FW: Morning Media Scan: Fair Hydro Plan - March 22, 2017

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Subject: Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 22, 2017

Morning Media Scan: March 22, 2017

MEDIA SCAN: FAIR HYDRO PLAN

March 22, 2017

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Print Coverage

Toronto Sun: Liberal hydro costs; a 'disgrace'; Hospitals getting hammered: NDP; A6; 2017.03.22

PUBLICATION:	Toronto Sun
PAGE:	A6
DATE:	2017.03.22
SECTION:	News
EDITION:	Final
BYLINE:	Shawn Jeffords
SOURCE:	Political Bureau Chief
KEYWORDS:	liberal,slash,hydro,rates,offer,relief
ILLUSTRATION:	Craig Robertson, Toronto Sun / NDP leader Andrea Horwath says Ontario hospitals' hydro bill has gone up by as much as 105%.;
WORD COUNT:	415

Liberal hydro costs; a 'disgrace'; Hospitals getting hammered: NDP

The Liberal government's plan to slash hydro rates will offer no relief for Ontario hospitals, some of which have seen their bills go up by as much as 105%, the NDP says.

Andrea Horwath says documents released to the New Democrats through a Freedom of Information request show that many hospitals in the province have seen doubledigit electricity cost increases over the last six years.

That's valuable money being pulled from patient care and a new government plan to slash rates by 25% offers no reduction for hospitals, she said.

"If you're taking money from your operating budget to pay electricity bills instead of frontline patient care, then it's going to have an impact," she said. "Look, I think it's a disgrace what the Liberal's have done."

According to the documents, Toronto's University Health Network has spent $6 million more on hydro since 2010, a 39% increase.

Sinai Health System has spent $1.45 million more, a 48% rate jump.

Toronto East Michael Garron Hospital's hydro bills have gone up by $1.3 million or 67%. Outside of Toronto the figures are also substantial.

At Hamilton's St. Joseph's Healthcare, hydro costs are up $4.16 million, or 105% in six years.

At London Health Sciences Centre, hydro costs have jumped by $2 million, or 29%.
At Windsor Regional Hospital's Met Campus, hydro rates are up $880,000 or 49% in five years.
The Liberal government announced three weeks ago that it would slash hydro rates by re-amortizing long-term energy deals.
That means Ontarians will pay less for electricity in the short-term, but will pay an estimated $25 billion in interest over the next 30 years for the short-term relief.
But that plan doesn't include hospitals.
Health Minister Eric Hoskins downplayed the costs, saying they represent a small portion of the overall hospital budgets and none of the province's hospital CEOs have complained to him about the issue.
But Hoskins couldn't say whether any of the targeted relief from hydro-rate increases would be offered to hospitals.
"For a hospital's operating budget, on average, electricity costs amount to roughly 1% of their budget," he said. "There's no doubt over the past years because of the fiscal situation the province has been in, hospitals have a number of challenges and we've been working with them on those challenges."
Horwath slammed Hoskins for not addressing the issue.
The NDP plans to cut hydro rates by 30% and would slash other costs to hospitals, according to the party.
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Toronto Sun: The shameless gall of Premier Wynne; A18; 2017.03.22

PUBLICATION:	Toronto Sun
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WORD COUNT:	381

The shameless gall of Premier Wynne

There's a word in Yiddish that perfectly describes the political philosophy of Premier Kathleen Wynne.
It's "chutzpah", which means shameless audacity, impudence or gall.
Ontarians should be prepared for repeated displays of chutzpah by Wynne as next year's provincial election approaches.
The latest example is a new government radio ad that Ontario Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk describes as overtly partisan.
That means it should not have been paid for by taxpayers, but by the Liberal Party of Ontario.
In the ad, explaining Wynne's plan to reduce hydro rates (by taking on more public debt), the narrator tells the audience, among other things, "We've heard you" - meaning the Liberal government.
That is so absurdly partisan that no one - except for Wynne's Liberal government - would seriously claim otherwise.
"We've" heard you? Who's "we"? The Wynne Liberals, of course.
Further, as both PC Leader Patrick Brown and NDP energy critic Peter Tabuns have pointed out, the ad is hyping a government policy that hasn't happened yet. The hydro rate cuts don't even start until June 1. But Wynne's chutzpah - her shameless gall - goes further.
That's because in 2015 she gutted a law passed by her predecessor - Dalton McGuinty - that empowered the auditor general to disallow partisan government advertising, over the specific objections of the auditor general.
As Lysyk explained to Sun Political Bureau Chief Shawn Jeffords in an email regarding the appropriateness of Wynne's hydro ad: "Our office approved the hydro-related ads under the current version of the Government Advertising Act. However, they would not have passed under the previous

legislation because we feel that these ads have the objective of fostering a positive impression of the government."
In fact, ever since 2015, the Wynne Liberals have repeatedly run ads that Lysyk has described as inappropriately partisan and "self-congratulatory" - for example on their now-defunct Ontario pension plan. That means they're spending millions of taxpayer dollars - in the opinion of the auditor general - promoting themselves in ads that should be paid for by the Liberal party.
The one bit of good news is that Lysyk has cleverly continued to comment on these partisan ads as if the old law was in place, demonstrating the positive side of chutzpah, which can also mean boldness or daring.

