

FW: Evening Media Scan: Fair Hydro Plan - March 27, 2017

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Media Scan: Fair Hydro Plan

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Online Coverage

Toronto Star: How Kathleen Wynne's Liberals can save their own skin: Cohn

If Liberals are losing the battle of endearment, they can set the terms of engagement — with policy over personality.

By: Martin Regg Cohn, Ontario Politics Columnist
Mon., March 27, 2017

<https://www.thestar.com/news/queenspark/2017/03/27/how-kathleen-wynnes-liberals-can-save-their-own-skin-cohn.html>

How does Kathleen Wynne overcome her dismal popularity ratings?

There's no good answer, but here's a better question: With or without Wynne, how do Liberals compete in the next election?

Recurring speculation about the premier's fate misses the mark. There is no saviour waiting in the wings, or walking on wings, capable of jettisoning all the excess baggage from nearly 14 years of Liberal rule.

Image is highly overrated in Ontario politics. Few people have any idea who now helms the opposition Progressive Conservatives (hint — Patrick Brown) or New Democrats (still — Andrea Horwath), yet both are flying high, personally, in the polls.

Their ratings may prove ephemeral, yet the opposition seems content to coast on negative public perceptions of the premier's personality and Liberal criminality. That's precisely how they lost the 2014 campaign — damning Wynne as the devil incarnate, yet inchoate or inconsistent in their own ideas.

If Liberals are losing the battle of endearment, they can at least set the terms of engagement. The challenge is to focus on policy over personality, ideology over popularity.

In 2014 they campaigned hard on a new public pension plan, targeting fears about retirement security at a time of rising economic uncertainty and corporate insolvency. It proved popular on the campaign trail and ultimately drove major reforms to the Canada Pension Plan.

That same impetus for government activism at a time of private sector paralysis can reposition the Liberals as a party of ideas in the run up to next year's provincial campaign. Starting in next month's budget.

While the federal Liberals produced a stand-pat budget last week, expect the provincial government to come out with a more substantive document later next month. It will foreshadow major policy thrusts to stake out a reform agenda for the 2018 campaign.

It will go far beyond the recent mantra of affordability that drove the premier's repentance on road tolls and hydro rates. The government's goal in both cases was to address pocketbook concerns — or at least dial down the volume — so that the rest of their agenda can get a hearing.

The Liberals aren't counting on affordability to generate lovability, but they are keen to avoid the kind of American alienation that helped elect Donald Trump president. So far, their promised 25 per cent cut to hydro rates has dramatically reduced the static, clearing the decks for next steps.

Affordability is the flip side of uncertainty. In a precarious economy, where few young workers can count on jobs for life, what role can government play in addressing people's future prospects and present-day problems?

As the government weighs a just-completed report on the workplace, expect the Liberals to recognize the challenges of eroding wages — and the decline of private sector unions that has accompanied it. Employment standards and union organizing rights in the new (and disrupted) economy will be key.

How can low-wage workers who bounce from job to job, lacking any company benefits plan, afford to buy their own medicines? The government's study of a minimum annual income has attracted little attention, but could prove to be a winner if it is recast as a necessary response to the unpredictability of unemployment.

In the months ahead, the government will talk up its promise of free tuition for lower income families, which was phased in slowly and remains below the radar. And it is hinting at expanded rent controls later this spring to round out its affordability agenda.

This will be the first provincial budget to be balanced in nearly a decade. Ever since the 2008 economic crisis forced the Liberals to give up on annual surpluses, they have been tracking toward deficit elimination — incurring the wrath of public sector unions as they froze wages for years.

A balanced budget will be cast not as a fiscal end, but as a foundation to shore up social supports. A robust economic recovery has left much of the province behind, especially outside the big cities, but it has left the government flush with tax revenues.

The Liberals aren't alone in going back to basics on policies. To their credit, the third-place NDP has rediscovered the merits of a higher minimum wage, public ownership of hydro, and rent controls as an urban vote-getter.

By contrast, the Tories have so far steered clear of major policy pronouncements. A promised hydro plan hasn't materialized, and a planned policy conference has been deferred to November.

As long as Brown remains a political unknown, we can't know how voters will react to his (so far) invisible personality — or lack of policy. He reaches out tirelessly to new groups of people, but the suspicion remains that he will try to be all things to all people.

Even if Wynne can't make a miraculous comeback in her personal popularity, her party can at least bounce back with a public policy agenda. Ahead of the next election, expect the Liberals to contrast their emerging ideas with the submerging platform of the PC leader.

Or in political terms: a full policy suite versus an empty suit.

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Owen Sound Times WYNNIE'S IMMINENT FALL CAN'T COME SOON ENOUGH

By: Jim Merriam
Monday, March 27, 2017 5:45:49 EDT PM

<http://www.owensoundsuntimes.com/2017/03/27/wynnes-imminent-fall-cant-come-soon-enough>

The latest poll that shows Premier Kathleen Wynne with a pitiful 12 per cent support would seem to prove Abraham Lincoln's famous line that you can only fool people some of the time.

I'm sure Wynne and her merry band of advisers were looking for a significant bump in the polls after announcing a further 17 per cent reduction in electricity rates.

Instead the premier's personal popularity is plumbing new depths.

Voters appear to understand that the move did nothing to fix the complex power problems, but rather put payments onto the shoulders of our grandchildren, at increased costs.

That example is illustrative of why Wynne keeps sinking to new lows. Since being elected premier in 2014 she has shown little to no interest in doing what's best for the people of Ontario.

Instead her agenda seems to be driven by what bureaucrats at Queen's Park perceive to be best.

