

Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - October 5, 2017

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MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

October 5, 2017

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Print Coverage

Ottawa Sun: Better late than never; Ontario taking needed action in opioid crisis; A10; 2017.10.05

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Better late than never; Ontario taking needed action in opioid crisis

Last February, I read a heartbreaking post on social media from a desperate father pleading for someone, anyone, to listen to his cries for help in the opioid crisis that was just beginning to take our city by stealth. I reached out. Back in 2012, there had been a few tragic overdoses in Manotick from fentanyl that prompted me to work with The Royal Ottawa Hospital and Ottawa police. I wasn't an expert, but I had had some experience. Not long after Sean O'Leary responded, we met.

When Eric Hoskins, Ontario's health minister, announced an Opioid Emergency Task Force this week, Sean was the first person I thought of.

Had it not been for Sean's candidness and downright honesty about the battle his family was waging with this dangerous opioid crisis, I'm not sure Ottawa, or the rest of Ontario would be taking this as seriously as it needs to be.

Meeting with him and his board, "We the Parents," has informed much of my work over the past nine months. You see, Sean introduced me to his daughter and some of her friends. They were as candid as he had been. All 17-years-olds, the three Ottawa youth told me their stories. One young man did the drugs - and he's done the time. Another girl had a friend who overdosed and was brought back to life by a naloxone kit. The third, a girl as well, told me she had started taking drugs at the age of 10, she had overdosed multiple times and wasn't worried about dying. She said, when she's that high she "doesn't care," and when she's sober, she feels guilty about hurting her family, so death would ease that pain. Some heavy stuff, and it was a real eye opener for me. This is why, for the past nine months, I've been calling for an opioid task force, more treatment and detox beds, naloxone kits for all first responders and, just the other day, for a dedicated opioid awareness and an education campaign.

I've also been working with Steve and Natalie Cody, who lost their son to "one bad pill" a few years ago, on new legislation, which will be debated in the legislature.

Nick's Law, named for the Cody's son, is designed to ensure 10 per cent of the government's \$56-million advertisement buy is focused on opioid prevention. For perspective, the government's Fair Hydro Plan and ORPP self-promotion ads cost \$5.5 million and \$5.7 million, respectively, so \$5.6 million of the ad budget

directed toward opioid awareness is not a stretch, in fact, it's a reasonable amount for this public health emergency.

Considering nearly 900 people died from opioid overdoses in 2016 in Ontario, and with many more struggling each day, increased awareness can't come soon enough.

I also recognize that we are about two years behind in the fight against opioids and that trying to play catch up is not easy.

This is a big problem, and a single silver bullet is not the answer. But the Task Force appointed by the government can give good thought to how we can best prevent experimentation with and addiction to opioids; how to build capacity at our province's detoxification and treatment centres, how we can best equip communities with counselling services and naloxone kits; and, frankly, how to better teach parents and their children how to talk to each other about this public health crisis.

I could have easily criticized the government for not acting fast enough, but I believe that would have been a disservice to the O'Learys, the Codys and every other family who is confronted with this challenge and who needs my help.

There is no question Ontario could have acted more quickly, but a \$220-million investment and bringing the right people together under a Task Force is a good place to start. Hopefully, the government will support Nick's Law today, and get their Task Force up and running immediately. In the meantime I'll continue to add pressure and ensure the government lives up to its commitments.

MacLeod is the Progressive Conservative MPP for Nepean-Carleton

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Waterloo Region Record: With Jagmeet Singh gone, Fife has a higher profile; B1; 2017.10.05

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With Jagmeet Singh gone, Fife has a higher profile

Catherine Fife, New Democrat MPP for Kitchener-Waterloo, has been celebrating a lot lately. Last week, there was a big party to celebrate the fifth anniversary of her extraordinary, historic victory in 2012.

Fife's byelection win made her the first New Democratic Party MPP ever to be elected in that riding. (It also blocked Dalton McGuinty's plan to squeak through a Liberal majority, which he would've accomplished if the Liberal candidate in Waterloo had won instead of Fife.)

Then a few days ago, Fife's friend and colleague at the Ontario legislature, Brampton-area MPP Jagmeet Singh, became leader of the federal New Democrats. It was another historic moment. Singh is the first person of colour to lead a federal party in Canada. Fife was one of the people who nominated him for that leadership race.

"I'm so incredibly proud," Fife wrote on Facebook as Singh's victory was announced after just one ballot.

"He has inspired many and the future is bright - for our party and country."

In one sense, Fife is absolutely right.

Singh's election as leader is a defining moment for Canada. It could revitalize the federal party. But his departure from Queen's Park to the national stage also leaves the Ontario New Democrats with problems to solve before next June's election.