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24 Hours Toronto: Slashed hydro rates leave hospitals in lurch; A7; 2017.03.22

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SOURCE: Postmedia Network
KEYWORDS: liberal,slash,hydro,rates,offer,relief
WORD COUNT: 253

Slashed hydro rates leave hospitals in lurch

The Liberal government's plan to slash hydro rates will offer no relief for Ontario hospitals, some of which have seen their bills go up by as much as 105%, says the NDP.
Andrea Horwath says documents released to the New Democrats through a Freedom of Information request show that many hospitals in the province have seen double-digit electricity cost increases over the last six years. That's valuable money being pulled from patient care and a new government plan to slash rates by 25% offers no reduction for hospitals, she said.
According to the documents, Toronto's University Health Network has spent $6 million more on hydro since 2010, a 39% increase. Sinai Health System in Toronto has spent $1.45 million more, a 48% rate jump. Toronto East Michael Garron Hospital's hydro bills have gone up by $1.3 million or 67%.
Outside of Toronto, the figures are also substantial. At Hamilton's St. Joseph's Healthcare, hydro costs are up $4.16 million, or 105% in six years. At London Health Sciences Centre, hydro costs have jumped by $2 million, or 29%. At Windsor Regional Hospital's Met Campus, hydro rates are up $880,000 or 49% in five years.
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Ottawa Sun: Liberal hydro costs a 'disgrace'; Hospitals getting hammered: NDP; A13; 2017.03.22

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DATE: 2017.03.22
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SOURCE: Political Bureau Chief
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ILLUSTRATION: Craig Robertson / NDP leader Andrea Horwath says Ontario hospitals' hydro bill has gone up by as much as 105%.;
WORD COUNT: 395

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The Hamilton Spectator: NDP says energy costs a threat to health care; Expense more than doubled at St. Joseph's Healthcare from 2010 to 2016; A1; 2017.03.22

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PAGE: A1

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SECTION: Local / News
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BYLINE: Steve Buist The Hamilton Spectator
KEYWORDS: rapidly,rising,electricity,costs,ontario,hospitals
ILLUSTRATION: Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath
WORD COUNT: 700

NDP says energy costs a threat to health care; Expense more than doubled at St. Joseph's Healthcare from 2010 to 2016

Rapidly rising electricity costs for Ontario hospitals are a threat to health care, warns provincial NDP Leader Andrea Horwath.

A prime example, Horwath noted in the Ontario legislature Tuesday, is Hamilton's St. Joseph's Healthcare, which has seen its electricity costs more than double from 2010 to 2016.

During those six years, electricity costs at St. Joseph's Healthcare in Hamilton rose from almost $4 million in 2010 to $8.1 million in 2016, an increase of 105 per cent, based on numbers obtained by the NDP through a freedom of information request.

The figures include St. Joe's Charlton Avenue site, King Street East site and the West 5th site.

Part of the reason for the whopping increase at St. Joe's was the replacement of the West 5th site with a new building in early 2014 that is twice the size of the previous facility on the Mountain.

Even still, St. Joe's saw its average price paid for a kilowatt-hour jump from 10.2 cents in 2010 to 16.4 cents per kwh in 2016.

The NDP canvassed nine hospital systems in Toronto, Hamilton, London and Windsor.

The nine hospitals surveyed by the NDP plus Hamilton Health Sciences, which provided its figures to The Spectator, paid about $15.5 million in extra electricity costs combined in 2016 compared to 2010.

Added together, their electricity costs went from $33.4 million to $48.8 million in six years, an increase of 46 per cent.

"Every dollar spent on these rising electricity costs is a dollar that's not spent on patient care," Horwath said in an interview.

"It's going to impact their ability to provide the kind of care they want to provide to patients," said the MPP for Hamilton Centre.

"We've seen front-line health-care workers being laid off," she added. "There's been 1,500 registered nurses given the pink slip since January of 2015.

"That's a lot of registered nurses to be walking the sidewalk."

