

Evening Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - May 9, 2018

From: Electronic Media <cab.amedia@ontario.ca>

To: "Basha, Cindy (CAB)" <cindy.basha@ontario.ca>, "Bateman, April (CAB)" <april.bateman@ontario.ca>, "Betzner, Lynn (CAB)" <lynn.betzner@ontario.ca>, "Bourdeau, Annette (CAB)" <annette.bourdeau2@ontario.ca>, "Bromm, William (CAB)" <william.bromm2@ontario.ca>, "Brown, Kyle (CAB)" <kyle.r.brown2@ontario.ca>, "Carrington, Sharlyn (CAB)" <sharlyn.carrington2@ontario.ca>, "Colford, Jonathan (CAB)" <jonathan.colford@ontario.ca>, "Covert, Leah (CAB)" <leah.covert@ontario.ca>, "Curtin, Marybeth (CAB)" <marybeth.curtin3@ontario.ca>, "Davidson, Steven (CAB)" <steven.davidson@ontario.ca>, "Deschamps, Angèle (CAB)" <angele.deschamps@ontario.ca>, "Di Giovanni, Robert (CAB)" <robert.digiovanni@ontario.ca>, "Dicks, Steve (CAB)" <steve.dicks2@ontario.ca>, "Doose, Ann (CAB)" <ann.doose2@ontario.ca>, "Evans, Kirsten (CAB)" <kirsten.evans2@ontario.ca>, "Farrow, Alicia (CAB)" <alicia.farrow@ontario.ca>, "Forrest, Jamie (CAB)" <jamie.forrest@ontario.ca>, "Foster, Robert (CAB)" <robert.foster@ontario.ca>, "Fournier, Pierre (CAB)" <pierre.fournier@ontario.ca>, "Green, Patrice (CAB)" <patrice.green2@ontario.ca>, "Greson, Sean (CAB)" <sean.greson2@ontario.ca>, "Hall, Caspar (CAB)" <caspar.hall@ontario.ca>, "Hartley, Hillary (CAB)" <hillary.hartley@ontario.ca>, "Heitshu, Tania (CAB)" <tania.heitshu2@ontario.ca>, "Hwang, Wendy (CAB)" <wendy.hwang@ontario.ca>, "Jonsson, Rachel (CAB)" <rachel.jonsson2@ontario.ca>, "Kwamena, Boafoa (CAB)" <boafoa.kwamena@ontario.ca>, "Lepage, Guy (CAB)" <guy.lepage@ontario.ca>, "Lewis, Allison (CAB)" <allison.lewis@ontario.ca>, "Ma, Cesue (CAB)" <cesue.ma@ontario.ca>, "Maddock, Michael (CAB)" <michael.maddock@ontario.ca>, "McElgunn, Jim (CAB)" <jim.mcelgunn@ontario.ca>, "McMichael, Rhonda (CAB)" <rhonda.mcmichael@ontario.ca>, "Paech, Arielle (CAB)" <arielle.paech2@ontario.ca>, "Peyer, Murielle (CAB)" <murielle.peyer2@ontario.ca>, "Pollett, Rene (CAB)" <rene.pollett2@ontario.ca>, "Roach, Jackie (CAB)" <jackie.roach4@ontario.ca>, "Scott, Adrienne (CAB)" <adrienne.scott@ontario.ca>, "Skene, Katherine (CAB)" <katherine.skene@ontario.ca>, "Tomescu, Alexandra (CAB)" <alexandra.tomescu@ontario.ca>, "van der Valk, Jennifer (CAB)" <jennifer.vandervalk3@ontario.ca>, "Wheeler, Stewart (CAB)" <stewart.wheeler@ontario.ca>, "Wolgelerenter, Debbie (CAB)" <debbie.wolgelerenter2@ontario.ca>, "Yoo, Sarah (CAB)" <sarah.yoo@ontario.ca>, "Potter, Shelley (OPO)" <shelley.potter@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>, "Ma, Cesue (CAB)" <cesue.ma@ontario.ca>, "Truong, Kimberly (CAB)" <kimberly.truong@ontario.ca>, Electronic Media <cab.amedia@ontario.ca>

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MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

May 9, 2018

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TV Transcripts

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Print Coverage

National Post: Wynne offers consistency over change as she faces election (Also appeared in the Hamilton Spectator)

Wed May 9 2018

Section: PMN Canada

Byline: The Canadian Press

TORONTO - At a time when polls suggest Ontario voters are clamouring for change, Kathleen Wynne is offering them something far less dramatic: consistency.

