Afternoon Energy Media Summary - March 3, 2017

From: "Halford, Gavin (ENERGY)" <gavin.halford@ontario.ca>
To: "@ENERGY All" <energy-all2@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "@MAH-L-BMD - Issues Management" <mah.l.bmd.issuesmanagement@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "Stromberg, Richard (MMA/MHO)" <richard.stromberg@ontario.ca>, "Martin, Ashley S. (MMA/MHO)" <ashley.s.martin@ontario.ca>
Date: Fri, 03 Mar 2017 15:00:29 -0500

Good Afternoon,

Here is a roundup of the day's news:

Rate Mitigation

United Way Director Praises Hydro Bill Cut- Bayshore Broadcasting

Welcome help with hydro bills- Hamilton Spectator

Patrick Brown on PC Hydro plan: Stay tuned- Soo Today

Reactions expressed to hydro reduction- Northumberland Today

Cheaper electricity doesn't mean the death of conservation. Here's why- TVO

NDP leader impressed by Oxford County's 'amazing plans- Woodstock Sentential

New rules for energy retailers in 2017- South Asian Focus

Bruce Grey MPP Says Taxpayers Are Now On The Hook For The Hydro Mess- Blackburn News

Politicians sound off in northern Ontario about Liberal hydro plan- CBC

Brown said Tory plan "will affect everyone"- Barrie Examiner

Kathleen Wynne defends plan to spread out hydro costs- CBC

Ont. hydro cut misses many businesses, but offers some manufacturers a reprieve- Canadian Manufacturing

Wynne's hydro plan draws ire and praise- Sudbury.com

Auto Makers Say No Help from Wynne- Windsor Square

Wynne readying for voters' 'judgment' in next election after hydro move- CBC

Hydro ratepayer puts Wynne on hot seat- Canadian Press

Premier Kathleen Wynne’s pocketbook politics may not be enough to power down anger over hydro rates: Cohn- The Star

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Other Energy related news

- E.L.K. users raise concerns about proposed rate increase during meeting- Yahoo News

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Please see below ***Today in Twitter*** for news articles.

March , 2017

Today in Twitter

- @ SudburyHydro - Honored to host Minister Thibeault for Fair Hydro Rate announcement on 25% hydro bill reduction. #relief @GlennThibeault
- @ SudburyHydro - Residences, small businesses and farms will benefit most from the largest hydro rebate in govt history. #makinghistory @GlennThibeault
- @ CTVNorthernNews - ICYMI: Reaction to the Premier’s plan for #hydro prices from Ontario's Energy Minister @GlennThibeault .
- @ StevenDelDuca - Proud to stand with @GlennThibeault at @SudburyHydro to talk about our plan to lower electricity bills across #Ontario #onpoli
- @ ChiefsofOntario - #fnpoli @ONgov @GlennThibeault on eliminating FN delivery rates 'We heard you, we're acting' #onpoli @ChiefDay @g_avahill @PetersGordon
- @ PnPCBC - @brownbarrie says @Kathleen_Wynne 's government has made Ontario a laughing-stock of energy policy #pnpcbc
- @ PCPressOffice - Big difference 1 year makes: "our govt. is proud that we have achieved competitive rates" - former Energy Min. @Bob_Chiarelli , March 23/16
- @ PCPressOffice - @brownbarrie slams Premier Wynne’s shell game. We all know this will just mean higher taxes and rates. Listen here:

- @ PCPressOffice - Positive response from the Former Energy Minister when he said hydro rates were just peachy last year: http://www. torontosun.com/2016/01/12/ene rgy-minister-defends-electricity-record … #onpoli

- @ Oakville_PC - Electricity bills have roughly doubled in the last decade, rising faster than inflation since 2010 #Onpoli #pcpo

- @ mflalonde - Pleased to join my #Ottawa Caucus colleagues for an unprecedented announcement re. Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan which will reduce bills by 25%!

- @ Bob_Chiarelli - Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan will lower electricity bills by 25%. This is substantial, long lasting relief for all Ontarians #onpoli

For today's visuals, click here

United Way Director Praises Hydro Bill Cut

By: Claire McCormack

For: Bayshore Broadcasting

On: March 2, 2017

A 25 per cent cut to hydro bills is great news according United Way of Bruce Grey Executive Director Francesca Dobbyn.

And while she expected an announcement from the Province at some point, Dobbyn was surprised to get an invite from Premier Kathleen Wynne the night before Wednesday's news conference in Toronto.

That's where Wynne announced a 17 per cent reduction to hydro bills on top of the 8 per cent reduction that went into effect January 1st.

Dobbyn, who has been pushing hard to make the rural voice heard on energy issues and meeting with the Energy Minister and Premier, says it's good news for rural and low income people in Ontario.

According to Dobbyn, the province is enhancing the Rural Rate Protection Program to even out the delivery charges shouldered by those in rural areas compared to cities.

She says "It's quite impressive and it really speaks to them hearing about the rural, about the low density, and the nasty impact that it's had on people's hydro bills."

Dobbyn says low income, low density people eligible for the Ontario Energy Savings Plan (OESP) and possibly the 8 per cent that went into effect this January, could see as much as a 50 per cent cut.

Dobbyn hopes the changes to the Ontario Energy Savings plan happen fairly quickly, but she's not sure if legislative change have to be made first.

She expects the global adjustment and rate reduction aspects of it will go through on May 1st with the Ontario Energy Board's semi-annual rate adjustment.

Meanwhile Premier Wynne says the the rates will be held for four years and will only rise with inflation or roughly 2 per-cent.

Welcome help with hydro bills

By: Staff Post

For: CBC

On: March 3, 2017

Ontarians have been begging for relief from their crushing hydro bills and on Thursday relief is exactly what Premier Kathleen Wynne delivered.

The 17-per-cent cut in electricity prices coming to residential customers this summer along with the eight-per-cent sales-tax reduction that kicked in Jan. 1 should provide substantial, meaningful savings for people struggling to pay their bills — and even enduring hardship to do so.

Let the critics complain that the help is overdue, that the Liberals are trying to buy votes in the 2018 election or that the people of Ontario are trading short-term gain for the long-term pain that will be borne by coming generations.

When the average bill for one of life's necessities — electricity — rises by 70 per cent in just seven years, when the poor must choose between paying for food, rent or hydro each month, when a Peterborough woman breaks down and cries to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau over a hydro burden she can no longer bear, Ontario faces a crisis.

If you can't swim and happen to fall out of a boat, you'd be wise to grab the lifesaver thrown your way no matter who's doing the throwing and what the lifesaver costs.

In the same way, Ontarians should latch on to what the Liberals have given and credit this government for finding a sensible, sustainable way to keep us from drowning in those ever-rising electricity bills.

The Liberals will pay for most of the hydro-bill savings by stretching out the financing agreements for past contracts. Essentially this means Ontario will pay more, but over a longer period. Indeed, this plan will add $25 billion in interest costs over the next 30 years.

