FW: Saturday Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 11, 2017

From:	"Halford, Gavin (ENERGY)" <gavin.halford@ontario.ca>
To:	"@ENERGY-COMM-Issues_and_MediaRelations" <energy-comm-issues_and_mediarelations@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "Sermat-Harding, Kaili (ENERGY)" <kaili.sermat-harding@ontario.ca>, "Hume, Steen (ENERGY)" <steen.hume@ontario.ca>, "Reid, Michael (ENERGY)" <michael.reid@ontario.ca>, "Armstrong, Hillary (ENERGY)" <hillary.armstrong@ontario.ca>, "Burns, Robert (MEDG/MRIS)" <robert.burns@ontario.ca>, "Chander, Sunita (ENERGY)" <sunita.chander@ontario.ca>, "Colalillo, Sam (ENERGY)" <sam.colalillo@ontario.ca>, "Esdaile, Trevor (ENERGY)" <trevor.esdaile@ontario.ca>, "Imbrogno, Serge (ENERGY)" <serge.imbrogno@ontario.ca>, "Hume, Steen (ENERGY)" <steen.hume@ontario.ca>, "Kitchen, Matthew (ENERGY)" <matthew.kitchen@ontario.ca>, "Nutter, George (ENERGY)" <george.nutter@ontario.ca>, "Ruttan, Craig (ENERGY)" <craig.ruttan@ontario.ca>, "Sermat-Harding, Kaili (ENERGY)" <kaili.sermat-harding@ontario.ca>, "Teliszewsky, Andrew (ENERGY)" <andrew.teliszewsky@ontario.ca>, "Thompson, Erin (ENERGY)" <erin.thompson@ontario.ca>, "Whittington, Matt (ENERGY)" <matt.whittington@ontario.ca>, "Coker, Meaghan (ENERGY)" <meaghan.coker@ontario.ca>, "Martin, Eric (ENERGY)" <eric.martin@ontario.ca>, "Campbell, David (ENERGY)" <david.campbell2@ontario.ca>, "Dade, Christine (ENERGY)" <christine.dade@ontario.ca>, "Imlay, Patrick (ENERGY)" <patrick.imlay@ontario.ca>, "McGoey, Eric (ENERGY)" <eric.mcgoey@ontario.ca>, "Chatterjee, Jeet (ENERGY)" <jeet.chatterjee@ontario.ca>, "McGrath, Jessica (ENERGY)" <jessica.mcgrath@ontario.ca>, "Cox, Hilary (ENERGY)" <hilary.cox@ontario.ca>, "Pagel, Alexa (ENERGY)" <alexa.pagel@ontario.ca>, "Biggs, Megan (ENERGY)" <megan.biggs@ontario.ca>, "Barbaro, Rachel (ENERGY)" <rachel.barbaro@ontario.ca>, "Tretiakov, Ilia (ENERGY)" <ilia.tretiakov@ontario.ca>, "Feather, Adam (ENERGY)" <adam.feather@ontario.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:	Sat, 11 Mar 2017 11:52:44 -0500
Attachments:	20170311 - Media Scan - Hydro Rate Reduction (Saturday Scan).doc (110.59 kB)

From: Electronic Media
Sent: Saturday, March 11, 2017 11:31 AM
To: @OPO-Media Relations and Issues Management; Bevan, Andrew (OPO); McEachern, Gillian (OPO); Donelson, Philip (OPO); Bossin, Bryan (OPO); Tomney, Genevieve (OPO); @CAB-Trans CO; Baker, Carys (ENERGY); Berry, James (ENERGY); Bodrug, Andrew (ENERGY); Campbell, David (ENERGY); Coker, Meaghan (ENERGY); Den Heijer, Kevin (ENERGY); DeWolfe, Julie (ENERGY); Esdaile, Trevor (ENERGY); Festeryga, Katherine (ENERGY); Foster, David (ENERGY); Iqbal, Muhammad (ENERGY); McGrath, Jessica (ENERGY); Moseley-Williams, Kate (ENERGY); Nekolaichuk, Colin (ENERGY); Olsheski, Mark (ENERGY); Ramasra, Raynier (ENERGY); Ruttan, Craig (ENERGY); Singh, Alysha (ENERGY); Teliszewsky, Andrew (ENERGY); Thompson, Rachel (ENERGY); Tresise, Landon (ENERGY); Tretiakov, Ilia (ENERGY); Walman, Evan (ENERGY)