Five years after becoming the first female premier in Ontario and the first openly gay premier in the country, the Liberal leader is facing an uphill battle for re-election as her popularity and that of her party continues to slump.

While much of the discourse around the campaign has so far been on personality rather than policy, Wynne is hoping to turn the tides with a plan she says is steeped in her values and builds on her party's achievements.

But she's also emphasizing what she calls a stark contrast between her approach to government and that of her Progressive Conservative rival, Doug Ford.

"The notion of change is going to become more about 'how is the policy that's being put forward by the Liberals or the other parties going to change my life for the better?'" Wynne told The Canadian Press.

"Everything that we are doing and everything that we've brought forward in our budget and we will bring forward in our platform is rooted in work that we're already doing or that we've already done. So this is the next step."

The Liberals, who have been in power for 15 years, laid the foundation for their platform this spring in unveiling a budget that targets nearly every demographic, pumping billions into health care, child care, and

support for seniors, as well as a drug and dental-care program for people without existing coverage.

But the \$158.5-billion fiscal plan also plunges the province back into deficit, with the books expected to stay in the red for six years - breaking a key Liberal promise to balance the budget through 2019-20.

Their detractors have accused the Liberals of pandering for votes in an effort to distract from their record, with the Progressive Conservatives accusing them of compromising the province's financial future and the New Democrats saying the government isn't doing enough to help those in need.

While some controversies stoking the anti-Liberal sentiment occurred under her predecessor, Wynne has faced significant backlash over some of her own policy decisions, particularly the move to partially privatize Ontario's largest electricity transmission and distribution provider, Hydro One.

Dogged by resentment over rising electricity costs, Wynne also brought in the Fair Hydro Plan, which saw the government borrow money over the long-term to cut rates immediately.

That contributed to an ongoing battle with Ontario's auditor general and financial accountability office, who both say the government's accounting on the plan as well as revenues on two teacher pension plans has led the province to underestimate its deficit by billions. The Liberals have attributed the discrepancy to an accounting dispute.

Wynne's implementation of a cap-and-trade carbon pricing system and staggered minimum wage hikes have also faced pushback from the Tories and the business community.

But the longtime politician who was first elected as a Toronto school trustee said she has always seen government as a force to help those who need it most.

"I can go back through my life and I can find the threads of my belief system and my value system throughout that whole time. There's no inconsistency. I have pushed and fought for fairness my whole life," she told the legislature on the day before the campaign began.

Her grandmother was a teacher who taught her pupils' parents, most of them Italian immigrants, to speak English after realizing they wouldn't otherwise be able to help their children with schoolwork, she said.

Her grandfather was a First World War veteran who practised medicine and allowed patients to pay him in baked goods when they couldn't afford their bills, she said.

Wynne's parents, a general practitioner and a professional singer, rallied to create a singing program for young people with severe disabilities in a long-term care home, she said.

"Early on, my value system was that if you see a problem, let's figure out how to fix it. If there's somebody who needs something, let's make sure they get it," Wynne said.

But keeping the focus on the work that needs to be done will be the biggest challenge in the weeks leading up to the June 7 election, said Wynne, who has predicted the campaign will take a vicious turn.

"There's a tone that's crept into the political discussion, the political debate, into election campaigns that is very problematic because it does have more to do with individuals and personalities and personal attacks than policy," she said in an interview.

"The other reality is that social media has given a lot of permission for people to say whatever they choose without any accountability and that can create a very nasty undertone as well."

Recently, Wynne called out Ford after he suggested some Liberals could face jail time if they pulled what he described as "shady tricks" with taxpayer dollars. She accused him of being a bully and likened him to U.S. President Donald Trump.

One political observer said Wynne needs to frame Ford in a way that will make him less appealing to swing voters without going so far as to seem desperate.

