votes, or 22.9 per cent of the ballots cast. Krmpotich held steady for some time early in the count but Romano's victory gap continued to grow, claiming the victory. PC leader Patrick Brown called the results a positive sign for the 2018 general election. "What we're looking at is change for Ontario, that the voters are fed up with the broken ways of this Liberal government, that they're fed up with Hydro bills and deficits and fed up with a government that doesn't value their taxpayer dollars," Brown said. "If one of their safe Liberal seats can change, that's an indicator that change is in the air everywhere in Ontario." Romano called it "an incredible feeling" bringing the PC voice into Queen's Park for Saultites. "We're definitely 30 plus years without a PC in the Sault and I think this is an indication that people want to see a change," he said. At the NDP party headquarters, leader Andrea Horwath told supporters that while the results were not what they were hoping for, the fight isn't over. Horwath said the NDP continues to hear Saultites and will continue to fight for good jobs, pensions, better health care and lower hydro bills. "Our work is far from over," she said to the chanting crowd. "We will not give up." She said the NDP will continue to focus on people, put Hydro One back in public hands and establish a first universal Pharmacare plan that covers everyone. Krmpotich said "we took a hit tonight but what's important is that we get up and continue moving on." He said "we want to turn things around in the Sault and together we are going to fight to continue doing just that." Krmpotich congratulated Romano on his victory and all the other candidates that put their name on the ballot. Liberal Debbie Amaroso also congratulated Ross Romano. "Byelections are always tough for the governing party, but I am proud of the campaign we ran. While Ross and I may have different political views, we share a passion for, and commitment to, this community." Seven candidates sought the member of Provincial Parliament seat for Sault Ste. Marie in the June 1 election.

The ballot included Debbie Amaroso (Lib), Joe Krmpotich (NDP), Ross Romano (PC). It will also include Gene Balfour (Libertarian), Kara Flannigan (Green), John Turmel (Paupers) and Znoneofthe,Above (None of the Above Party).

Former MPP David Orazietti, a city councillor who was elected to represent Sault Ste. Marie at Queen's Park in 2003, stepped down in December, citing the need to be closer to his family.

The PC's Romano got an early start campaigning after the local riding association heard rumblings that Orazietti might step down. While the nomination was billed as one for the 2018 Ontario general election, Romano, a city councillor, began campaigning as soon as Orazietti announced his departure.

His message to voters is that Northern Ontario deserves more - lower hydro rates, better funding for health care services and a chance to make its economic thumb print by moving forward with the Ring of Fire development.

Krmpotich, a strong unionist and city councillor, has also pointed the finger at the Liberals for high hydro costs, the sale of Hydro One and its failure to create good paying jobs with benefits for the younger generation.

Amaroso, a former city councillor and mayor, stepped up to the plate with the party banner about a week before the writ dropped.

Her message to voters is that she should be given the chance and that Sault Ste. Marie does better when it is aligned with the provincial government. She points to a number of largescale infrastructure projects that Sault Ste. Marie has since in the past decade since voters sent a Liberal to Queen's Park, the same time the Liberals formed government.

Outsiders have said that this byelection will set the stage for what could become a trend looking ahead to the June 2018 general election.

In the 2014 general election, the Liberal's easily won the race with 17,490 votes, the NDP's a distant second with 7,611 votes and the Conservatives garnered only 3,703 votes from the ballots cast.