A spokesperson for St. Joe's said the hospital requires large amounts of energy to run equipment such as MRI and CT scanners and operating rooms in addition to providing heat and lighting.

"Like all hospitals, we continually face inflationary pressures and increasing costs," stated Karen Langstaff, chief of facility planning and patient support services at St. Joe's.

"The additional cost of hydro is a very significant additional yearly inflation cost that we must manage if we are to balance our budgets."

At Hamilton Health Sciences' seven sites, electricity costs from 2010 to 2016 shot up by more than 50 per cent, even though electricity consumption at HHS dropped by more than a third.

Electricity costs for HHS went from $2.6 million in 2010 to $4 million in 2016 while consumption dropped from 35 million kilowatt-hours to 23 million kwh.

Chris Cuthbert, manager of co-generation and energy for HHS, said higher energy costs put more pressure on hospital budgets, which tend to get tighter each year.

"It's not like you can just shut the lights off when you've got patients in the building," Cuthbert said. "We've got less money to do other things because we're spending more money on electricity.

"The good thing is it's created a lot more will to conserve," Cuthbert said.

The numbers obtained by the NDP show significant increases in electricity costs at some hospitals even though consumption was sharply reduced over six years. At Toronto's Princess Margaret Hospital and Toronto Western Hospital, electricity costs at both sites rose by 21 per cent from 2010 to 2016, even though their electricity consumption dropped by 25 per cent.

Horwath said high electricity costs aren't just an issue for hospitals. During a recent tour of northern Ontario, she learned the town of Desbarats near Sault Ste. Marie may have to close its arena because of overwhelming energy costs.

Premier Kathleen Wynne announced earlier this month that residential ratepayers will receive an average 25 per cent cut to their electricity bills starting this summer. It will also affect half a million small businesses and farms. Rates will increase no higher than inflation for the next four years.

But the plan will ultimately cost ratepayers about $25 billion more in interest, the government has said.

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Daily Miner & News (Kenora): Fair Hydro Plan; Liberal strategy does little to address problems with Ontario's electrical system; A5; 2017.03.22

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BYLINE:	Bob Stewart
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KEYWORDS:	electricity,bills,fault,opposition,parties,along
WORD COUNT:	980

Fair Hydro Plan; Liberal strategy does little to address problems with Ontario's electrical system

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A 25 per cent cut in electricity bills. Who could fault that? Yet, Ontario's opposition parties, along with many others are finding plenty of fault with the Liberal's Ontario Fair Hydro Plan.

You can't blame them. The plan - with some measures already lowering monthly bills - does little to address the high cost and poor planning problems within Ontario's electrical system. Rather, it moves costs from electrical users to taxpayers, or in some cases, reduces costs now by extending long-term payments for an even longer period.

Unfortunately, opposition parties haven't offered up anything better. The NDP have their own plan - Pay Less, Own More - with promised savings of 30 per cent. Like the Liberal plan it mainly moves money from electricity bills to the tax base. The Tories say they have a plan too, a better one than the Liberals or the NDP of course, but aren't giving out any details.

Ordinary folk meanwhile, are left in a daze with all the numbers, promises and dire predictions being tossed around by politicians and commentators who have become instant experts on a topic that is complex to even the well informed.

As someone who has followed Ontario's electricity file closely for the past 20 years, writing extensively about the various changes over two decades in the newspaper business and as a freelance writer, here is my take on the various components of the government's Fair Hydro Plan, what we'll save now and the cost that's going to show up on future tax bills.

First is the sales tax rebate, an 8 per cent credit on total bills that started in January.

An average user is now saving just over $10 a month, or $130 annually, while someone using electric heat and getting $1,000 a month winter bills is saving $80, with annual savings of about $520 once lower average summer use is factored in. But the savings mean a reduction in Provincial Sales Tax collections of roughly $1.2 billion annually.

Next there are changes to the Global Adjustment, a surcharge on the per kwh price for electricity itself to account for the price difference between the open market rate - where surplus power is sold for whatever it can fetch - and actual costs of power purchase contracts, imports and conservation measures.

The government plan is to extend long-term payments for the cost of major capital work included in current contracts - arbitrarily if it can, or by re-negotiation - make smarter decisions on future contracts, defer two of three major nuclear projects and look for other efficiencies to cut $2.5 billion from the Global Adjustment costs annually for the next three years. Costs, including increased interest payments, will be covered by tax revenues for now, but some costs will be returned to payment through electricity rates after 10 years.

Overall, the measures, to be reflected in summer prices beginning May 1 under the Regulated Price Plan, could cut up to 3 cents from the 2016 average per kwh price of 11.5 cents.

