

Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - November 29, 2017

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MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

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Print Coverage

Toronto Star: PC 'efficiencies' mean spending cuts: Wynne; Premier takes aim at Brown's election platform, saying Tory promises don't add up; A9; 2017.11.29

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PC 'efficiencies' mean spending cuts: Wynne; Premier takes aim at Brown's election platform, saying Tory promises don't add up

In the People's Republic of China, Premier Kathleen Wynne is seeing red over the Progressive Conservative People's Guarantee manifesto.

As in red ink - and blood on the floor from anticipated budget cuts.

Speaking to the Star from Nanjing - a stop on her two-week trade mission to China, Hong Kong and Vietnam - she was incredulous about Tory Leader Patrick Brown's campaign platform unveiled Saturday. "We've been waiting for quite a while to see something substantial come out of Brown and the Conservatives. So we've seen those now and the thing that jumps out at me is the pretty serious cuts," Wynne said.

"We're the leanest per capita program-spending government in the country," added the premier, who has read the Tories' 78-page platform. "So to suggest that there's this bloated government and you can come in and slash \$12 billion and nobody will feel pain is nonsense," she said.

That's a reference to Brown's pledge to cut income taxes, eliminate the cap-and-trade climate change plan that brings in \$1.9 billion annually, and conduct a "value-for-money" audit to find \$6.1 billion in savings over three years if elected.

"I mean 'efficiencies' - that's the language that they use - and in my experience, 'efficiencies' has always been code for 'cuts' for Conservatives," Wynne said.

"Conservative leader after Conservative leader has talked about efficiencies so we're looking at ... a scale of \$12 billion. In reality, it would be impossible to realize that kind of cut without cutting education and health care in some way."

Campaigning at a Scarborough manufacturing plant, Brown insisted "every Ontarian is going to pay less" under his People's Guarantee plan, which will also bolster services.

"Under Kathleen Wynne, you work harder, you pay more, and you get less. This is not right and this is not fair."

He is promising to reduce hydro rates by 12 per cent, invest \$5 billion in a TTC subway network that will be uploaded to the province, reduce middle-class provincial income tax rates by 22.5 per cent, and enable parents to write off up to 75 per cent of child-care costs while boosting the number of daycare spots by

100,000.

Wynne said some of that seems to be cribbed from the Liberals.

"It's great that they have now come around to acknowledging that they agree with our Fair Hydro Plan because, I mean, they want to add to that," she said, referring to the Liberals' 25-per-cent reduction in electricity rates that the Tories voted against in the legislature.

"The 100,000 child-care spaces, I mean, we're implementing that, so that's great that they agree with that. It's not an additional 100,000 child-care spaces. They're basically just doing what we're already doing."

As for the Tories' plan to return Ontario to deficit next year - with a \$2.8 billion shortfall - Wynne, who is projecting budget surpluses for the next few years, was gobsmacked.

"I'm sure there was a lively internal conversation about that - that's for sure," she said with a laugh, mindful of fiscal conservatives' concerns.

"Starting to pay down the debt starts with balancing the budget - and keeping it in balance," she said. "This document is all about having it both ways or all ways: 'so we're going to run a deficit, we're going to cut fat that's not there, we're going to start to pay down the debt.' There are all sorts of inconsistencies in what he's suggesting."

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No hidden agenda, Brown's a Red Tory

Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown's "People's Guarantee" election platform is a strategic political document that helps him in two key ways.

First, by releasing it seven months before the vote, Brown has kept his promise that Ontarians would have plenty of advance notice about what a government under his leadership would do.

Second, Brown has defined himself before his opponents could - as a Red Tory in the tradition of former Ontario premier Bill Davis, not a "common sense revolutionary" like former premier Mike Harris.

This has effectively blunted attempts by Wynne and her union allies to portray him as a Canadian Donald Trump with a "hidden agenda".

On issues ranging from tax cuts for the middle class, to financial help for young families, to lowering hydro bills, to almost non-existent debt reduction, Brown's platform could have been written by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

It could almost have been written by Wynne. Not only will Brown keep Wynne's 25% reduction in electricity rates - which he denounced when it was passed as fiscal flimflammy based on massive borrowing - he's promising to reduce them 12% more.

Nowhere in Brown's 147 promises is there anything for social conservatives.

For example, no mention of reforming Wynne's sex-ed curriculum, which Brown floated when he was running for PC leader.

To his credit, Brown has tackled the third rail of politics for Conservatives - man-made climate change - saying he will cancel Wynne's \$6 billion cap-and-trade political slush fund and replace it with a revenue neutral carbon tax, verified by the auditor general, based on Trudeau's compulsory carbon prices.

Brown's promise to quit after four years if he hasn't fulfilled five key promises is unnecessarily gimmicky. What if he wins a minority and the Liberals and NDP combine forces to stop him, for example? We don't think Brown is being forthright enough with voters about the economic pain Ontarians will have to endure

to undo the economic damage caused by 14 years of Liberal rule, that has left the province as the world's most indebted sub-sovereign borrower.

That said, Brown is clearly preferable to the politically corrupt Liberals, who drove us into that ditch by repeatedly doubling down on fiscally reckless, billion-dollar boondoggles like their green energy disaster.

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