"The strategy has to be that change for change's sake is not necessarily the best thing if you can paint the other person as not worthy of the change," said Tamara Small, a political science professor at the University of Guelph.

Wynne must not focus all efforts on Ford, however, since NDP Leader Andrea Horwath appears to be making inroads, said Kathy Brock, a political science professor at Queen's University.

The Liberals also have to shore up Wynne's fiscal profile and show they can afford their promises, Brock said.

Other factors may also play a role in the anger directed at Wynne, Brock said, pointing to studies suggesting female politicians are treated more harshly than their male counterparts when they begin to fall out of favour.

"People get angrier at them and are more negative about them than when men's popularity starts to decline and it makes it much harder for women to recover," she said. "I think that's one thing Kathleen Wynne is facing."

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National Post Andrea Horwath campaigns on 'change for the better'
(Hamilton Spectator)
thespec.com
Wed May 9 2018
Section: News

TORONTO - The third time may well prove to be a charm for Andrea Horwath, who both pundits and polls suggest has the most to gain in Ontario's spring election.

Horwath's New Democrats, long relegated to third-party status in the provincial legislature, are emerging as an alternative to the deeply unpopular Liberals, who have been in power since 2003.

Experts give much of the credit to the 55-year-old party leader, who they say has positioned herself as an effective foil to both the staunch populism of Progressive Conservative Leader Doug Ford and the familiar talking points of Premier Kathleen Wynne.

For her part, Horwath said her approach in the June 7 election will be to put herself and her personality on full display.

Horwath said the pledges at the heart of the NDP election platform grew from personal experiences on factory floors, in legal clinics and during years of motherhood.

"I think people deserve to know what makes their leaders tick," she said in a recent telephone interview from Thunder Bay, Ont. "We've had a premier that said she was one thing and then turned out to be something else. We have somebody in Mr. Ford who's trying to hide from who he is and not let people know exactly what it is he has in store...It's incumbent upon us to say to people, 'it doesn't have to be that way.'"

The platform on which Horwath has pinned her hopes is firmly rooted in traditional NDP ideology.

The document, dubbed "Change for the Better," touts free dental and pharmacare for all and promises free child care for families earning less than \$40,000 a year. Other cornerstone pledges include more money for hospitals, higher taxes for those earning \$220,000 a year or more, the return of the partially privatized Hydro One to public ownership, and a 30 per cent cut to electricity rates.

Horwath said the priorities laid out in the platform harken back to her childhood in Stoney Creek, where she grew up in a family with strong ties to the manufacturing sector.

Her father Andrew became an auto worker at a nearby Ford plant after immigrating from Slovakia and marrying her mother, Diane. The comfortable income and secure benefits they enjoyed provided stability for her and her three siblings, Horwath said.

Over time, however, she said she's seen that security erode to the point where her son can't count on supports her parents took for granted.

When Horwath moved on to a role as a community development worker at a legal clinic, she said her interactions with everyone from single parents to new immigrants reinforced her belief in social justice.

Many of the NDP campaign pledges have echoes in the Liberal party's most recent budget, a document Horwath dismisses as a late effort to pander to voters who've been largely ignored in the past 15 years.

Her platform, she said, is founded on personal conviction.

"Sometimes those kinds of pieces of what makes a person who they are are not up front and centre in politics, but those things really do shape your value system and why you do what you do," she said. "...A lot of the things I feel passionate about come not just because I'm a New Democrat, but they come from who I am as a person."

Making Horwath the face of the campaign may prove to be a savvy strategy in a field dominated by deeply polarizing adversaries, according to one political observer.

University of Ottawa political studies professor Genevieve Tellier said that while Ford and Wynne provoke visceral reactions among their opponents and are both deeply disliked in some factions of the electorate, Horwath has consistently ranked as the most popular personal choice for premier even as her party trails the Conservatives in the polls.

Tellier said Horwath has had time to establish herself as a steady hand and consistent communicator during her nine years at the party helm, traits she said may be seen as assets when contrasted with her rivals' ongoing attempts to portray each other as untrustworthy or corrupt.