This will trim $300 annually from total bills for an average user and $900 for an electric heat user.
A bundle of new and enhanced subsidies is also in the works for rural and Northern Ontario year-round residential customers.
Hydro One R2 (low density class) and Algoma Power customers, were already receiving the benefit of an enhanced Rural or Remote Rate Protection credit that is embedded in their distribution rates. This was bumped from $31.50 ($378 annually) to $60.50 a month in January and will be increased to $75 this summer. That translates into an additional savings of $522 annually. The program is being expanded to Hydro One R1 customers with an $18 monthly subsidy ($216 annually) and six other utilities including Sioux Lookout and Atikokan Hydro with a $12-$18 per month subsidy for yearround customers.
A low-income support program, started in 2016, is being beefed up with a new credit range of $45 of $98 a month ($540 to $1,176 annually) - $113 ($1,356 annually) on First Nations.
First Nations residents living on-reserve will also have all distribution costs covered, a benefit worth an average $85 a month ($1,020 annually) according to the government, and with 51,000 households on-reserve according to Stats Canada a budget expense of $50 million.
The costs of these subsidies, $335 million in total last year and an estimated $825 million when fully enacted, is being moved from per kwh levies on electricity bills to the tax base, representing a further savings of $3 monthly off an average bill and $10 or so for someone using electric heat.
A final measure is a government pledge to hold increases in average bills to the rate of inflation, nominally 2 per cent annually for the next four years. Total electricity bills have been rising $800 million to $900 million annually in recent years, an average of 5 per cent. Keeping them to 2 per cent is going to cost the government roughly $500 million a year When you add it all up, electricity users, especially those using electric heat will save considerably on monthly bills, easily reaching the government's 25 per cent in promised bill reductions with annual savings ranging from $460 for an average customer to $2,850 for electric heat users, up to $4,000 for low income customers or First Nations, and $5,000 for low income electric heat customers living on First Nations However, you can't add nearly $5 billion to general government expenses without it showing up on the books as increased borrowing, reduced services, or tax increases at some point. Likely sooner than later given Ontario's debt/deficit situation.
Spend your Fair Hydro Plan savings wisely, you'll pay for it later.
- Bob Stewart is the former editorial page editor for the Kenora Daily Miner and News
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Tillsonburg News: Energy minister rejects Hardeman's criticisms; Glenn Thibeault slams provincial Tories for not offering their own plan to reduce electricity costs; B7; 2017.03.22

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WORD COUNT:	435

Energy minister rejects Hardeman's criticisms; Glenn Thibeault slams provincial Tories for not offering their own plan to reduce electricity costs

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Ontario's energy minister offered his own criticism of the province's Progressive Conservative, responding Thursday to comments made by local Oxford MPP Ernie Hardeman.
In a statement provided to the Sentinel-Review, Minister of Energy Glenn Thibeault said the PCs have been eager to criticize his government's proposed hydro plan but have offered no plan of their own - or any ideas - that would help lower electricity costs.
"While our plan provides substantial, wide-spread and longlasting relief that will have an immediate impact on peoples' lives, MPP Hardeman and the PCs have yet to bring forward anything credible," Thibeault

said. "One of their criticisms - halting the broadening of Hydro One - won't take one cent of electricity bills. And their push to rip up energy contracts would lead to increased rates, lawsuits and penalties."

Through Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan, Thibeault said the provincial government is cutting electricity bills by 25 per cent on average for all families starting this summer, as well as about half-a-million farms and small businesses.

"It is the single largest rate reduction in the province's history, with rates also held to inflation for the next four years," he said. "Our plan is about real relief for Ontarians and a way to ensure greater fairness in our electricity system."

Hardeman said he was unimpressed with the provincial Liberal governments proposed Fair Hydro Plan earlier this week, adding the solution being proposed was to just defer costs for hydro to the future.

The proposed plan was introduced recently by the provincial liberal government and will ultimately give an average of 25 per cent off electricity bills for households, farms and small businesses. This target is going to be reached, however, by paying the costs of the electricity generation contracts over longer periods, which will mean higher interest fees down the road.

But in an interview with the Sentinel-Review, Hardeman said the government has to look at the root cause as to why hydro prices are so high.

"One of the main ones is, of course, the Green Energy Act, which is putting a lot of the cost of the hydro that they're paying for and putting it into the global adjustment pot and trying to pay for it that way," Hardeman said. "If they don't look at how we got into this mess and solve that problem, obviously the mess is going to keep growing as time goes on."

According to the MOE, the Fair Hydro Plan will enhance lowincome support (OESP) and some customers could see as much as a 40 to 50 per cent reduction in their electricity bill. bchessell@postmedia.com