

Evening Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - June 3, 2018

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Date: Sun, 03 Jun 2018 21:00:56 -0400

Attachments: 20180603 - Media Scan - Hydro Rate Reduction (Evening).doc (96.26 kB)

Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plans

June 3, 2018

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TV Transcripts

[GLOBAL: Focus Ontario: Global Compares Hydro Plans From All Three Parties](#)

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[Toronto Sun: LILLEY: Hydro One using ratepayer money to oppose NDP and PC plans?](#)

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TV Transcripts

GLOBAL: Focus Ontario: Global Compares Hydro Plans From All

Source: GLOBAL

Jun 3, 2018 11:38 AM (8)

Alan Carter, Host: Well that's where the voters are. Jamie Mauracher now with a closer look at the hydro plans in our ongoing election feature called 'Where They Stand.'

Reporter: Ontario's out of control hydro rates. It's one of the most talked about election issues, and for good reason because the mess we are in isn't going to be an easy one to clean up.

Tom Adams, Energy and Environment Consultant: Ontario's electricity outlook is really rough.

Reporter: Don't believe him? Take a look at the numbers. In 2006, Ontarians were paying 3.5 cents per kilowatt hour for off peak usage which makes up the majority of your bill. By 2016, that number had skyrocketed to 8.7 cents, an increase of nearly 150 per cent.

Unidentified: I can't pay my bill.

Reporter: For some, that has meant the choice between putting food on the table and living in the dark. Oh but thanks to the government's Fair Hydro Plan, bills have since come down by 25 per cent, so things are good now, right?

Adams: The way that is achieved is by borrowing money that has to be repaid in the future.

Reporter: According to the Liberals, that bill will come in to the tune of \$20 billion, \$40 billion if you ask the Auditor General.

Adams: Those costs accumulate with interest and the situation gets worse.

Reporter: So let's talk solutions. Kathleen Wynne's Liberal plan is already in play. It includes cutting bills by borrowing, subsidies for rural customers and a ban on winter disconnections. But the damage, even according to her own party, has already been done.

Premier Kathleen Wynne [Clip]: A big part of that means admitting when a mistake has been made.

Reporter: Andrea Horwath is also promising to cut hydro rates by 30 per cent.

Andrea Horwath, Ontario NDP Leader [Clip]: We'll get bills down by about 30 per cent.

Reporter: The NDP says it will scrap the Fair Hydro Plan and look at cancelling some of those lucrative contracts given to solar and wind companies, a decision the government says could lead to lawsuits and millions in damages. NDP's also promising to buy back Hydro One, which also won't come cheap if at all.

Peter Day, Paradigm Capital: If you look at the economics of buying back 53 per cent, you're into many billions of dollars.

Reporter: Meantime, PC's Doug Ford says he's not sure what he'll do with the energy giant.

Doug Ford, Ontario PC Leader [Clip]: It's a little premature to say we're going to go in there and buy it back.

Reporter: But the party says it does have a plan for savings, which Ford says would knock \$173 a year off your bill. How? By giving Ontario's Hydro One dividend payments back to the people. But the math behind that doesn't quite add up with roughly five million residential customers in the province and \$248 million in dividends annually, that's closer to \$50 a year.

Adams: There's hardly a word from the politicians that has any substance to it.

Reporter: And without looking at the real underlying problem, the extremely high costs of producing energy in this province, whoever takes over at Queen's Park, well there will be no quick fix.

Online Coverage

Toronto SUNLLEY: Hydro One using ratepayer money to oppose

By: Brian Lilley

Updated: June 3, 2018 8:40 PM EDT

<http://torontosun.com/news/provincial/lilley-hydro-one-using-ratepayer-money-to-oppose-ndp-and-pc-plans>

"If this is an advertising request, please note that Hydro One does not purchase advertising."

That's how the outgoing message on the media line for Hydro One ended when, funny enough, I called to ask about their advertising.

Seems Hydro One has been advertising quite a bit lately, but not how you might expect. The once-public utility is outbidding the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party to secure the top ad placement for anyone who searches the term "Hydro One" using Google.

Doug Ford has promised to fire Hydro One's Six Million Dollar Man, CEO Mayo Schmidt and the entire Hydro One board.

Ford's promise drew the ire of Hydro One insiders but resonated with voters, also hydro ratepayers, fed up with sky high bills.

Ontario's hydro rates have skyrocketed four times faster than inflation and more than double the national average over the past decade, the Fraser Institute reported in 2017.

Public outrage turned hydro prices into an election issue and prompted the Liberals to borrow \$45 billion to temporarily reduce rates by 25%. Ford has promised to cut rates an additional 12% through a variety of measures, which would save ratepayers \$173 a year.