Beyond meeting an urgent, immediate need, this strategy is fair because it means the costs of badly-needed improvements to the power system will be shared by future Ontarians who will also benefit from them.

Less appealing is the government's plan to shift $2.5 billion in electricity costs over the next three years to the province's general budget.

Insofar as tax dollars will help cover the real cost of generating power, some conservation-minded users will subsidize their more wasteful neighbours. That's regrettable.

But there are no quick fixes for a massive, complex and inflexible hydro system that also confounded the best efforts of New Democrat and Progressive Conservative governments before these Liberals.

That said, whatever their latest hydro plan achieves, it does not excuse the Liberals for how they have too often bungled the energy file — and especially for the outrageous subsidies they handed the generators of wind and solar power.

Moreover, the relief this latest hydro plan provides may be diminished by the higher costs Ontarians are now paying for gasoline and natural gas as part of the Liberals' fight against climate change.

It will be up to every Ontarian to judge the worth of these hydro bill cuts. And in 15 months, it will be up to every voter to judge the Wynne government.

John Roe

Reactions expressed to hydro reduction

By: Valerie MacDonald

For: Northumberland Today

On: March 3, 2017

NORTHUMBERLAND - Hydro consumers were presented with two different political plans to lower hydro bills last week.

The first one was proposed by the NDP – which local riding and rural caucus head MPP Lou Rinaldi denounced – and the second was from his own Liberal government, which he supported.

The NDP plan called for a variety of measures, but the centrepiece was taking back public ownership of Hydro One. It suggested the average bill would go down 30%.

The more recent proposal, that from the Liberals, promises an average 25% decrease in hydro bills but comes with refinancing plans that add costs well into the future.

“Everyone will see a further reduction in their hydro bills, an average of 25%...This is a significant reduction in household costs,” Rinaldi said about the Liberal plan.

That 25% reduction includes the 8% HST taken off as of Jan. 1 of this year, or 17% on average more on top of what the Liberals had already put in place earlier this year.

“We're (also) limiting (hydro bill) increases to 2% per year for the next four years,” he also said.

For those living in rural Ontario, there will be “additional relief...passed along to rural customers in Low and Medium Density areas – some will see up to 50% reduction in their bills.”

The Ontario Energy Savings Plan will also provide “up to 50% more assistance” for low-income people, the MPP added.

The way this is being accomplished is by “refinancing our 20-year contracts (paying for hydro generation and nuclear facility refurbishments) that are now amortized over 20 years, changing those to a 30-year amortization, lowering the costs and passing that savings along through this plan.”

As Premier Kathleen Wynne outlined the plan, Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault sat silently by her side. In Port Hope last month, Thibeault told business people a plan to lower hydro bills was coming. After that plan was laid out last week, he said the re-amortization would cost $25-billion over 30 years.

It's this aspect of the Liberals' plan that has drawn criticism. The Conservatives and NDP put that amount higher, at $40-billion.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwarth stated in a media release that the Liberals' refinancing plan means taxpayers will be paying “$40-billion in interest costs over the next 30 years” to get this hydro bill reduction.

"The cost of electricity has gone up 50% just since Premier Wynne took office, and she has no plan to stop the actual price of power from rising," Horwath said.

"She’s spending $40-billion to buy some pre-election political relief for herself and her party – and failing to fix the system. We’re all going to pay for that, one way or another.”

But the Canadian Association of Retired Persons supports the Liberals' hydro-bill reduction plan. It had been lobbying for an immediate 25%.

In a CARP press release, vice-president Wanda Morris stated, “We’re glad that the province has finally decided to listen to Ontarians, particularly seniors, who were really being harmed by unrelenting increases in electricity rates. An immediate reduction in prices will take away some of the anxiety seniors now face when deciding whether to heat their homes or do their laundry.”

Another aspect of the Liberal proposal involves working with utility companies “to be more efficient, to further reduce costs,” Rinaldi said.

“Our goal is to get this new legislation on the table and passed as soon as possible, to put these cost reductions in place. We have to assume the opposition will be on board and co-operate so we can pass these savings along to all Ontarians right away.”

[Cheaper electricity doesn't mean the death of conservation. Here's why]

For: John Micheal McGrath

For: TVO

On: March 3, 2017

The author Barbara Tuchman, writing about Chinese leader Chiang-Kai Shek, said “if power corrupts, weakness in the seat of power, with its constant necessity of deals and bribes and compromising arrangements, corrupts even more.” The Liberal government in Ontario is weak — vulnerable even with its most consistent supporters and facing an election next summer — but is still for now in the seat of power. So here come the questionable deals and compromising arrangements.

Faced with a voter revolt over electricity prices, Premier Kathleen Wynne has joined the list of literally all of her predecessors from the last 20 years and promised Ontarians a break on their hydro bills, conspicuously timed to give the government maximum political advantage: if things work as planned, the average customer should see a 17 per cent drop in their bills this year, on top of the 8 per cent HST rebate that started in January.

How is the government proposing to pay for this double-digit decrease? In large part, by having Ontario Power Generation take on a lot of new debt so it can continue making payments to power generators. Under the previous plan, consumers were seeing big rate hikes now, and would have had them level off dramatically in coming years. The new proposal calls for smaller hikes now, paid for both by having them level off more slowly in future, and spreading the entire repayment schedule over a longer period of time.

In short, the government is trading a higher total cost in the end for lower individual bills along the way.

The Liberals say the cuts will kick in by the summer — just in time for air conditioning season, and just in time for MPPs to head back home to their ridings with a ready answer to the most common complaint from their voters. They've also committed to keeping hydro prices flat relative to inflation for at least four years.

Aside from the usual political disputes about pandering to voters, the most obvious concern about the plan is that lower hydro prices will undermine the government's conservation efforts. This may very well end up being wrong — and even if it's correct, a bit less conservation won't substantially undermine environmental protection efforts overall, and will have economic benefits.

It could be wrong because electricity prices aren't the only significant factor in encouraging conservation: even with a 25 per cent total cut in their bills, people still have an incentive to choose more efficient light bulbs and fridges. The harder parts of conservation need more than simply higher hydro prices to reduce energy use: people need help affording those more efficient fridges in the first place. Absent that help, high prices don't really help conservation efforts, they just extract wealth from people who don't have enough to start with.

But even if Ontarians do respond to lower prices by suddenly increasing their consumption, this may perversely end up being the more economical option, at little environmental cost. Ontario has a surplus of energy that we consistently have to export, at a loss. It would have been wiser not to build so much extra generation in the first place, but we can't un-build that capacity now, and that energy is both going to be generated and is going to be paid for, somehow: the province is locked into contracts with private companies that require it to purchase power whether or not Ontarians wind up using it. The only question is whether it gets used in-province and paid for domestically, or exported at a loss.

