

FW: Afternoon Media Scan: Fair Hydro Plan - March 20, 2017

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From: Electronic Media

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Subject: Afternoon Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 20, 2017

Afternoon Media Scan: March 20, 2017

Media Scafair Hydro Plan

March 20, 2017

Click links below to view article:

Online Coverage . 2

[Toronto Star: Liberals under fire for ads promoting hydro rate cut . 2](#)

[CP24: Liberal's hydro ads are in contempt of parliament, Tories say . 4](#)

[BayToday.ca: Wynne Liberals' partisan hydro ads in contempt of parliament: PCs . 6](#)

TV Transcripts (Noon) 7

[CFTO: Controversy Over Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan Ads Continue . 7](#)

Online Coverage

Toronto Star LIBERALS UNDER FIRE FOR ADS PROMOTING HYDRO RATE CUT

By: Robert Benzie

March 20, 2017

<https://www.thestar.com/news/queenspark/2017/03/20/liberals-under-fire-for-ads-promoting-hydro-rate-cut.html>

As the governing Liberals gear up for an all-out advertising blitz to promote a 25-per-cent reduction in hydro rates this year, they are under fire for jumping the gun with radio ads.

Both the opposition Progressive Conservatives and New Democrats complain the commercials that began airing Friday are in contempt of parliament because the new rate cut has not yet been approved officially.

"This Liberal government has no business in possibly spending millions of hard-earned taxpayer dollars on self-promoting hydro ads," PC Leader Patrick Brown said Monday.

"They are blatantly partisan and they are littering radio stations and social media in a sad attempt to save this government's falling popularity," fumed Brown, who is expected to unveil his party's plan for hydro relief within weeks.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath blasted "the self-serving, partisan radio ads" that are coming months before bills are to be lowered in June.

"Not one dime has come off the skyrocketing hydro bills and this premier has not tabled a plan yet, nor even any legislation yet to show Ontarians what their money is going to be spent on, or if they are even going to save any money in the future," said Horwath.

"But she is still spending more money on advertising, claiming that the problem has been solved," she added.

Premier Kathleen Wynne was unrepentant about the two radio spots, which include the line "we've heard you," a reference to the furor over skyrocketing rates.

The Liberal government is cutting hydro rates by 25 per cent. They will be held at inflation for at least the next four years.

"We have a plan that actually will reduce people's electricity bills and will reduce those bills by the summer," said Wynne.

"Substantial relief: 25 per cent on average off all bills across the province for residents who pay for electricity in their homes and further relief for people who are paying disproportionately high distribution costs in remote and rural areas and an enhancement to the Ontario Electricity Support Program that will help people on low incomes."

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault told reporters the Liberals have "spent under \$1 million on both the radio ads and the social media ads" and there will be "more to come" in print and on television.

Three weeks ago, Queen's Park announced a 17-per-cent cut in electricity prices atop the 8-per-cent reduction that took effect Jan. 1, when the provincial portion of the harmonized sales tax was removed from bills.

The measures will cost \$25 billion in increased interest payments on the cost of recent electricity system improvements, which will now be amortized over the next 30 years.

With files from Rob Ferguson

C P 24: LIBERAL'S HYDRO ADS ARE IN CONTEMPT OF PARLIAMENT, TORIES SAY

By: Allison Jones

March 20, 2017

<http://www.cp24.com/news/liberal-s-hydro-ads-are-in-contempt-of-parliament-tories-say-1.3332638>

TORONTO -- Taxpayer-funded ads about planned hydro bill reductions put the Liberal government in contempt of parliament, the Opposition charged Monday.

Both the Progressive Conservatives and NDP say the radio and social media ads are only meant to boost the popularity of a party sagging in the polls.

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said the government has so far spent less than \$1 million -- how much less, he wouldn't say -- on the ads, but that adding print and TV to the campaign later is likely.

"It's important for us to make sure that we let everyone know about the 25-per-cent reduction that's coming," he said.

The ads say people will receive an average of 25 per cent off their hydro bills this summer and rate increases are being held to inflation for four years. It doesn't mention that the 25 per cent includes an eight-per-cent reduction that already took effect Jan. 1.

Thibeault noted that not a lot of people know about the Ontario Electricity Support Program for low-income ratepayers, so it's important to inform people of hydro relief programs.

But, Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown noted, the OESP requires people to sign up to qualify. The planned additional 17-per-cent reduction is going on bills automatically.

"This is all about Liberals trying to help themselves," he said. "They're going to waste hundreds of thousands of dollars, maybe millions, of taxpayer dollars not towards reducing hydro bills, but to promote themselves."

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath said public money is being used for partisan purposes.

"The Liberals have been in bad shape politically for some time now," she said. "This phantom plan that they threw out the door was a way to save their own political skin -- it had nothing to do with the people of Ontario."

The Progressive Conservatives believe the ads are a case of contempt of parliament because no

legislation has been passed or even tabled, and promoting the policy as definite presumes the will of the house.

But government house leader Yasir Naqvi said the ads don't interfere with the proceedings of the house because there is nothing to interfere with, since no legislation has yet been introduced.

The Speaker will rule at a later time.

Auditor general Bonnie Lysyk has said the ads likely wouldn't have been approved under old government advertising rules that gave her more discretion to deny ads she felt were partisan.

BayToday WYNNE LIBERALS' PARTISAN HYDRO ADS IN CONTEMPT OF PARLIAMENT: PCS
by: BayToday Staff
March 20, 2017

<https://www.baytoday.ca/local-news/wynne-liberals-partisan-hydro-ads-in-contempt-of-parliament-pcs-566031>

Ontario PC's today charged that Kathleen Wynne's taxpayer-funded hydro ads are in contempt of parliament.

MPP Wilson informed the Speaker today that he will rise on a point of privilege arguing a case of contempt by the Ministry of Energy.

"The self-congratulatory ads, which the auditor general has said are out of line, are running before legislation has been introduced, an alleged breach of parliamentary rules," says a PC news release.

House Leader Jim Wilson said "What we've got here is a clear case of electioneering from the Wynne Liberals using taxpayer dollars."

The ads in question appeared on both social media and radio markets across Ontario.

Ontario PC Leader Patrick Brown has already written to Minister Liz Sandals asking her to immediately stop the ad campaign, release a detailed account of the budget for these advertisements, as well as which consulting firms received the contracts.

"These ads are potentially costing millions of dollars while families, businesses, hospitals, schools and other institutions suffer every day from affordable electricity bills," continues the release.

"Neither MPPs nor the public even know what the new hydro scheme looks like, what it will cost, and who will get left behind," added Wilson. "Clearly, these advertisements serve no purpose other than to promote Kathleen Wynne's re-election."

"Based on past parliamentary rulings, we feel that we've got a very strong case. We look forward to hearing the ruling of the Speaker," said Wilson, noting that the Ministry of Energy has previously confirmed that legislation is needed to enact this new hydro scheme.

TV Transcripts (Noon)

CFTO CONTROVERSY OVER ONTARIO'S FAIR HYDRO PLAN ADS CONTINUE

Source: CFTO

Mar 20, 2017 12:56 PM (28)

Anchor: At Queen's Park, controversy continues over government ads promoting the hydro rate cut. The Progressive Conservatives say the ads put the Liberal government in contempt of Parliament. PC House Leader Jim Wilson says the radio and social media ads are a clear case of electioneering using public money. The ads point out that people are going to receive an average of 25 per cent off their hydro bills this summer and rate increases are being held to inflation for four years. Wilson says the ads promise a timed outcome when nothing has yet passed the Legislature or even been tabled.