The NDP is promising to cut rates 30% and Andrea Horwath plans to buy back shares to return the utility to public ownership.

Meanwhile, Ford has been running ads based on the search term Hydro One for some time now, and

highlighting terms such as “clean up the mess” and “more money in your pocket,” at least until the utility ads recently bumped the PC ad pitch.

Now the top ad takes you to a Hydro One page that tells viewers, “We’re changing to better serve our customers, communities and the people of Ontario.”

They promise to give you “Just the Facts.”

That page is filled with tales of how great Hydro One is serving their customer base.

They brag about savings, “\$114 million in productivity savings.” And high customer satisfaction, “...of 74 per cent, a six percentage point increase year over year and a four year high.”

If it all sounds a little self-serving it is.

Rather than relying on a hunch that Hydro One was paying more than the Ford campaign, I reached out to an independent tech analyst who specializes in online campaigns. While the analyst couldn’t say how much Hydro One was spending in total, they were able to determine that at 97 cents per click, the utility was outbidding the Ford campaign.

“I can say for sure they have outbid Ford to be sure they are at the top of Google Search results,” the analyst said.

Here is why this matters.

Hydro One is acting in a very political way in the middle of an election campaign where they are a central campaign issue. They are spending money from ratepayers, often angry ratepayers, to launch a PR campaign to buff up their image.

There is potentially another big problem with their ad campaign – Hydro One isn’t registered as a third party with Elections Ontario. Under Ontario election law, “any person or entity that is not a political party, candidate or constituency association” that engages in political advertising must register.

Election’s Ontario defines political advertising “as advertising in any broadcast, print, electronic, or other medium with the purpose of promoting or opposing any registered party or its leader... and includes advertising that takes a position on an issue that can reasonably be regarded as closely associated with a registered party or its leader or a registered candidate.”

Hydro One would likely argue these ads don’t qualify but in the spirit of the law, I’d say they do.

NDP supporters should be outraged as well.

On the very same page that Hydro One pushes back at Ford, they push back at Horwath.

“Since becoming an investor owned utility, we have renewed our commitment to customers,” reads the website. They even take credit for reducing bills.

If Hydro One wants to use not only their website but substantial funds to place ads refuting the messages of political parties during an election campaign then they should follow the law and register.

It is outrageous that Hydro One hasn’t done this but not nearly as outrageous as the utility campaigning against the two main parties that could control the strings for the biggest shareholder at the utility.

Asked to comment on all of this, Hydro One issued a generic statement about their website that ignored the questions of advertising, Elections Ontario and more.

Maybe the Ford campaign is right, their statement was crystal clear.

“Yet another reason why the six million dollar man and the board need to go.”

Ottawa Citizen where do three big Ontario political parties stand
ottawacitizen.com
Sun Jun 3 2018

Section: Local News

Child care

Liberals: Children between the ages of two and a half and kindergarten age would be eligible for free preschool beginning in 2020. The Liberals say it would save families an average of \$17,000 per child. The party would create 100,000 new licensed child care spaces over five years, spend \$1 billion over three years for increased access to licensed child care for infants and toddlers and reduce subsidy wait lists. First Nations communities would receive 4,500 new child care spaces. Child care workers across the province would receive higher wages.

NDP: Households with incomes under \$40,000 wouldn't have to pay for licensed, not-for-profit child care. All other families would have fees based on their ability to pay, with the party estimating the average fee at \$12 per day. Wages for early childhood educators would go up. The number of licensed non-for-profit spaces would increase by 202,000.

Progressive Conservatives: The PC party would offer a tax credit for up to 75 per cent of costs for children up to age 15. The rebate would be on a sliding scale, according to the party's announcement in April. On one end, low-income families could recover 75 per cent of child care costs and, at the other end, families earning \$150,000 would recover 26 per cent. It would be up to families to choose what kind of child care providers they wanted to use.

Transit

Liberals: The provincial Liberal government made a monetary commitment to Stage 2 LRT in Ottawa. The party is also promising fare discounts in the Toronto area. Seniors across the province would get refundable 15 per cent tax credits for transit costs.

NDP: Transit agencies would receive half of their net costs for operating public transit — those costs left after fare revenue and other fees were subtracted from the expenses — covered by the provincial government. The NDP would have all-day GO rail service between Kitchener and Toronto, GO rail service between Niagara and Toronto and implement a northern rail strategy. The party would support a subway relief line in Toronto and LRT in Hamilton. The party has also voiced support for Ottawa's Stage 2 LRT project.

Progressive Conservatives: The PCs support Ottawa's Stage 2 LRT project. In the Toronto area, the party would have more all-day GO rail service and upload the costs of Toronto subway infrastructure to the province. The party commits to \$5 billion in new subway funding for Toronto.