Related:

Note to Queen's Park: Policy doesn't have to be complicated to be good

Steve Paikin: How Ontario's premier can get her groove back

Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk made exactly this point in her indictment of Liberal power planning: “From 2009 to 2014, Ontario had to pay generators $339 million for curtailing 11.9 million megawatt-hours (MWh) of surplus electricity; during the same period, Ontario exported 95.1 million MWh of power to other jurisdictions, but the amount it was paid was $3.1 billion less than what it cost to produce that power.” Paradoxically, conserving electricity in a time of surplus production can force us into losing money in the process.

And it’s not as if conservation is the government’s only tool for shifting to a more environmentally friendly energy policy. It also wants people to switch to a greater use of Ontario’s much cleaner electricity system in lieu of fossil fuels, eventually replacing natural gas for home heating, and gasoline or diesel in cars. (It’s important to note in all this that despite slightly lower hydro costs, Ontario will continue to proceed with its cap-and-trade system to control greenhouse gas pollution.) The environmental benefits of powering cars with electricity, especially the very clean electricity Ontario has in abundance during the nighttime, are substantial. With the rapid decline of oil and gas prices in the last few years, a lower, slower-growing price for electricity may be exactly what’s needed. The government’s equally shady decision to increase its subsidy to people who buy luxury electric vehicles will probably help, too.

It would be one thing if the government’s financial jiggery-pokery was obviously terrible, but no real-world policy to address electricity prices is going to be elegant. A decision to pay off the province’s hydro costs over 40 years has some logic to it, and some costs, but the status quo policy to pay them over 20 years wasn’t a neutral decision, either — it’s how we found ourselves with the sharp hikes everyone is upset about.

The government has an interest in making sure things like electricity aren’t artificially cheap by imposing unfair costs on others, like dumping pollution into the air for free. The decision to close down coal-fired power plants in Ontario remains broadly popular, but it means electricity here simply won’t be as cheap as it is in jurisdictions that have yet to follow suit. All that said, there’s no virtue to higher costs on their own, either. People are wealthy when the things they need — housing, food, energy — are cheap and abundant. They’re poor when those things are scarce and expensive.

The big question mark is whether any of this will matter. In her remarks Thursday unveiling the new hydro policies, Wynne repeatedly conceded that the Liberal government had made mistakes in its energy policy but is asking for forgiveness. Voters may decide this is insufficient, or they may simply not believe her. They’ll get to make their judgment known come election day.

Watch The Agenda with Steve Paikin tonight at 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. for a conversation about the new Ontario Liberal plan for lowering hydro rates.

Photo courtesy of dpmitchell and licensed for commercial use under a Creative Commons licence. (See the uncropped version.)

WATCH: Hydro rates soared for a good, but poorly explained, reason, Thibeault says

By: Staff Post

For: Sudbury.com

On: March 3, 2017

At a press conference this morning at Greater Sudbury Utilities, Energy Minister and Sudbury MPP Glenn Thibeault said Ontario did a poor job explaining the province's skyrocketing hydro rates.

Unveiled yesterday, Thibeault provided details on the Ontario Fair Hydro Plan, which will refinance aspects of the province's hydro infrastructure upgrades over a longer term. In the short term, that allows Ontario’s Liberal government, which is under fire for the massive increase in electricity rates in recent years, to cut rates by 17 per cent starting this summer.

In the long term, however, critics say the Ontario Fair Hydro Plan will add more than a billion dollars in interest costs to taxpayers down the road.

Thibeault explained Ontario's high costs are a direct result of the $50 billion spent on upgrades to the electricity system following the massive 2003 blackout, which was blamed on an outdated power grid. He said the Liberals wanted to pay for those upgrades within a generation (which resulted in much higher electricity costs), but did a poor job of explaining that to taxpayers.

He said the refinancing Ontario is undertaking now means the province will take 30 years to pay for the electricity system upgrades, instead of the original 20 years.

Joining Thibeault for the press conference was Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca, who is also the guest speaker at a Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce luncheon starting at noon at the Holiday Inn on Regent Street.

Live coverage of the press conference has ended, as the press conference is over, but you can still watch the event by clicking the Play button in the above image.

[NDP leader impressed by Oxford County's 'amazing plans]

By: Bruce Chessell

For: Woodstock Sentinel Review

On: March 3, 2017

Local leaders met with Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath Thursday to discuss both her party's plan to reduce hydro rates and Oxford County's commitment to sustainability.

On Monday, Horwath announced her party's plan to cut hydro bills for everyone across the province by up to 30 per cent and return Hydro One back to public ownership. On Thursday, she said she was disappointed with the provincial Liberals' announcement promising a 25 per cent cut to hydro rates in Ontario.

"I don't think the premier has done anything but spend $40 billion to protect her political interests," Horwath said. "That's not what the people of Ontario deserve."

Horwath said there are a number of problems with Ontario's energy system, as well as enduring concerns over Premier Kathleen Wynne's plan to privatize Hydro One.

"To simply say that in order to deal with the political problem that the Liberals have, that they are going to increase payments (to refurbish power plants) to the tune of $40 billion and stretch them over the next 30 years isn't good enough," she said. "I think it makes people cynical about politics, and I don't blame them frankly."

Horwath also talked about her discussions with Oxford County's warden, David Mayberry, and Woodstock's mayor, Trevor Birtch. She said the meeting was about learning all of the "amazing" plans the county has.

"What I was able to do was get some detail on all kinds of different pieces," she said. "On demonstration projects, on rail, on energy, on renewables, on transit ... My mind is spinning on all of the things I heard today.

"I have to say it was a pleasure," Horwath added. "It was very inspiring ... This county and the folks that were part of this meeting today have shown that you can have real leadership when it comes to climate change and when it comes to taking responsibility for tackling climate change at the local level." Mayberry said he thought the discussions with Horwath went well.

"We wanted to make sure that all of the parties -Liberals, Conservative and NDP -understand where Oxford County stands on these issues," he said. "We want to make sure that every party understands that we have our goals, ambitions and drive, and that from that we're expecting and wanting to partner with them and work with whoever's the elected government of the day or future government." In response to the NDP's hydro plan, Birtch said the recognition of the high cost of nuclear energy from both the NDP and the Liberals has been interesting to see.

"There has been much editorializing from many sources that have been giving individuals within our community the sense that renewable energy projects, such as solar panels and windmills, is what has been increasing the cost of electricity for the home owner," he said. "In the dialogue that we've had in the last few days from the province, what we can clearly determine is that the true increase in cost has been generated by the nuclear industry and the refurbishments that's been happening there.

"Hearing today from the premier that the amortization of those expenses from 20 years being extended over 30 is something I have to give more thought to," Birtch added. "But clearly, we can now use that as a good example to see that renewable energy is not the driver of increased electricity bills."

[Patrick Brown on PC Hydro plan: Stay tuned]

By: Sue Sgambati

For: Soo Today

On: March 3, 2017

Progressive Conservative leader Patrick Brown says his party will soon be having its own hydro announcement that will 'detail fixes' to skyrocketing rates.

"I really believe the Liberal Hydro plan fell short," Brown said. "$1.4 billion in interest. We're paying to make up for mistakes that continue to be committed. We're borrowing money to make up for bad contracts."