Some pundits suggest a palace revolt to oust Wynne is not in the cards because many Liberal MPPs believe they owe their jobs to her after she led them to victory in the 2014 election.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Sitting Liberals owe their victories to former Progressive Conservative leader Tim Hudak's promise to eliminate 100,000 public service jobs in the province.

Even though that was an idea whose time had come, the proposal managed to turn public service unions and other organized labour groups against the conservatives.

The word went out to the rank and file that other benefits such as maternity leave would not be safe under Hudak and the rest, as they say, is history.

But back to the premier, as I've said before, Wynne has to go and is not likely to do so voluntarily.

She keeps saying the people of Ontario elected her to do a job in 2014 and she intends to see it through to the bitter end.

It would be hard to find any voter in Ontario who supported Wynne's actions that have driven the province's debt well over \$300 billion, rapidly heading towards \$350 billion.

Likewise, it's hard to believe many Ontarians voted for the aforementioned power fiasco that has hospitals laying off staff so they can afford to keep the lights on.

Nor would many have voted to expand the most ineffective level of bureaucracy in the Ministry of Health, the local health integration networks, at the expense of doctors, nurses and other front line workers.

Similarly, it's doubtful that many voters would have looked favourably on the idea of changing the school curriculum without full discussions with parents.

Nor would any of us have voted to close rural schools in favour of some bureaucratic standard on school populations, risking the health, education and safety of students, parents and others who will clog the roads of rural Ontario during major winter storms.

Nor would many have voted for Wynne to provide \$14,000 subsidies to buyers who can afford to purchase expensive electric cars, while the poorest among us have little access to transit.

The premier wasn't elected to drive jobs out of the province, to dictate how Toronto handles its traffic woes, or to turn rural Ontario into a semblance of a Third World country.

The list goes on and on and gets more and more troubling.

Wynne has shown little leadership ability and less concern for the people she is supposed to be serving.

The best advice for the premier: don't let the door hit you on the way out.

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W a w a N e w s FROM THE P A R K – R E N T I N C R E A S E S

By: Michael Mantha, MPP for Algoma-Manitoulin
Mar 27, 2017

<http://wawa-news.com/index.php/2017/03/27/from-the-park-rent-increases/>

This week New Democrats challenged the Liberal government on a new but important front that MPP offices receive many complaints about; rent increases. My colleagues and I hear from young renters who are worried that this might be the month they're hit with a rent hike they can't afford. We hear from families that say that the increases are chasing them from their homes – the place they're raising their kids. Seniors are not exempt from such pressures either.

As it stands today in Ontario, rent increases are regulated to ensure tenants are able to afford to keep a roof over their heads. However, according to the Residential Tenancies Act, only tenants living in buildings constructed before 1991 have rent increase caps which are based on annual rent increase guidelines. But those living in rental units built after 1991 have no such protection. Across the province we hear from constituents who are facing rent increases of hundreds of dollars or even \$1,000 a month in some instances. That's just not fair, and it doesn't have to be this way. The Wynne Liberals could have done something to eliminate this cruel loophole years ago but they chose not to. Well, now it's time to act.

On Monday during Question Period Andrea Horwath called on Premier Kathleen Wynne to stop allowing devastatingly unfair rent hikes. Later that day the NDP tabled a bill that proposes closing this loophole that allows landlords in buildings built later than 1991 to hike rents as much as they want, whenever they want. My colleagues and I will be working to pressure the government to bring this bill up for debate.

No doubt you have been hearing and reading about how the Liberals have decided to resolve the mess they've created with hydro in this province. Their answer is to download the horrific costs onto the backs of our generations to come. The Liberal strategy will cost the people of Ontario over \$40 billion in interest charges. Think back for a moment about the advice your parents gave you about running long term balances on your credit card. Paying interest charges is like burning your money. The only ones that are happy with interest charges are the banks. Yes, the Liberals say it will result in lowering our hydro bills by up to 25% but at what cost and at whose expense?

The NDP is not merely standing on the sideline and watching the parade of Liberal ads and radio promotions, paid for by the taxpayers of Ontario. You'll notice that the ads have the tag line, "Paid for by the Government of Ontario." (That's you.) So far, not one dime has come off people's sky-rocketing hydro bills and Wynne hasn't tabled legislation or even a credible plan to save us money. Yet, she's spending more of people's hard-earned dollars on ads claiming the problem is solved. In truth, it's all about Kathleen Wynne and her party, and not at all about making life more affordable for real people and real families who have been suffering day after day and month after month.

You can see for yourself that New Democrats have stepped up to the plate by releasing a plan which realistically addresses this cataclysmic situation the successive Conservative and Liberal governments have created. Our plan will cut all hydro bills by as much as 30 percent. It will even reduce hydro costs to our hospitals thus allowing them to redirect that money to where it should be going – to the front lines where care is needed. Our plan will enable us to reverse the selloff of Hydro One and put it back into public hands as well as a number of immediate relief measures – such as eliminating time-of-use billing – and permanent fixes to the system.

As for Patrick Brown and his Conservatives.... We don't know what their plan is yet. But we do know that privatization is part of the Conservative's DNA.

For further information and to compare the plans that each party is offering, try out our new webpage at ontariondp.ca/comparetheplans.

Michael Mantha is MPP for Algoma-Manitoulin. He is currently the NDP Critic for Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and NDP Critic for Northern Development and Mines. Michael Mantha is currently serving his second consecutive term as MPP for Algoma-Manitoulin. Constituents can reach his constituency office by email at mmantha-co@ndp.on.ca or by phone at 705-461-9710 or Toll free 1-800-831-1899.

TV Transcripts (6 PM)