Hydro

Liberals: Touting their Fair Hydro Plan, the Liberals argue they have reduced hydro bills by 25 per cent by borrowing money and spreading the cost of updating the electricity system, although the province's auditor general called into question the accounting practices that underpinned the scheme. Now the party wants to design a system that reduces greenhouse gases and the burden placed on hydro ratepayers.

NDP: Hydro One would be brought back into total public ownership, which the party said would reduce hydro bills by 30 per cent. The party says it would stop time-of-day pricing and make sure rural residents paid the same hydro delivery charges as urban residents.

Progressive Conservatives: The first priority for the party would be firing the board and CEO of Hydro One. The PCs would reduce hydro rates by 12 per cent and apply the province's Hydro One dividend to hydro bills to reduce the burden on ratepayers. Conservation programs would be shifted to the tax base, rather than hydro bills.

Health care

Liberals: Hospital funding would receive an \$822-million boost in the current fiscal year. Prescription drugs for seniors would be free. There would be capped reimbursements for drug and dental costs. Mental health and addiction services would receive \$2.1 billion over four years. There would be more money for home care, 30,000 new long-term beds over 10 years, more nursing care in long-term care facilities and more money for community-based palliative care.

NDP: A universal pharmacare program would launch by 2020, starting with coverage for 125 "essential"

medicines. A new Ontario Benefits program would provide dental benefits to every worker. Low-income workers would have their contributions to the benefit refunded. Seniors without retiree benefits and people on social assistance would be eligible for public dental coverage. Hospitals would receive an extra \$916 million. There would be more money for hospital expansions. Extra funding would cut down on surgery cancellations. There would be 40,000 more long-term care beds. Home care wait lists would be eliminated. There would be more community health centres. There would be no more wait times for palliative care. There would be full coverage for take-home cancer drugs. There would be 360 more midwives.

Progressive Conservatives: Mental health, addictions and housing services would receive another \$3.8 billion. The party believes it can cut hospital wait times by creating 15,000 long-term care beds in five years and 30,000 beds in 10 years. Low-income seniors would receive free dental care.

Education

Liberals: There would be 2,000 new teachers and education workers, including assistants for high-need students, and another 450 guidance teachers to help students plan for careers. More schools would have access to high-speed internet service and there would be \$16 billion over 10 years for new and improved schools. There would be more “classroom emphasis on problem-solving, critical thinking, communication and collaboration.” The party would tweak the student assessment process by consulting with parents. It would have more math tutoring resources. The party would earmark \$3 million to refurbish musical instruments. When it comes to post-secondary education, the Liberals would provide more financial aid to students from middle-class families and increase the number of graduates in science, technology, engineering and math.

NDP: There would no longer kindergarten/Grade 1 split classrooms. The party would cap kindergarten classes at 26 students. There would be a new funding formula for schools and an increase in funding for special education. A moratorium on school closures would be in place until there was a new funding formula and there would be \$16 billion to repair schools. There would be no more standardized testing. Any post-secondary student who qualified for an Ontario Student Assistance Plan (OSAP) loan would receive the money as a non-repayable grant. Interest on all existing provincial student loans would be forgiven. The NDP would create the province’s first Franco–Ontarian university.

Progressive Conservatives: “Discovery” math would be scrapped from the curriculum and cellphones would be banned from primary and secondary school classrooms. The PCs would make students in teacher colleges take math classes. The standardized testing regime would be “fixed.” The sex-education curriculum would be switched back to the previous one until consultations helped devise an “age appropriate” curriculum. The party would earmark \$38 million more for children with autism.

Where can I find the full party platforms?

Liberals: The Ontario Liberal plan for care and opportunity, <https://platform.ontarioliberal.ca/>

NDP: Change for the better, <https://www.ontariondp.ca/platform>

Progressive Conservatives: Plan for the people, https://www.ontariopc.ca/plan_for_the_people

London Free Press Election muddies red-hot green energy file

By: Ellwood Shreve, Chatham Daily News
Updated: June 3, 2018

<http://lfpres.com/news/local-news/election-muddies-red-hot-green-energy-file>

CHATHAM — It plunged Ontario headlong into green energy nearly a decade ago, making Southwestern Ontario the province’s Ground Zero for costly wind energy projects that have divided many communities and become a lightning rod for soaring electricity prices.

But with Ontario’s Liberal government facing certain defeat in Thursday’s provincial election, and even Premier Kathleen Wynne herself admitting the Liberals’ 15-year run in office is over, the question now is what would a Progressive Conservative or a New Democratic Party government do with green energy?

The answers, say a veteran industry analyst, aren’t exactly clear.