The Simcoe North MPP was in Barrie Friday for Hockey Helps the Homeless and took questions from local media via conference call about his plan to relieve Hydro rates.

"Very shortly we will be having our own Hydro announcement," he said offering no specifics on timing.

"As a starting point, I think the NDP and the Liberals are in damage control on this file and that's why they came up with these schemes because it's about their own political survival. They're looking at pretty ugly polling numbers. But ultimately this is the mess they own," Brown said.

"When we do unveil our Hydro plan I can assure you we'll be dealing with the issue of generation. We'll be dealing with the issue of bad contracts. We'll be dealing with the issue of the ongoing contracts that are being proceeded with even though we don't need it."

Brown says his party was awaiting figures from the government before drafting its Hydro fix.

He alleges the government is not sharing numbers that the opposition can work with but says some were released yesterday.

"This is probably the most secretive government we've ever had in Ontario history and when they're not sharing the books its difficult to put exact numbers on the table and that's why we wanted that disclosure."

Brown is also upset that 'out of control' executives' salaries are not being addressed and he also wants the Premier to ensure future shares of Hydro One are not sold.

Of Kathleen Wynne's plan to lower electricity rates another 17 percent, Brown said it doesn't go far enough.

"The Liberals have raised our Hydro rates since coming into office 400 percent and they're offering a 17 percent rebate simply by borrowing money and paying for contracts over a longer time."

Brown says the Liberals have not invested in infrastructure to make the system more reliable.

"Blackouts and the amount of interruptions have gone up 250 percent between 2012 and 2015," he said.

His Hydro plan will be 'across the board' and 'effect everyone' although he concedes the energy file has not been well-managed for decades.

"But the real blemishes, the real mistakes have happened on the watch of this Liberal government."

New rules for energy retailers in 2017

By: Staff Post

For: South Asian Focus

On: March 3, 2017

Tough new rules to better protect households and small businesses in their dealings with energy retailers that came into effect recently have consumers relieved.

Following a review of the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2010, the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) recommended several new measures to strengthen consumer protection which included banning door-to-door energy retailers from signing people up for an energy contract while they are at your home and placing limits on when energy retailers can come to your home to market or advertise their business.

Door-to-door energy retailers can present consumers with information at the door of their home at certain times, but they can no longer sign them up for a contract when they are there. This gives residential consumers more time to consider whether an energy contract is right for them and make an informed decision.

“It is critical that we hear from consumers to understand their concerns and how we, as the independent regulator tasked with protecting energy consumers, can better protect their interests,” says Martine Band, associate general counsel at the OEB. “It's our goal to give consumers a voice in their energy sector — a voice that has impact — and we want consumers to know that they are being heard.”

Consumers can visit the OEB’s website to access tips so they have the information they need to make decisions about their energy supply that are right for them. Consumers can also access complaint data, read about enforcement action taken, and report any concerns they have about their interactions with an energy retailer through the website.

The OEB encourages all consumers to visit its website and learn more about their rights and the rules that energy retailers have to follow, and to contact the OEB if they have any concerns.

Bruce Grey MPP Says Taxpayers Are Now On The Hook For The Hydro Mess

By: Janice Mackay

For: Blackburn News

On: March 3, 2017

Bruce Grey Owen Sound’s MPP says there is nothing fair about Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne’s hydro plan.

Bill Walker says spending $14 billion of taxpayers money to fix the mess the Liberal government created is just shifting the cost to everyone’s tax bill.

Walker agrees rate relief is needed for skyrocketing electricity bills, but he is concerned they are using taxpayer money to cover the discount.

Walker says while Hydro bills may decrease 25%, you will have to pay that much more in taxes and have fewer government services.

Walker says instead of cancelling expensive energy contracts, the Liberals instead are scheduled to sign more energy contracts today, despite running an energy surplus of power.

That forces Ontario to pay the US and Quebec up to a half a billion dollars a year to take the surplus power.

He says the average Residential hydro bill has increased over $1000. a year since the Liberals took office.

And up to 600,000 families were unable to pay their bills last year, with some 60,000 cut off from power.

“We remain the only party that is committed to stopping the bad contracts by repealing the Green Energy Act,” said MPP Walker.

He also added that electricity prices are higher because the Liberal government wasted $1.1 billion on the gas plants scandal, $2 billion on Smart Meters that don’t work, and, as confirmed by the auditor general, because Ontarians have been forced to pay a shocking $9.2 billion more than necessary for green energy contracts. Additionally, ratepayers will also continue to be overcharged $170 billion for electricity – meaning over $12,000 in excess costs for every Ontarian.

“Again, this is no real fix – it’s a scheme, a $14-billion misconception, and it will cost you, your children and your grandchildren for many more years in reduced education, healthcare and social services.”

Politicians sound off in northern Ontario about Liberal hydro plan

By: Staff Post

For: CBC

On: March 3, 2017

Opposition politicians in northeastern Ontario are throwing shade on the province's plan that it says will lower energy costs for residents and small businesses.

The plan, announced by Premier Kathleen Wynne Thursday, calls for a 17 per cent reduction in hydro bills come the summer. The initiative involves stretching the financing costs of building and refurbishing power plants over a longer period of time than was previously planned.

Hydro rates to drop 17%, but Ontarians will pay for it later

ANALYSIS: Ontario Liberals hope hydro plan will douse voter anger

"Kathleen Wynne said 'oh yes it will cost a bit more,'" Vic Fideli, the Progressive Conservative MPP for Nipissing said. "It's 25 billion dollars just in interest."

The New Democrats, who already released their energy proposals, are charging that the Liberals' plan is more about refinancing, and less about improving Ontario's hydro sector.

NDP proposes plan to cut hydro rates by up to 30%

Ontario opposition parties spar over NDP plan to reduce hydro rates

"Their plan is really a financial restructuring plan," Nickel Belt MPP France Gélinas said. "It has nothing to do with the energy sector. They're keeping everything as is."

The Tories have yet to release their plan for hydro.

Spreading energy costs out longer 'fairer'

Wynne has acknowledged that the bill for the across-the-board-relief will cost more in the long run, but said the new proposals are "fairer, because it doesn't ask this generation of hydro customers alone to pay the freight for everyone before and after."

The plan would keep electricity rates at or below the rate of inflation over the next four years, but government officials said they can't predict the size of the electricity rate increases after that.

Ontario's energy minister, and Sudbury MPP, Glenn Thibeault said spreading out the costs of green energy contracts over 30 years will also help.

Ont Hyrdo 20170302

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault and Premier Kathleen Wynne say spreading out hydro costs over a longer period of time will cost more in the long run but will be fairer to Ontario ratepayers. (Frank Gunn/Canadian Press)

"When we did those 20 year contracts, we front-loaded the payment so it's only you and I and this generation that pays for it," he said.

"We know that our system and the generating capacity that we built will last a lot longer than 20 years."