The NDP caucus is well represented in southwestern Ontario and the north. But there are just two MPPs from Toronto, and Singh was the only one who represented the so-called "905" area: the vote-rich suburbs around Toronto.

Although he will undoubtedly do his best to help his provincial colleagues, Singh now has his hands full. He must quickly pull together a party that's thinly spread over a huge country.

In Ontario, Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne has rock-bottom ratings. You might think it looks good for the opposition parties. But nothing is certain eight months before an election, says Wilfrid Laurier University political scientist Barry Kay.

"It's really time for the Liberals to be turfed out," he said.

Yet, public opinion polls show the Liberals "starting to come back" against the leading Progressive Conservatives.

That relief came after a spate of progressive-sounding announcements from Wynne, including a \$15 minimum wage and a 25 per cent cut to hydro bills.

How can the New Democrats distinguish themselves when the Liberals have literally taken their ideas and outflanked them on the left?

Of all provincial leaders, New Democratic Party head Andrea Horwath is the best-liked by Ontarians. But many Ontarians aren't sure about her party.

"The problem isn't Andrea Horwath," Kay said. "The problem is that people don't take the NDP seriously."

Fife has never had a greater opportunity to help change that perception.

From the start, Fife has distinguished herself as a competent and well-spoken advocate.

She has held some weighty critics' portfolios including finance, economic development, and innovation.

She has articulated the party's heart, too: speaking up for the rights of laid-off workers to protect their pensions, and supporting the right of children with autism to get better services.

"She's seen as a bright light in the NDP caucus," says John Milloy, a former Liberal cabinet minister under McGuinty, who now teaches at Wilfrid Laurier University

So was Singh. But now he is gone. "That raises her profile," Milloy said.

Let's see what she does with it.

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Hanover Post: A \$5.5 million dollar slap in the face-to advertise what we know; A6;
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A \$5.5 million dollar slap in the face-to advertise what we know

Back in the day, disputes sometimes were settled by duels.

An aggrieved party would slap another with an empty glove and the battle was on.

Duels have fallen out of favour, although a revival of the practice between Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump has its appeal.

The slap in the face part of the duel has returned in Ontario where the premier and voters have an aggrieved relationship with each other.

Thus the Kathleen Wynne government has slapped residents of the province in the face with a credit card receipt for \$5.5 million.

First a little background.

Voters in the province and the government have been in a verbal battle since the last election over one of the biggest boondoggles in modern governmental history, the energy file.

Instead of learning from this battle, the premier is doubling down with a plan to spend \$5.5 million to advertise the fact her government has "reduced" hydro rates by 25 per cent.

It's difficult to remember any government actions that were more widely publicized than the plan to provide energy cost relief after endless reports of people living in power poverty in the province.

The relief plan, by the way, kicks the costs down the road and then adds interest, all of which will be paid by our grandchildren.

Any voters in Ontario who don't know about the 25 per cent reduction haven't been reading their hydro bills, which point out the great savings we each have received due to the plan.

In fact, that's the nub of the whole problem with the expenditure. Hydro One, and therefore Queen's Park, communicates with all customers all the time through regular bills, so who needs advertising? The brain surgeons at the Park would accomplish just as much by throwing the \$5.5 million in front of a wind turbine on a stormy day.

This expensive plan is designed to help the few (Liberals candidates in next June's election) at the expense of the many, every taxpayer in Ontario. Any other excuse we hear from the government, such as taxpayers needing to know, is so much gibberish.

Now \$5.5 million doesn't sound like a lot of money in the days of multi-milliondollar lottery jackpots. To put it into perspective, however, that money would buy over 4 million servings of beer for you and your friends at today's prices.

But the spending issue is more important than that. The \$5.5 is on credit card because the province's finances have been decimated by this government.

The debt is rising so fast that it's hard not to get dizzy watching the numbers spin upwards on the digital debt clock.

Today we owe about \$307 billion, three times the \$110 billion when the Liberals came to power.

Government spending in the same period has doubled from \$71 billion to \$141 billion.

The interest on that debt is \$11.6 billion a year.

So yes, \$5.5 million is chump change to this government but it would make a contribution, however small, to the interest payments.

Getting back to the duel, a Forum Research poll shows if the election had been held last week, the majority Liberals would win only 12 seats. The Conservatives would score 84 and the NDP 26.

So Wynne is in tough against the people she was elected to serve.

It seems an odd time to challenge them to a duel. However, there isn't much about the actions of this government that make any more sense.

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The Paris Star: Wynne's \$5.5M ad plan slap in face for Ontarians; A3; 2017.10.05

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Wynne's \$5.5M ad plan slap in face for Ontarians

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Thus the Kathleen Wynne government has slapped residents of the province in the face with a credit card receipt for \$5.5 million.

That's the amount the premier plans to spend to advertise the fact her government has "reduced" electricity rates by 25 per cent.

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