Cc: Sumi, Craig (CAB); Di Giovanni, Robert (CAB); Law, Sally (CAB); Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB); Nutter, George (ENERGY); Halford, Gavin (ENERGY); Electronic Media
Subject: Saturday Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 11, 2017

Saturday Media Scan: March 11, 2017

MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

March 11, 2017

Click links below to view article:

Print Coverage

IDNUMBER 201703110010
DOCID: 268734316
PUBLICATION: Orillia Packet & Times
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.03.11
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Elizabeth Van Houtte
SOURCE: Orillia Packet & Times
KEYWORDS: hydro,coming,march,patrick,brown,contributed
DATELINE: President, Ondp Simcoe North
WORD COUNT: 399

Orillia Packet & Times: Pay less, own more

Re: "PC hydro plan coming 'soon,'" March 4 Could it be that MPP Patrick Brown contributed yet another sleight-of-hand assertion, this time to distract you from the absence of a Tory Hydro One plan? "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."

In reality, the privatization of hydro and other public assets was started under Mike Harris and shifted into high gear by McGuinty and Wynne. The MPP's accusations seem conveniently out of place.

I await the plan from the PC leadership. The Grits have already presented their election-season curtsy to Ontarians: a proposal which will require our children and grandchildren to pay for the Liberals' fiscal games. Reducing "power poverty" somehow seems outside the capacity of the Grits or the Tories.

Andrea Horwath and the Ontario NDP have placed a clear and thoughtful plan on the table - openly, for all to see. No whistles and bells - no distracting slams against the opposition.

The ONDP plan to cut hydro prices shows that Ontarians can take back hydro production and the millions in revenues it generates instead of those revenues going to private shareholders. It shows how, by using the receipts from the remaining publicly owned portion of Hydro One, we can buy the outstanding private shares and return those dividends to the public coffer, where they belong. More importantly, this process will take a mere eight years and, significantly, will not cost a dime in additional debt for our children and grandchildren. Once complete, Ontario will again see publicly controlled dividends grow in the range of $1 billion to $4 billion annually and more.

Other points in the plan include immediate elimination of "time of usage" constraints, immediate change so rural customers save 15% by paying the same delivery rates as urban customers, immediate removal of the 8% provincial portion of HST, negotiations with Ottawa to remove all of the federal portion of HST, and contractual revisions to end the practice of paying for unused power currently subsidized on your hydro bill.

It is easy to see the NDP has the first realistic and achievable solution to "power poverty" in Ontario.

Elizabeth Van Houtte

President, ONDP Simcoe North

IDNUMBER 201703110009
DOCID: 268734315
PUBLICATION: Orillia Packet & Times
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.03.11
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
SOURCE: Orillia Packet & Times
KEYWORDS: premier,kathleen,wynne,thing,government,cutting
WORD COUNT: 364

Orillia Packet & Times *Wynne passes buck, can't be trusted*

Premier Kathleen Wynne says it's a good thing her government is cutting electricity bills by passing on the $25-billion cost to future generations of Ontarians.

Wynne defended this decision - developed with next year's election in mind in the face of public fury over hydro bills - in an interview Monday with Newstalk 1010's John Moore.

Here's what she said: "I'm quite comfortable saying to my grandkids that, you know, in order for your mom and dad to be able to do the things that they want to do for you right now, we're going to ask you to pay a little bit for electricity that you'll be using, for a system that you'll be using when you're a bit older. I think that's a reasonable thing to ask of a couple of generations."

Wynne may be comfortable passing the buck to our children and grandchildren but, as Newstalk 1010 commentator James Laidlaw pointed out, what happens 30 to 40 years from now when all the hydro infrastructure today's children helped their parents and grandparents pay for, has to be replaced again? Who's going to help them, as adults, pay for that expense? It won't be their parents and grandparents.

Wynne isn't reducing hydro bills 17 per cent on June 1.

She's doing it by making provincial taxpayers subsidize hydro ratepayers, which accomplishes nothing because taxpayers and ratepayers are the same people.

In the past decade that saw electricity rates double in Ontario, while two provincial auditors general documented how they were wasting billions of dollars on green energy through reckless planning, the Liberals were indifferent to the suffering their electricity policies caused.

When their constituents appealed to Liberal MPPs for help, many were ignored, or received form letters. Some even got back snarky replies from Liberal MPPs.

Wynne and the Liberals didn't come up with their "rob Peter to pay Paul" hydro subsidy plan because they suddenly care about Ontarians forced into energy poverty because of their inane policies. They came up with it to save their hides. Which is why they can't be trusted to keep any promise they make before next year's election after next year's election, if they win again.