The Liberals' move comes as Wynne's government trails the PCs by some 14 points in a range of polls and finds itself nearly even with the NDP ahead of next year's election.

[Brown said Tory plan "will affect everyone"]

By: Bob Bruton

For: The Barrie Examiner

On: March 3, 2017

Patrick Brown says the Tories' soon-to-be released plan on cutting Ontario hydro rates will be for more than homeowners, farmers and small businesses.

“It will be across the board, it will affect everyone,” the Progressive Conservative Party leader said Friday morning – almost 24 hours after the governing Liberals announced they're lowering electricity rates.

Premier Kathleen Wynne's government said Thursday it will cut hydro costs by 17% this summer, following an 8% reduction Jan. 1.

The new cuts will not only affect Ontario households, but many small businesses and farms. People with low incomes and those living in eligible rural communities would receive even greater reductions to their electricity bills.

Rate increases during the next four years would be held to the rate of inflation for everyone.

“Very shortly we will be having our own hydro announcement and we're going to detail some of the fixes we see in the system,” Brown said. “It will be soon ... in the near future.”

The Ontario Tory boss said his party's plan will include details on how it will be implemented and how it would be financed.

The Liberal plan, however, does not directly affect some large hydro users.

“The focus of our announcement is on reducing the electricity bills of families, farms and small to medium-sized businesses across Ontario by an average of 25%,” said Natasha Demetriades of the Energy Ministry.

“However, hospitals, post-secondary institutions and municipalities will still see a modest reduction in their electricity bills with the removal of social programs from the rate base to the tax base. Taking social programs off of the rate base is part of our plan to make the electricity system more fair.”

She said some broader public institutions have already taken advantage of energy saving programs.

But it's not nearly a 25% hydro cut.

The City of Barrie spent nearly $7.8 million on electricity in 2016. Its top five users were the Wastewater Treatement Plant at almost $1.1 million, the Surface Water Treatment Plant at nearly $620,000, East Bayfield Community Centre at $560,000, Holly Community centre at $531,600 and Barrie Molson Centre at $403,400.

Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre spends approximately $3.4 million annually on electricity. It's largest users are the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system, diagnostic imaging for MRIs, CTs and nuclear medicine, linear accelerators for cancer treatment and for general uses, such as lighting.

Sharon Burkhart of Georgian College said its overall 2015-2016 hydro budget was $2.32 million, and is expected to increase to $2.64 million in 2016-2017, a fiscal year which ends March 31.

“A reduction would mean several hundred thousand additional dollars could be spent on student learning, services or facilities instead of paying hydro bills,” she said.

Ontario's New Democratic Party announced an extensive plan Monday to save all provincial households as much as 30% on their hydro bills - including immediate measures like eliminating time-of-use premiums and unfair, higher delivery charges, and repairs the broken hydro system permanently – including a return of Hydro One to public hands.

“I think the NDP and Liberals were in damage control on this file,” Brown said. “That's why they came up with these schemes, because it's about their own political survival and we're looking at pretty ugly polling numbers.

“But ultimately this is a mess they own.”

The Liberals' plan to find hydro savings is to finance the costs of electricity generation contracts during longer periods of time.

NDP leader Andrea Horwath has said this plan will cost Ontario taxpayers $40 billion in interest costs during the next 30 years.

“I really believe the Liberal hydro plan fell short” said Brown, Simcoe North MPP. “At $1.4-billion in interest (annually) we're paying to make up for mistakes that continue to be committed. We're borrowing money to make up for bad contracts.”

He said the PC hydro plan will deal with such issues as generation, bad contracts and even ongoing contracts.

“It (the Liberal plan) doesn't go far enough right now,” Brown said. “Right now the Liberals have now raised our hydro rates since coming into office 400% - 400%, and they're offering a 17% rebate simply by borrowing money and paying for contracts over a longer time.”

Ontario Energy Board data says the off-peak or cheapest electricity prices in this province have nearly doubled between Nov. 1, 2009 and Nov. 1, 2016.

Kathleen Wynne defends plan to spread out hydro costs

By: Staff Post

For: CBC

On: March 3, 2017

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne is defending her government's decision to cut hydro rates by about 17 per cent, saying it's not fair to ask this generation of hydro bill payers to shoulder the costs of infrastructure upgrades to be used for years to come.

Hydro rates to drop 17%, but Ontarians will pay for it later

ANALYSIS: Will Kathleen Wynne's hydro plan save her re-election hopes?

Wynne was a guest on CBC Radio's Ottawa Morning Friday, and said decades of hydro infrastructure neglect by past Liberal, NDP and PC governments necessitated action by the time the Liberals again assumed power in 2003.

"Is it fair to ask this generation to pay not only for that neglect, but also to pay for assets that are going to be in service and are going to provide capacity over the next 30 years?" Wynne asked.

"And we've determined that the answer to that is no, that we need to be able to ask those [future] generations to share the cost. ... The decision probably should have been, in the first place, to spread the cost over the life of the asset as opposed to trying to get it paid off that quickly.

"... It's really intergenerational fairness."

Bills to drop by 17%, on average

Residential and small business hydro bills in Ontario will drop by 17 per cent on average this summer under the plan, which was announced Thursday. It will lift billions of dollars in costs off customers this year and load them onto future hydro bills and taxpayers.

It means some $28 billion in costs projected to be paid over the next decade will be refinanced. Officials said the maximum amount of interest per year would be $1.4 billion, with those interest costs to be paid by hydro customers in future years.

Asked about those interest costs, Wynne told Ottawa Morning interim host Hallie Cotnam that other solutions would also come at a cost.

"We looked at everything ... we looked at all of the options in terms of what we could do to provide relief to people. And I know that there are people, some of them in Opposition, who will say we should just rip up the contracts that we've signed ... that is not reasonable and in fact, would also put billions of dollars of more cost into the system."

Listen to the full interview with Wynne here.

'Always a political component'

Asked whether the move was political — it will start to take effect on hydro bills this summer, about a year before the June 2018 election — Wynne said "there's always a political component" to decisions politicians make.

"I'm in elected office. I was elected in 2014 to do a job, and part of that job, a fundamental part of that job, is responding to challenges that people face in the province," she said.

"So yes, we're more than a year away from an election and there will be that interpretation of this. I can't actually help that, Hallie ... My job is to be responsible and to be responsive to people's lives and people's concerns, and that's why we're making these changes."

Ont. hydro cut misses many businesses, but offers some manufacturers a reprieve

By: Staff Post

For: Canadian Manufacturing

On: March 3, 2017

TORONTO—Queen's Park's latest step to push down the ballooning cost of Ontario hydro bills largely missed the province's businesses—but it didn't ignore them entirely.

Premier Kathleen Wynne announced the new measures to decrease residential electricity bills by 25 per cent March 2. The figure includes an eight per cent rebate introduced this January and a further 17 per cent reduction that will come into effect this summer, assuming the Liberal's Fair Hydro Plan clears the legislature.