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Sarnia Observer: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A4; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Sarnia Observer
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: Sarnia Observer
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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Owen Sound Sun Times: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A4;
2017.06.02

PUBLICATION:	Owen Sound Sun Times
PAGE:	A4
DATE:	2017.06.02
SECTION:	Opinion
EDITION:	Final
BYLINE:	Randall Denley
SOURCE:	Owen Sound Sun Times
KEYWORDS:	election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT:	671

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London Free Press: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A7; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: London Free Press

PAGE: A7

DATE: 2017.06.02

SECTION: Comment

EDITION: Final

BYLINE: Randall Denley

SOURCE: London Free Press

KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood

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The Belleville Intelligencer: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A6;
2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: The Belleville Intelligencer
PAGE: A6
DATE: 2017.06.02

SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: The Belleville Intelligencer
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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Ottawa Citizen: Ontario must have honest chat about hydro; We can't keep pushing costs onto the next generations; A9; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Ottawa Citizen
PAGE: A9
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Early
BYLINE: Mohammed Adam
SOURCE: Ottawa Citizen
KEYWORDS: reaction,report,financial,accountability,officer,liberal
WORD COUNT: 681

Ontario must have honest chat about hydro; We can't keep pushing costs onto the next generations

The reaction to the report of the province's financial accountability officer on the Liberal hydro relief plan illustrates perfectly the hydro conundrum facing Ontario.

Beset by skyrocketing hydro rates that many cannot afford, we demand relief - and when the government obliges, we complain that the price is too steep. We can't have it both ways. Either we resolve to pay the full cost of electricity, or accept that the cost of the relief we demand would be borne by future ratepayers. We got here after Premier Kathleen Wynne cut electricity prices by 25 per cent for residential users and small businesses. The Liberals touted their plan as refinancing the mortgage on the electricity system by spreading out payment of long-term power-generation contracts over a longer period.

But it was clear that however it is described, relief would not be cheap. You don't get something for nothing, and it must not have come as a surprise when financial accountability officer Stephen LeClair released his sobering numbers.

Cutting electricity prices will save \$24 billion for hydro users, but cost \$45 billion down the road, he said. By getting relief now, we are saddling future ratepayers, 20 years down the road, with a \$21-billion bill. Future electricity prices will rise.

It is obvious the Liberals are punting the problem, but they are doing so because consumers can't, or don't want to, pay the real cost of the power. And the government hasn't got the courage to make us do so. This is not new. The strategy has a long history. The NDP government froze electricity prices in 1994, and after the privatization debacle under Mike Harris, successor Ernie Eves did the same in 2002, despite warnings that it would cost billions. When they came to power in 2003, the Liberals flirted with the idea of having consumers pay the full cost of electricity but abandoned it because of the backlash. And with their bungled green-energy plan, they left a mess of their own.

"The legacy of previous decisions has finally caught up with us," says electricity consultant Tom Adams. Ontario governments have bungled this issue more than any other. The common thread running through all government plans is the desire to keep rates low to placate angry consumers.

There's no doubt that the price of electricity has gone up significantly. Figures show that in the decade since 2006, the cost of off-peak consumption, which accounts for about two-thirds of residential usage, went up about 150 per cent. Mid-peak and peak usage costs also rose considerably.

People are not complaining for nothing.

Many are really hurting.

Faced with massive public outcry over runaway electricity prices that apparently are forcing people out of their homes and driving businesses out of the province, no government would court political suicide by doing nothing. Which is why the Liberals offered relief, and I dare say any other government would too, especially with an election looming.

But if the price of relief is too big to bear for future ratepayers, as some are saying, what's to be done? Some of the expert suggestions out there are not new: End waste and get rid of bad programs that offer little value. Experts like Adams want to kill energy conservation and renewable energy procurement programs, to save billions.

Some might disagree with the choices, and even if common ground can be found, it may not be enough to provide the needed relief. But it is a debate worth having. Perhaps the path to a solution lies in you and me accepting that we are part of the problem, and should be part of the solution.

And then when the election is over, whichever party wins, the government should engage Ontarians in a

serious and honest debate about paying for the real cost of electricity - a debate we've never really had. Like you, I don't want to pay any more for electricity than I am doing now. But we can't keep passing on the cost to generation after generation. We have to share the burden. Mohammed Adam is an Ottawa writer.