"It's always a bit easier when you're in the opposition to have this kind of support, but...it's very consistent," Tellier said. "As a person, she's likable, I would say. People are not concerned by her personality."

But despite Horwath's status as a three-time veteran of the campaign circuit, Tellier said some questions remain about her political instincts.

The 2014 election was triggered when Horwath withdrew support for a Liberal government she'd propped up for two and a half years, Tellier said. But the contest, in which Horwath ran on a more centrist platform, did not result in more NDP seats in the legislature.

However, McMaster University political science professor Peter Graefe said Horwath gained ground in other respects.

While her centrist platform lost her seats to the Liberals in vote-rich Toronto, he said the approach was reflective of her working-class roots and helped her gain credibility and votes in other parts of the province.

Even her present-day platform, though more ostensibly left-leaning, adheres to those working-class values, Graefe said, citing the NDP child-care plan that is geared to families' incomes unlike the Liberal pledge to make child-care free for anyone over the age of two-and-a-half.

Graefe said the combination of years of work and the recent shifts in Ontario's political cast of characters leaves Horwath in a uniquely positive position as the campaign gets underway.

"She certainly has the most to gain," he said. "If it goes poorly, she can move on to something else. If it goes well, then she has a new opportunity ahead of her."

National Post Doug Ford paints himself as fiscally responsible on Ontario (Also appeared in the Hamilton Spectator)

nationalpost.com

Wed May 9 2018

Section: PMN Canada

Byline: The Canadian Press

TORONTO - Eight years after a populist wave handed Rob Ford the reins of Canada's largest city, his brother is testing the same brand of everyman appeal on the provincial stage.

With calls to trim government fat and put money back into voters' pockets, Doug Ford is painting himself as a fiscally responsible outsider in an effort to propel Ontario's Progressive Conservatives back to power for the first time in 15 years.

"We will form a government that is for the people. Not for the insiders, not for the elites, a government that will have your back," Ford told cheering supporters as he launched the Tory campaign Tuesday night. "I intend on keeping the promises that I make."

Ford, who seized the Tory crown in a heated leadership race two months ago, is hoping to woo voters with promises of relief that harken back to his late brother's mantra to "stop the gravy train," but offer little in terms of concrete policies.

His brash demeanour and controversial remarks have made him a polarizing figure, but they've also endeared him to so-called Ford Nation, a demographic that first mobilized around his scandal-plagued younger sibling and remains fiercely loyal to the family name.

Ford's opponents, meanwhile, say his reliance on slogans, suggestions that some Liberals should be behind bars, and rocky relationship with the media bring to mind another controversial politician - U.S. President Donald Trump.

Yet with both Ford and his party leading in the polls, some say the election is his to lose.

"The Liberals are watching us right now and they are worried," Ford told his supporters at a rally late Tuesday. "They see a movement taking hold, a movement like we've never seen in the last few decades."

Though he has yet to present a platform, the Tory leader has laid out some of his priorities while criss-crossing the province ahead of the campaign, pledging to order both an audit and an inquiry into government spending and to fire the board and CEO of partially privatized utility Hydro One over executive salaries.

He has vowed to scrap carbon pricing and cut four per cent from the budget without eliminating jobs, a plan denounced as impossible by his opponents.

And in a move appealing to the party's social conservative elements, he has promised to revoke the controversial sex-ed curriculum brought in by Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne and to tie post-secondary funding decisions to "the willingness of university administrators to protect free speech."

Ford has also promised to reunite the party after months of unprecedented upheaval and infighting brought to the fore by the departure of his predecessor, Patrick Brown, amid sexual misconduct allegations that he denies.

"I will get our party back on track, we will put a platform forward that speaks to every Ontarian," he said in his leadership victory speech in March. "Together we will return our province to where it belongs."

Ford is the second son of Diane and Doug Ford Sr., a provincial politician for one term in the late 1990s. Ford has also played a leadership role in Deco Labels and Tags - the family's multimillion-dollar company with operations in Canada and the U.S.

The Tory leader has promised to put the company in a blind trust if elected premier, though experts say that would not stop him from benefiting from the corporate tax cut he has promised.

A self-described family man, the father of four speaks regularly of his father and brother and launched his bid for the Tory leadership from his mother's basement in west Toronto.