Despite the rate reduction, critics were quick to point out that the plan—which involves refinancing some of the province’s long-term power contracts—will ultimately cost ratepayers in the province more.

Wynne likened the plan to re-amortizing a mortgage over 30 years as opposed to 20.

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said the government expects its plan to cost about $25 billion over 30 years, though opposition parties said the costs could be more like $42 billion.

“Over time it will cost a bit more. That’s true,” Wynne said when detailing the plan. “And it will take longer to pay off. That’s also true. But it is fairer because it doesn’t ask this generation of hydro customers alone to pay the freight for everyone before and after.”

Though rural businesses should see a reduction in their delivery charge under the new plan, for most businesses, taking part in the immediate savings is more difficult.

Still, mid-sized manufacturers across the province have at least been offered a chance.

As part of the plan, the government will expand the Industrial Conservation Initiative, a program open to manufacturers and other industrial consumers that can translate to savings of up to one-third on a hydro bill’s Global Adjustment line. Under the program, instead of paying the wholesale Global Adjustment rate, eligible companies pay the GA based on how much power they are using during the five hours of the year when the Ontario electricity grid requires the most power.

When it was introduced in 2011, only the province’s largest companies—those that whose peak power demand was greater than 5 megawatts—could join. That threshold has already been lowered twice and currently sits at a single megawatt. Now, the Fair Hydro Plan proposes opening the program up to companies whose peak power demand is just 500 kilowatts—giving even smaller manufacturers the chance to shave thousands off their hydro bill.

Savings of up to 34 per cent on the Global Adjustment can be enticing, but the program requires companies to anticipate when the province's overall power demand will peak and curb their power consumption accordingly. The province provided few details about the changes, but currently, companies that use less than 5 MW must opt-in to the program.

It is a complex process, but one of the few ways companies can take advantage of the latest Ontario hydro cuts.

You can learn more about the program, eligibility and predicting peaks in the Independent Electricity System Operator's latest backgrounder. Note that it has not been updated with the proposed 500 kW changes.

And though the new plan could offer some reprieve for smaller manufacturers, larger businesses already enrolled in the program appear to be out of luck.

Following the announcement, the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturer Association, said the plan does nothing to address the "out of control" electricity rates for large hydro customers. The organization, which represents the Canadian divisions of Fiat Chrysler, Ford and General Motors says Ontario electricity costs can be two to three times higher in Ontario than competing auto regions.

"We will continue to reach out to the province to see what can be done but this is a major disappointment for vehicle assemblers and their parts and component manufacturing operations," Mark Nantais the CVMA's president, said in a statement.

[Wynne's hydro plan draws ire and praise]

By: Jeff Turl

For: Sudbury.com

On: March 3, 2017

Ontario PC Leader Patrick Brown says the Liberal plan to lower electricity bills will "burden Ontarians with $14 billion in new interest payments over 30 years."

“The Wynne Liberals came clean today and admitted their $14 billion mistake and that their policies and their policies alone are responsible for the 400% increase in hydro. Whether you pay today or pay tomorrow this Liberal plan will burden Ontario ratepayers for years to come,” said Brown in a news release.

"The Liberal plan signed on to borrow $14 billion in interest payments alone."

Brown was joined today by CARP.

The senior's advocacy group applauded the promised reduction, but say's it doesn't go far enough.

It launched a “Heat or Eat” campaign last year, calling for the government to restore sanity to electricity rates in Ontario with an immediate reduction in hydro bills in Ontario.

"Seniors in rural Ontario have been the hardest hit by the rise in hydro rates under the Liberal government and today’s announced increases to the Rural or Remote Electricity Rate Protection rebate will help offset the higher distribution costs faced by rural customers," it says in a news release.

"CARP was disappointed that the Premier did not address time of use pricing surcharges which continues to unfairly punish retirees who consume most of their electricity during the highest priced periods. CARP calls on the Premier to address this issue as these announced changes are implemented."

Meanwhile the plan drew praise from The Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM).

"We would like to commend the Minister of Energy, Glenn Thibeault and the provincial government for announcing today that they will lower electricity bills by 25 percent on average this summer for all residential customers.

“We are pleased that electricity ratepayers will see the positive benefits of this announcement in the near future and for the commitment that rates will not increase beyond the rate of inflation for the next four years,” said Mayor Alan Spacek of Kapuskasing and President of FONOM. “FONOM has raised this issue repeatedly, pressing upon the government to take immediate action to provide relief to ratepayers.”

Auto Makers Say No Help from Wynne

By: Robert Tuomi

For: Windsor Square

On: March 3, 2017

(WINDSOR, ON) – Just after the Ontario government issued a plan to lower hydro rates in the province, the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers Association issued an announcement saying the changes will do little for vehicle manufacturing.

In a news release, the Association’s president, Mark Nantais, was critical of the changes, suggesting they, “… do nothing to address a climate of investment uncertainty related to what has been our number one request to the Province of Ontario; the urgent need to address out of control Class A industrial electricity rates.”

Nantais said he is concerned over rates as much as two to three times higher in Ontario than in competing auto jurisdictions.

“We will continue to reach out to the province to see what can be done,” Nantais said. “But, this is a major disappointment for vehicle assemblers and their parts and component manufacturing operations.”

With the Wynne government’s carbon pricing and cap and trade taxes looming over the industry, the Association is concerned the province will, “… remain uncompetitive with other jurisdictions vying for automotive investment.”

The Association says the provincial government must address the taxation issue in the short term to support Ontario’s vehicle manufacturing competitiveness and temper the overall cost of doing business in the province.

Members of the Association include automobile manufacturer FCA Canada and Ford of Canada. Both have operations in Windsor, manufacturing vehicles and engines respectively.

In total, 130,000 jobs in the province are directly tied to vehicle assembly. Direct and indirect jobs associated with vehicle manufacturing are estimated at over 500,000 across Canada.

Wynne readying for voters' 'judgment' in next election after hydro move

By: Andrea Janus

For: CBC News

On: March 3, 2017

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne said of voters that she is "prepared to take their judgment" in next year's election, a day after she announced a plan to cut hydro rates for Ontarians who were getting increasingly frustrated with her government over skyrocketing bills.

Wynne said Friday she has been "repeatedly" asked over the last few months whether, with her government sitting low in the polls, she will lead the Liberal party into next year's provincial election.

ANALYSIS | Why Kathleen Wynne is so unpopular, and what she can do about it

In an interview with CBC Radio's Metro Morning, Wynne said answering such questions is "part of the job," but confirmed she does plan to run in 2018.

"The poll that matters is the poll when people go to vote," Wynne told host Matt Galloway. "And I'm prepared to take their judgment. In the interim I'm going to continue to do my job."

Polls by three different firms in recent months suggest that just 13 to 16 per cent of voters approve of the job Wynne's doing.

Wynne denied, however, that Thursday's announcement on hydro rate cuts was designed to curry favour with voters, which is also how some viewed her recent decision to stop Toronto from bringing in tolls on major highways.