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Kingston Whig-Standard: Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A4;
2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Kingston Whig-Standard
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: The Whig-Standard
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 671

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Ottawa Sun: Ontario's Fair Hydro Act 'a Ponzi scheme'; A15; 2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Ottawa Sun
PAGE: A15
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Comment
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Alan Whiteley
SOURCE: Ottawa Sun
KEYWORDS: following,edited,version,address,lawyer,whiteley
COLUMN: Guest Columnist
WORD COUNT: 566

Ontario's Fair Hydro Act 'a Ponzi scheme'

The following is an edited version of an address made by lawyer Alan Whiteley on May 23 before the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, regarding the Ontario government's Bill 132, the Fair Hydro Act. Residents of Ontario cannot afford electricity at current rates.

Some families have to choose between electricity and food.

Industries faced with exorbitant charges are relocating to the U.S.

Jurisdictions that offer much lower rates are taking jobs with them.

An urgent remedy is required. Bill 132 is no remedy. It is a Ponzi scheme.

It does not address the root cause of unaffordable electricity rates.

Ontario consumers can afford to pay the spot price for electricity they consume.

They can even afford to pay the delivery charges, if levied on an equitable basis.

What they cannot afford is the global adjustment charge, the difference between the price the government promised to any particular electricity generating company and the "market price" of electricity.

Simply put, the government buys high-cost electricity from operators of renewable energy projects, authorized under the Green Energy Act, at multiples of the market price, and then adds that excess to consumer prices.

The solution to the problem is patently obvious: Buy electricity only at market prices.

The grid is awash with electricity at market prices.

Every day, hydro generating stations spill water and nuclear power generating stations steam off heat because their carbon-free electricity is not required.

In addition, Quebec exports huge amounts of power from its northern hydro dams, all at market rates.

But instead of recognizing that the current crisis in electricity is the direct result of the disastrous Green Energy Act (2009), this government seeks to defer the problem by inflicting it on future generations.

Citizens of Ontario expect better than such unethical, unfair and underhanded machinations from their Legislature.

Bill 132 states that the "fair allocation amount" is a method of measuring and allocating estimated clean energy costs and estimated clean energy benefits among consumers.

But it doesn't address the "clean energy costs" imposed unilaterally and discriminatorily on residents of rural Ontario by the Green Energy Act.

Because of setbacks, noise levels, etc., IWTs (industrial wind turbines) can only be erected in rural areas. They are erected in contravention of municipal bylaws, official plans and assessment rights against local objections and are damaging communities economies, human health, land values and environments across rural Ontario.

The County Coalition for Safe and Appropriate Green Energy (CCSAGE) is seeking judicial review of the Green Energy Act and a declaration that by imposing all of the non-monetary costs of IWTs on rural Ontario, the act violates Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in that it deprives residents of rural Ontario of the benefit of sound land use planning principles and amounts to discrimination that has the effect of demeaning the human dignity of residents of rural Ontario.

CCSAGE fully expects to win this case, in which event every IWT erected in Ontario will be illegal.

The \$28 million that the World Trade Organization recently ordered Ontario to pay to (a wind developer) for imposing a moratorium on offshore IWTs will fade into insignificance compared to amounts demanded by IWT operators to compensate for (their) operating permits.

Bill 132 won't solve that problem.

Whiteley is counsel to CCSAGE which is seeking judicial review of the Green Energy Act and opposing the indiscriminate industrialization of rural Ontario

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Simcoe Reformer: Ontario Election Could Be Sooner Than You Think; A4;
2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Simcoe Reformer
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Opinio
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: Simcoe Reformer
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 673

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Times-Journal (St.Thomas): Ontario election could be sooner than you think; A7;
2017.06.02

PUBLICATION: Times-Journal (St.Thomas)
PAGE: A7
DATE: 2017.06.02
SECTION: Comment
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Randall Denley
SOURCE: Times-Journal (St.Thomas)
KEYWORDS: election,liberal,government,liberals,delivering,flood
WORD COUNT: 668

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