It was through his brother that Ford first came into the spotlight, as champion and sometimes enforcer for the then-mayor whose admission of using crack cocaine made international headlines.

Ford served one term on city council while his brother was mayor, and though the pair had a few successes early in their tenure they were otherwise largely hamstrung as they lost the support of council.

He stepped in as a mayoral candidate after cancer forced Rob Ford to give up on running for a second term, casting himself as a natural successor while also distancing himself from his brother's struggle with substance abuse and other issues.

Doug Ford, nonetheless, sparked controversies with his contentious remarks, which once saw him threatened with a defamation lawsuit by the city's then-police chief until he issued a public apology.

Since taking the Tory helm, Ford has shown more poise - a far cry from the confrontational politician who

heckled his peers during council sessions - but has drawn criticism for some off-the-cuff remarks.

So far, Ontario residents have gotten a "mixed bag" from Ford at a time where he needs to establish a clear image of how he would govern, said Anna Esselment, a political science professor at the University of Waterloo.

Ford has called for fiscal restraint without clearly articulating how he would achieve it, and his recent reversal of a pledge to allow development in a large protected green space shows he isn't used to the level of scrutiny given to provincial leaders, she said.

Competence, particularly on the fiscal front, is prized by voters when weighing Conservative leaders, Esselment said.

Presenting a fully costed platform is a key part of that, she said, and not having one would dog him during the campaign and allow his opponents to "make up how he's going to pay for it."

In order to maintain his lead, Ford "just has to show some basic level of competence," she said.

"He almost has to make it a no-mistake campaign...the advantages for him are all there."

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Hamilton Spectator should turn attention to Andrea Horwath
thespec.com

Wed May 9 2018

Section: Opinion

Byline: adreschel@thespec.com

If Progressive Conservative leader Doug Ford wants to be premier he better start rehearsing some lines to use against NDP leader Andrea Horwath.

Based on Monday's first televised leaders' debate, Horwath is clearly the biggest threat to the potential Ford government which opinion polls suggest may be coming our way.

While Ford initially appeared stiff and hesitant and Liberal leader Kathleen Wynne capable but inescapably discredited by 15 years of Liberal power, Horwath seemed loose, fresh and confident.

Even Horwath's amused smile as Ford and Wynne went off on their own wrangles conveyed the subliminal message that her party is the only reasonable choice for voters hoping for meaningful change.

Both Horwath and Wynne were much more verbal and quick on their feet than Ford, who sometimes gave the impression of a big eager-to-please dog with a limited repertoire of tricks at his disposal.

The fact the Tories have not costed their campaign platform isn't good for voters looking to make an informed choice. But so far it doesn't appear to have hurt Ford who seems to be banking on people being so angry and frustrated that they care more about turfing the Liberals than they do about detailed policies.

What will hurt him though is another clunky televised performance. If the Conservatives are going to maintain their lead, Ford obviously needs to up his training and range of material.

Wynne, of course, offers no end of new targets beyond Ford's accusations of mismanagement and shots at Ontario's \$350-billion debt. Wynne's common refrain about the Liberals "investing in people" by way of justifying their free-spending ways is rife with possibilities.

If the Liberals are so invested in people, why are more people using food banks in Ontario? Why is the number of people living on low incomes rising in this province but declining in the rest of Canada? Why did Liberal policies make Ontarians pay \$37 billion more than necessary for electricity from 2006 to 2014?

The Liberals are clearly on the ropes. Ford needs to keep them there. But, again, to form a majority government he also needs to turn his sights on the NDP, which he failed to do Monday.

Horwath, MPP for Hamilton Centre, has always enjoyed strong approval ratings among the electorate. That built-in sense that she's up to the job of premier contrasts strongly with the question marks over

Ford's own blustery political persona and apparent tentative grasp of issues.

Come the next televised debates on May 11 and May 27, Ford needs to start chipping away at both Horwath's personal gloss and the argument that the NDP are the best alternative to form a new government, especially since at least one poll now suggests the party is in second place behind the Tories with lots of room to grow.

Ford's tax-and-spend criticisms of the Liberals can just as easily be applied to the NDP platform, which promises, among other things, free daycare for lower income families and universal pharmacare.