ANALYSIS | Will Kathleen Wynne's hydro plan save her re-election hopes?

"There's always a political component to these decisions, I'm not going to deny that," Wynne said. "But as I said yesterday I'm not expecting people to stand up and celebrate because this is what we've done. What we've done, and what people will see on their electricity bills come summer, is a response to a real need that people were feeling and it's my responsibility as premier to respond to those needs and to help."

On Thursday, Wynne announced her government's plan to cut Ontarians' hydro bills by 17 per cent.

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Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne unveiled her plan Thursday to cut hydro bills, which is the biggest political issue her government faces less than a year-and-a-half away from an election. (Frank Gunn/Canadian Press)

The cut will come into effect this summer.

The move is in addition to an eight-per-cent cut that came into effect on Jan. 1 in the form of a rebate on the provincial portion of the HST on hydro bills.

Small businesses will also see their bills go down, and more medium-sized businesses will qualify for a preferential electricity rate that is currently given to larger industrial businesses.

The plan is made possible by a move to stretch the financing costs of billions of dollars' worth of hydro projects, such as building and refurbishing power plants. Lengthening these payment schedules will result in as much as $1.4 billion in annual interest, officials told CBC Toronto, costs that will be paid by hydro customers in future years.

The plan keeps electricity rates at or below the rate of inflation over the next four years, but the government would not commit to the size of rate increases after that.

Hydro rates to drop 17% but Ontarians will pay for it later

Residents have been complaining for months of soaring bills, which prompted Wynne to bring in the 8-per-cent cut in January. But she said her government "realized some months ago" that Ontarians needed more relief.

ANALYSIS | Why hydro bills are so high in Ontario

"It's not right, it's not acceptable that people would have to choose between feeding their kids, paying the rent and paying their electricity bills," the premier said Friday.

Opposition parties criticized the plan Thursday, saying that their children's children would be paying for it.

'Everybody is paying their share'

Wynne said Friday if she were to answer to her own grandchildren about the scheme, she would explain that she wants their parents to be able to "look after you now and do the things that are going to make your life good right now, but that will mean that you will also have to pay for a strong and clean electricity system into the future.

"But it means that everybody is paying their share. Because those assets, that building that we've done [in the hydro system] is going to last for a long time."

Asked whether she feels out of touch with residents' concerns, Wynne countered that the new policy is a direct response to people's concerns.

"I've said and I've acknowledged that we didn't pay as close attention to people and their electricity rates as we should have. You and I are having this conversation today because I get that, I get that we need to put in place support for people right now, it needs to be lasting, it needs to be structural change and that's what we have done," Wynne said.

"My earnest hope is that when people see those changes on their bills in the summer that they will recognize it's making their lives easier and they can move on to other things, because I don't want people to focus on their electricity bills to the exclusion of doing things with their family and feeling comfortable in their lives. That's not right."

Hydro ratepayer puts Wynne on hot seat

By: Canadian Press

For: Toronto Sun

On: March 3, 2017

TORONTO - Premier Kathleen Wynne was put on the hot seat over her new hydro plan today, not by reporters or opposition politicians, but by a ratepayer from Sturgeon Falls.

Wynne was making calls to people across the province who had written to her to complain about soaring electricity bills, a day after she announced an average 17-per-cent cut is coming this summer.

She made three of the calls today with journalists in the room for a photo opportunity and while two of the people she called mostly thanked her for the announcement, a woman named Anita had some things to say.

The 17-per-cent reduction is being achieved by spreading some costs over a longer period of time, akin to amortizing a mortgage over 30 years instead of 20, a move that will ultimately cost ratepayers billions of dollars in extra interest.

Anita wanted to know why that was being done and, using the mortgage analogy, said it’s like she will be paying for her house five times over.

Wynne said current ratepayers were footing the whole bill for investments that needed to be made to upgrade the electricity system, and since people in 15 or 20 years will still be making use of those assets, it's more fair to share the costs.

Anita, who had Wynne on the phone for about 10 minutes, had some parting words of advice for the premier.

"One last thing: see that you get good advisers," she said. "Like, you say '(high hydro bills are) my mistake.' It's not only your mistake. You've got a team there working and some of those are really bad advisers."

[Premier Kathleen Wynne's pocketbook politics may not be enough to power down anger over hydro rates: Cohn]

By: Martin Regg Cohn

For: The Star

On: March 3, 2017

As big bangs go, it's big.

And it goes like this: Get a bigger bang for the buck by borrowing money from future ratepayers — lowering the price for today's voters.

The latest Liberal plan to blow up Ontario's electricity system will slash hydro bills by roughly 25 per cent, year over year. But it's not the first time politicians have tried to retain the reins of power by reining in the price of power.

With the 2003 election looming, then-Tory premier Ernie Eves froze hydro rates in a panic — piling on billions of dollars in debt. It didn’t work out so well.

Eves paid a price on the campaign trail, going down to defeat. And ratepayers spent the next decade paying down the accumulated debt from his gambits (including a failed Progressive Conservative attempt to privatize electrical utilities), courtesy of the inherited and much-hated debt retirement charge on their bills.

All these years later, Kathleen Wynne faced a similar power crisis — electrical and political — but chose a bolder strategy:

On the eve of the 2018 election, with hydro prices boiling over, she went all in — not just freezing prices but cutting them back. Her Liberals are promising even bigger savings for ratepayers in remote areas, on reserves, or in financial need.

But like her predecessors, Wynne isn’t cutting the cost of hydro much. She is mostly fiddling with the price.

That’s not semantics but economics. The Liberal plan essentially refinances and rebalances fixed costs that remain unchanged within the system.

First, the refinancing: It’s akin to extending the amortization period on your home mortgage from 20 to 30 years, easing the burden of high monthly payments today on the premise that you will still be enjoying that asset decades later. The trade-off, of course, is that you pay more in financing costs, adding $25 billion in additional interest payments spread over 30 years.

You get what you pay for — short term relief. And you pay for what you get — via long term debt.

Second, the rebalancing: It’s about expanded financial relief — for the poor, rural residents, and people living on reserves — transferred from the electricity system to the provincial treasury, on the grounds that social programs are more properly paid through a progressive tax system.

We won’t know if it all adds up until voters pass judgment on the plan in the months ahead. But given the rising hostility over hydro rates, the Liberals knew they couldn’t afford to wait any longer.

History, however, suggests hydro therapy rarely calms voters.

Former premier Dalton McGuinty brought in a 10 per cent “Clean Energy Benefit” ahead of the 2011 election to trump opposition demands for an HST holiday. Yet subsequent polling showed most voters were oblivious to the giveaway, giving the government no credit for the cut — which is why Wynne ultimately phased out the $1 billion-a-year program.

But under renewed pressure, the premier revived that benefit in January, this time dressed up as straight 8 per cent rebate on the provincial portion of the HST. Yet once again voters seemed unmoved by a fleeting tax break, forcing Wynne to go back to the drawing board this week to come up with a further 17 per cent reduction on hydro rates.