Both the PCs and the NDP are “a little bit sketchy on the specifics of the renewable energy story,” said Tom Adams, an electricity consultant and researcher.

Only a small portion of Ontario’s electricity supply, green energy quickly became a flashpoint as costs and opposition soared when the Liberals signed up wind and solar producers, including large energy giants, to lucrative, long-term contracts paying them far more than what consumers pay for power.

Adding insult to injury in wind-blown Southwestern Ontario, where many communities declared themselves “unwilling hosts” for the mega-projects, the government also stripped municipalities of local control over where such energy projects could be located under its Green Energy Act in 2009.

Wynne promised a more sensitive approach than her predecessor, Dalton McGuinty, but a Chicago-based company’s wind farm was still imposed on one Southwestern Ontario community, Dutton Dunwich in Elgin County, even after it voted overwhelmingly against wind turbines in a referendum.

The Liberals’ embrace of green energy came as they moved to close the last of Ontario’s dirty coal-fired power plants, including the Lambton generating station near Sarnia, and to make needed investments in the power system they insist were neglected for decades by governments of all stripes in Ontario.

Southwestern Ontario quickly became home to the largest wind farms and the most wind turbines.

Doug Ford’s PCs say they’d scrap the Green Energy Act, slap a moratorium on new energy contracts and try to renegotiate existing ones if they can. They’d also restore local decision-making over the projects.

Adams say he agrees with the PC plan to scrap the legislation, but said it’s deeply intertwined now with how Ontario’s power system works and the PCs haven’t explained how they’d replace it.

“You simply can’t rip it up, you have to actually replace it with something,” he said.

Adams said the NDP has had a consistent record supporting expanded renewable energy projects, noting they voted with the Liberals to pass the Green Energy Act. The difference between the NDP and Liberals is that NDP wants the government, not the private sector, to develop green energy, he said.

But Adams also points to inconsistencies in the NDP message on its hydro plan, saying some days they say there will be a rate reduction of up to 30 per cent for some customers and other days, it’s a 30-per-cent rate cut for everyone.

“Where they do attempt to explain how that 30 per cent is going to come about, their explanations are nonsense,” Adams said.

Soaring electricity prices were an Achilles Heel for the Liberals, dogged by business and household hardship stories. In late 2016, Wynne apologized for not paying “close enough attention to some of the daily stresses in Ontarians’ lives,” citing electricity costs as an example.

But while the government moved to provide relief, effectively extending billions in costs far out in time like a mortgage, it came after Ontario’s own auditor general, in a scathing report, found Ontarians had paid \$37 billion more than needed in electricity costs over nearly a decade, with an even larger hit to come – a result blamed on poor decisions, overpriced green energy and other factors.

Politically, the Liberals also took a hit from their move to sell off a majority stake in Hydro One, the provincial power distributor, to raise money for infrastructure projects.

The NDP has pledged to buy back Hydro One and eliminate the difference between what rural and urban consumers pay for power delivery. But, said Adams, “none of those things translate into big rate reductions across the board.”

Ontario is Canada’s largest wind energy market, able to generate 5,000 megawatts of power with 2,550 wind turbines, the Canadian Wind Energy Association, an industry umbrella group, says.

In Southwestern Ontario, the industry has run into many opponents including citizens’ groups turned off by the sight and noise of the projects and concerns about their fallout on human health.

Government promises made to unwilling host communities have amounted to “lip service,” said Bonnie

Rowe, a spokesperson for Dutton Dunwich Opponents of Wind Turbines.

Noting NDP support for green energy, she said “I expect that would continue” if Andrea Horwath becomes premier, while Doug Ford “would potentially stop projects,” given where the PCs stand.

In Chatham-Kent, the group Water Wells First has fought for two years against a wind farm, claiming vibrations from its construction and operation have clogged more than 20 water wells with sediments.

Spokesperson Kevin Jakubec said a new government would be “a chance to reset, it’s a chance to start afresh and address the mistakes that were clearly made during the Liberal administration.”

He believes the NDP would make a difference, because it “has a well-established platform on water,” seeing it as “a public trust.” The PCs, on the other hand, were the party under whose watch Walkerton’s deadly tainted water disaster occurred, he noted.

The wind energy association said it stands ready to work with whatever government Ontarians elect.

— Chatham Daily News

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WHERE THE BIG THREE STAND

LIBERALS: Plan to keep Green Energy Act; cancelled plans for 1,000 megawatts of new green energy.

PCs: Have pledged to scrap Green Energy Act and halt new energy contracts while trying to renegotiate existing ones. The PCs say they’d also restore local decision-making powers to municipalities.

NDP: Says renewable energy would be at the heart of the system and be integrated responsibly as needs grow; says it will respect local decision-making and make sure communities have a stake in the benefits.