He can also point out that for all Horwath's criticisms of the Liberals, her party propped up a minority Liberal government from 2011 till 2014.

Ford, who's moved quickly to squelch embarrassing Conservatives candidates such as Tanya Granic Allan, dumped on Saturday for alleged "irresponsible" homophobic remarks, could also highlight that Horwath has been much less transparent and accountable regarding similar issues in her own party.

Hamilton East-Stoney Creek New Democrat MPP Paul Miller has been accused by one of his own staffers of routinely making "racist, sexist and homophobic remarks." But rather than launch a party investigation, Horwath is content to leave it in the hands of a union grievance and a human rights complaint.

Horwath has taken the same hands-off approach to the allegation Hamilton Mountain NDP MPP Monique Taylor tried to get one staffer to file a false sexual harassment accusation against another to create grounds for dismissal.

These troubling allegations haven't got much media play outside of Hamilton. Ford could change that overnight.

Andrew Dreschel's commentary appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday. adreschel@thespec.com
[@AndrewDreschel](https://twitter.com/AndrewDreschel)

Hamilton Spectator campaign kickoff: Several tight election races
thespec.com

Wed May 9 2018

Section: News

Byline: ereilly@thespec.com

As the four major party leaders vie for the province's top job, here in Hamilton veteran politicians, rookies and rivals are battling to be your representative at Queen's Park.

Ontario's 42nd general election campaign begins Wednesday, with Andrea Horwath's New Democrats, Mike Schreiner's Greens and Doug Ford's Progressive Conservatives trying to unseat Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne.

Locally, Hamilton has several tight races, thanks to newly drawn riding boundaries created in 2015. Two completely new ridings - Flamborough-Glanbrook and Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas - are up for grabs, while other ridings, including Hamilton Centre and Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, have been slightly redrawn to match up with federal election boundaries.

Local political watchers say the three incumbent NDP candidates are likely safe in their traditionally centre-left ridings, including Horwath in Hamilton Centre, Monique Taylor in Hamilton Mountain and Paul Miller in Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

"If I was any one of those three incumbents I'd feel pretty good," said Henry Jacek, political science professor at McMaster University.

While Taylor and Miller have both faced allegations of harassment in the weeks leading up to the campaign, the Liberals had difficulty finding candidates to face off against them. Local lawyer Jennifer Stebbing was nominated in Hamilton East-Stoney Creek only on Saturday, and the vacant Liberal candidacy on the Hamilton Mountain is set to be filled by entrepreneur Damin Starr on Wednesday evening - late nominations that will make it difficult for the Liberals to hit the ground running during the campaign.

Horwath's personal popularity and leader status make her almost impossible to defeat in Hamilton Centre, though first-time Liberal candidate Deirdre Pike is a well-known and well-liked face on the local political scene.

Traditionally, the PC candidates in these three ridings - filled this time around by Dionne Duncan in Hamilton Centre, Esther Pauls in Hamilton Mountain, and Akash Grewal in Hamilton East-Stoney Creek - trail in third place behind the NDP and Liberals.

"I tend to think, and this is my projection, that the NDP is going to do better (provincially) than they did last time," Jacek said. "Their three incumbents should win - the Liberals are not going to do well, I'm pretty certain."

The new riding of Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas (HWAD) is arguably the tightest local race, with Liberal incumbent Ted McMeekin trying to maintain his seat at Queen's Park against NDP challenger Sandy Shaw and PC Ben Levitt.

While McMeekin, a veteran in the former riding of Hamilton-Flamborough-Ancaster-Glanbrook, remains personally popular, dissatisfaction with Wynne may drag him down. Some voters, particularly in the more conservative areas of Ancaster and some enclaves in Dundas, will be drawn to Levitt, 26, who won the PC candidacy after a protracted nomination battle, suggests McMaster political scientist Peter Graefe.

However, the new HWAD boundaries include more left-leaning areas, including Westdale and areas of Dundas, while the more right wing enclaves of Flamborough have been shaved off. That bodes well for Shaw, the NDP candidate, a well-known figure both professionally and politically (she ran for city council in Ward 1 in the 2014 municipal election). Shaw has already had the benefit of a precampaign visit from Horwath, signalling the riding is in play for the NDP.