Taken together, the financial engineering pushes her over the psychological hurdle of a 25 per cent cut — not quite a Boxing Day or Black Friday discount, but it won't go unnoticed. How will the government pay for it?

The remortgaging — essentially a second mortgage — will be hived off to Ontario Power Generation, the government-owned business enterprise that is one of the successor organizations to the old Ontario Hydro. For better or for worse, OPG boasts decades of debt experience. Conveniently, the borrowings won't show up in the government's annual budget, which is no small thing given the provincial debt now exceeds $300 billion.

Another chunk of the rate relief will be absorbed by the treasury. But the government still intends to meet its pre-election goal of eliminating its annual budget deficit this spring, thanks to robust revenues in a recovering economy.

Paradoxically, the government will be bolstered in its goal of a balanced budget by fresh revenues from partially selling off — cannibalizing — the transmission assets of Hydro One, another piece of the old Ontario Hydro (split up by the Tories in their own abortive privatization plan). Wynne went further than the Tories ever dared with her Hydro One sell-off, and is paying a political price — but also cashing in on the financial windfall when she needs it most.

Despite the dubious economics, will the latest rate relief prove to be smart politics? We live in a world — and a province — of increasingly transactional pocketbook politics.

The government isn't counting on the public to bow down in gratitude, or banking on the latest discount to serve as a magic channel changer. But if it dials down the volume or cuts down the static, the plan may at least give them the space to talk about something beyond Ontario's perennial plague of high hydro rates.

And it will throw into sharp relief what really ails the party, amid the wave of public hostility over hydro that has driven down its support: Are people angry at Wynne because of high rates, or are they apoplectic about electricity costs because it serves as a convenient proxy for their antipathy to the premier?

[Arnott: Hydro rate “cut” will cost us more over the long run]

By: Ted Arrnott

For: South Western Ontario

On: March 3, 2017

WELLINGTON-HALTON HILLS — On March 2, the Ontario Government announced a plan to lower hydro rates by 25 per cent beginning this summer.

In order to finance the rate cuts, the Government has extended the costs of electricity generation contracts over a longer period.

“This means that we are going to be paying billions of dollars more over a longer period of time,” Wellington-Halton Hills MPP Ted Arnott said. “It’s like refinancing a mortgage on a house — your monthly payments may be smaller, but in the long run you end up paying much, much more. They’re pushing the bill off to our children and grandchildren.”

According to published reports, it is estimated that the rate cut will ultimately cost Ontario an additional $1.4 billion a year in interest.

“The Government boasts about cutting rates by 25 per cent,” Mr. Arnott observed. “However, that 25 per cent includes the 8 per cent HST reduction that already went into effect on Jan. 1, which they are essentially reannouncing.”

Mr. Arnott pointed out that these cuts would not have been necessary if not for the Liberals disastrous energy policies which sent Ontario hydro rates skyrocketing in the first place.

“They’re scrambling to fix a problem they’ve admitted to creating,” he said. “Our Ontario PC Caucus has consistently opposed the Liberals' energy policies which have caused this mess, including voting against the Green Energy Act in 2009.”

Mr. Arnott also questioned why it took the Government so long to act.

“We’ve been raising this issue in the Legislature repeatedly. I launched a petition calling on the Government to stabilize hydro rates over a year ago,” Mr. Arnott said. “It shouldn’t have taken the Government so long to realize that hydro bills have risen to the point where they are increasingly unaffordable for many families. Also, skyrocketing rates are costing us jobs, as businesses have closed or relocated outside Ontario.”

Mr. Arnott believes that with an election looming on the horizon, the Liberals are desperate.

“We all know there’s an election coming next year,” he said. “With their diminishing support in Ontario, the Liberals are focused only on political survival.”

Other Energy related news

E.L.K. users raise concerns about proposed rate increase during meeting

By: Staff Post

For: Yahoo News

On: March 3, 2017

Essex County residents expressed concerns about a proposed monthly increase to their hydro bills during a public meeting Thursday night.

The meeting, hosted by the Ontario Energy Board, was held to discuss an application by E.L.K. Energy to hike their distribution rate by $3.50 per month.

"That $3.50 increase is required for succession planning into the future," said Mark Danelon, a representative of the utility company. " As well as the new programs that the government has rolled out. To try and implement those in a reasonable and efficient fashion."

Counting nickles and dimes

Wayne Borcher was one of about 30 customers who attended the meeting. The Belle River man explained he's had his cable shut off, his phone plan halted and has even had to cut back on the groceries he buys for his family all because of increasing costs.

While $3.50 might not seem like much to some, when you're counting your change to get by each month it's a huge cost, Borcher said.

"The cost of utilities, water, gas pumps go up, even fruit goes up," he said. "Everything is literally going up except for what I work for. So it's coming down to the nickle and dime. "

E.L.K. Energy serves about 12,000 homes in Essex, Lakeshore and Kingsville. Danelon said the company heard what customers were saying during the meeting, but asked for patience as the electricity sector works through a period of transition.

Understanding how rates are calculated

Senior legal counsel for the OEB Kristi Sebaji, said the focus needs to be on finding a balance between what's needed to keep the hydro system in good shape and maintaining reasonable rates for customers.

Public meetings, such as the one held Thursday, explain to customers why a company might need to raise costs, she added.

"No one likes increased rates but I think when they better understand what's going into it, I think it helps them understand where there bills are coming from."

If approved, the rate increase would show up on customer bills for the next five years, starting in May.

Visuals

Sudbury Hydro
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Honored to host Minister Thibeault for Fair Hydro Rate announcement on 25% hydro bill reduction. #relief @GlennThibeault

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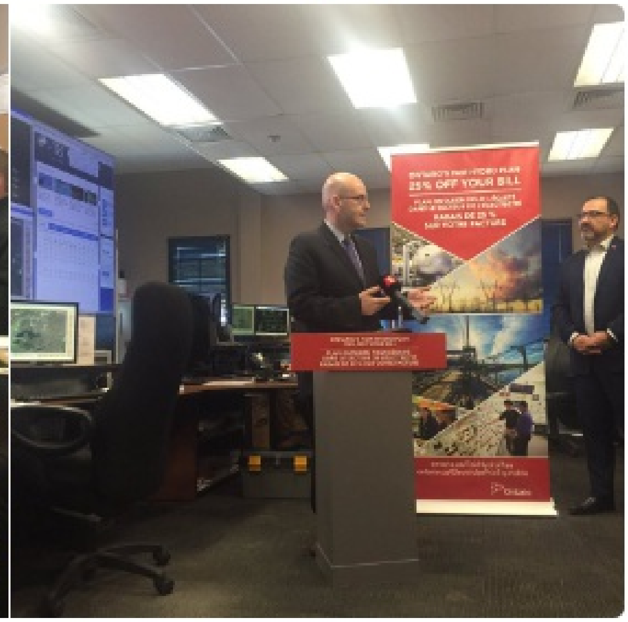

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