Still, Jacek suggests that voters who lean toward the NDP may vote strategically for McMeekin to keep the seat from going to the Conservatives.

"It's not easy to be a voter in this riding," he said "They have a strong Liberal incumbent who is on the progressive side, but how are they going to make up their mind between the local candidate and the leader?"

Local political watchers will be keeping a close eye on the race in Flamborough-Glanbrook, where city council colleagues Judi Partridge and Donna Skelly are jockeying for the same seat (Partridge for the Liberals, Skelly for the Conservatives) - a faceoff that makes for "natural drama," says Graefe.

The riding is one of the most right-leaning areas in Hamilton. It's held federally by Conservative David Sweet. And despite Partridge's personal popularity as the area's ward candidate, Graefe says Skelly's chances of taking the area are high.

The NDP have yet to nominate a candidate in Flamborough-Glanbrook.

"It's arguably the most winnable for the Conservatives," said Graefe.

Regardless of riding, political affiliation or experience, Hamilton's local candidates will face four tough weeks of door-knocking, debates, attacks, tough questions and, ultimately, either the road home or a path to Queen's Park. Three local issues to watch

Supervised injection sites

As Hamilton struggles to find a permanent home for a provincially funded safe injection site, the outcome of the election looms large.

Kathleen Wynne's Liberal government has committed to funding supervised injection sites and temporary overdose prevention sites amid an opioid crisis in Ontario.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath said she "unequivocally" supports supervised injection sites. "They save lives; end of story."

PC Leader Doug Ford has said he is "dead against" the idea, though has also started to suggest that he'll study the issue with community representatives.

Mike Schreiner's Green Party has called for support for both "government-sanctioned" and community-run "pop-up" sites for supervised, safe drug use.

Jobs and poverty

The increasing strain on low- and middle-income households hits especially hard in Hamilton, where almost 50,000 people rely on either Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program, and the poverty rate hovers around 16 per cent.

The Liberals have promised to increase minimum wage, introduce rent control, turn tuition loan programs into grants for low-income students, and provide free prescription drugs to children and youth.

The NDP is promising universal dental care and pharmacare, a \$12 per day child-care plan, cutting hydro bills by 30 per cent and to buy back Hydro One, and increase tax rates for high income earners and successful corporations

The PCs have promised to end the Liberals minimum wage hike from \$14 to \$15 next year, waive income taxes for anyone making less than \$28,000 a year, and end cap-and-trade to reduce the cost of gas and home heating.

The Greens have called for a basic income guarantee, community benefits agreements for large infrastructure projects, a focus on innovation, retraining and building a greener economy.

LRT

Hamilton's light rail transit project is an evergreen election issue because of the \$1 billion in attached provincial funding - and a never-ending stream of alternative spending suggestions.

The Liberal government promised to pay capital building costs of a 14-kilometre LRT line from McMaster University to Eastgate Square. But the \$1 billion is not transferable to other projects, officials have said.

The NDP supports Hamilton's LRT project, but criticized the plan to hand over public transit operations to a private consortium. It has offered to fund half of LRT operation costs.

New PC Leader Doug Ford first said he supported LRT because it will "create jobs, countless new jobs," but days later suggested if council abandons the project it can use the \$1 billion for other priorities.

The Green party supports Hamilton's LRT project.

ereilly@thespec.com

Ottawa Citizen Firing up Liberals in Ottawa, Wynne compares Ford to

By: David Reevely
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<http://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/reevely-firing-up-liberals-in-ottawa-wynne-compares-ford-to-mike-harris>

Liberal leader Kathleen Wynne speaks at a provincial election campaign rally Wednesday evening in Ottawa with members of her team. May 9, 2018. Errol McGihon/Postmedia Errol McGihon / Postmedia

Liberals are in an existential fight for the future of Ontario, leader Kathleen Wynne told her Ottawa team Wednesday night.

Four years ago, in the first hours of an uphill campaign, Wynne hit Ottawa for an evening rally. It was sunny and hot and the crowd spilled out the doors of a former carpet store on Bank Street near Heron Road that was about to become a local campaign office.

That night, Wynne's biggest cheer came from an attack on Stephen Harper, whose Conservative government was on its way down. Harper made a great villain: his government was tired and a year from defeat and seemed to enjoy kicking Ontario when it could. Wynne lashed herself to the record of her

predecessor Dalton McGuinty and declared war on Harper.

Now it's Wynne's government that's gone creaky, in need of fresh vitality. Harper's long gone. The new bogeyman isn't in Ottawa, he's in Etobicoke.

"This (election) has a particular edge to it," she told the 200 or so volunteers and fans who nearly filled the main hall at All Saints, a church-turned-event-space in Sandy Hill, for her short pep talk. "That's because of the contrast between what we're putting forward, that value system that says if you're stronger, I'm stronger, and we're stronger together —" she was interrupted by cheers "— and what Doug Ford is saying."

The Progressive Conservative leader is the modern version of Mike Harris, Wynne said, so much so that "I almost said Mike Ford." Harris hacked at Ontario's foundations, Wynne charged, and personally drew her into politics.

Ford believes the provincial budget can be shorn of \$6 billion without anybody hurting and he doesn't want to fight climate change, Wynne said, and the crowd booed obediently.

Her voice dropped. "It's the care, or the cut. And that's why this election is so, so important."

Go knock on doors, Wynne implored the crowd, her voice rising again. She lost her first election by 72 votes. Every conversation matters.

"We can continue to build Ontario up, but to do that we need to get through this election. Thank you so much!"

The crowd cheered and, but for a few who stuck around to get photos and handshakes with the leader, dispersed. Campaign volunteers plucked the signs out of the lawn at All Saints, loaded them into cars, and headed out.

Wynne knows well she's starting this race from behind. The polls have her Liberals fighting for second place at best.

"I know what I have to communicate is that we are building, by our platform and our budget, we're building on the foundation that we have put in place in Ontario," she said in a separate interview before the rally.

In 2014, part of what she was doing was introducing herself to voters who didn't know her all that well.

That campaign was fought against Tories led by Tim Hudak, who had a detailed (but technically very flawed) plan to cut public-sector employment and try to goose private-sector growth. The New Democrats' Andrea Horwath tried to position herself as a semi-populist alternative but never got traction.

"I think what will be different about this campaign is we actually have an opponent in Doug Ford who, all he does is talk in slogans. He is not explaining to the people in this province what the impact of what he's saying will be," Wynne said. "It's a different campaign in the sense that we're not debating policy in the same way. He's bringing forward slogans and we're bringing forward real solutions to real problems."

Of course, now voters know Wynne a lot better and a lot of them don't like her. Her personal approval ratings are terrible, some of the lowest ever polled, and she's a drag on her Liberal party. Wynne knows that, too.

She's made the mistake of getting lost in policy sometimes, she said, just assuming that people know who she is and why she's in politics.

"Every day, I can give you examples of exchanges I've had where I've tried to help people," Wynne said. "I'm not saying in an arrogant way — the point I'm making is that clearly I don't project that. And that always surprises me, that people don't know that about me."

Wynne acknowledges errors, which she sees mostly as failures to communicate. Privatizing a majority share of Hydro One was startlingly unpopular and Wynne believes she and her government didn't lay the groundwork for it — explaining the infrastructure projects the billions of dollars it brought in would pay for, or the degree of control the province still has over the utility even as a (large) minority shareholder.

Going back farther, in the McGuinty era the province rebuilt the electricity system and closed coal-fired

generating stations but didn't explain how expensive that was going to be and stuck ratepayers with too much of the cost too quickly. The "Fair Hydro Plan," which borrows billions to subsidize hydro bills temporarily, is a late answer, Wynne admits.

Knowing how you got into a mess isn't the same as knowing how to get out, but Wynne, unlike some politicians, loves to campaign. Like Hudak, Doug Ford leads rallies with an air of grim resignation. (It befits his message that Ontario needs plucking from the toilet it's swirling down but it's still a bummer.) Wynne charges out happily. If she goes down next month, she means to go down fighting.

dreevely@postmedia.com
twitter.com/davidreevely