IDNUMBER 201703110011
DOCID: 268733957
PUBLICATION: North Bay Nugget
PAGE: A1 / Front
DATE: 2017.03.11
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Gord Young
SOURCE: North Bay Nugget
KEYWORDS: steele,fighting,losing,battle,against,rising
ILLUSTRATION: Gord Young, The Nugget / Joe Steele looks through his Hydro One bills at his kitchen table at his home in Powassan.; Gord Young, The Nugget / Joe Steele faced a double payment on his latest Hydro One bill of nearly $2,000 due to a problem with his smart metre. He has electric heat and has been hit will charges averaging nearly $900 during the coldest months of winter.;

WORD COUNT: 426

North Bay Nugget

'Safe; clean, modern,' but very costly; Retired H.
monthly hydro bills average nearly $900 in winter

Joe Steele has been fighting a losing battle against the rising cost to heat his home in Powassan.

Steele, 85, has tried his best to conserve energy by keeping the thermostat down in certain rooms and wearing sweaters on a daily basis.

But his efforts have had little effect on his Hydro One bills, which have - in recent years - averaged nearly $900 during the coldest winter months.

Steele thought installing electric radiant heating in the ceilings was the way to go when he built his modest three-bedroom bungalow a little more than 50 years ago. But Steele, a widower who lives alone, firmly regrets that decision today.

"It was the 'safe, clean, modern' way," he says, recalling how electric heat was marketed at the time.

Ironically, Steele is a retired Hydro One (formerly Ontario Hydro) employee of more than 35 years, most of which were spent in customer service.

"I dealt with a lot of complaints during that time," he says, proud to have been able to leave customers satisfied more often than not.

"I don't know how I would answer their questions now. I wouldn't want to even attempt it."

Steele says he can't imagine how high his hydro bills would be if he didn't live alone.

He plans to stay in his home as long as he can. But Steele worries that when it comes time to sell, electric heating won't be much of a selling point.

The Liberal government's promise of hydro relief this summer comes as cold comfort for Steele, who expects his electricity bills will still likely top $700 next winter even with a 17-percent reduction.

Not only that, he doesn't care much for the plan, which would slash bills largely by paying the costs of electricity generation contracts over longer periods.

"My grandchildren will be paying for it," says Steele.

He likes the NDP's proposal of buying back assets of Hydro One and doing away with timeof-use pricing, which also hasn't helped to put a dent in his bills. And Steele says he's still waiting to hear how the Tories plan to cut hydro rates.

In the meantime, he's purchased a $4,000 wood pellet stove to try to take the sting out of his home heating bills. Steele hopes to have it installed in the coming days.

A natural gas line runs past his house, but without ducts installing a furnace was an even more expensive proposition.

"I'm trying to conserve as best I can," he says, hopeful that the new pellet stove will make a difference.

IDNUMBER 201703110010
DOCID: 268733956
PUBLICATION: North Bay Nugget
PAGE: A1 / Front
DATE: 2017.03.11
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Jennifer Hamilton-Mccharles
SOURCE: North Bay Nugget
KEYWORDS: ontario,power,operation,north,delivering,value
WORD COUNT: 293

North Bay Nugget: *Efficiency motivates OPG; North Bay jobs being t money on ratepayers' bills'*

Ontario Power Generation's operation in North Bay wasn't delivering the best value for Ontario ratepayers, and that is why the regional office will close within a year, OPG says.

Kelly Neal, OPG's director of media and communications, said the decision to transfer staff from North Bay was studied thoroughly ultimately made in order to achieve benefits for electricity ratepayers.

He said the 66 staff in North Bay oversee 126 MW of power generation.

"Our other four regional offices oversee much bigger operations. Eastern operations manages over 4,000 MW, Northeast in Timmins manages over 1,000 MW, Northwest manages over 1,000 MW and Niagara manages over 2,000 MW.

"By transferring personnel to other locations, we will be able to increase efficiency in our operations and save money on ratepayers' bills. It's important to note that these jobs will be relocated, not eliminated," he said Friday.

"OPG takes personnel decisions very seriously, and any changes are carefully considered. It's important that we remain vigilant in lowering costs, while providing safe, clean power for the people of the province."

Neal said OPG recognizes the decision is difficult for staff and the community.

"Our priority is to treat OPG staff fairly in accordance with collective agreements."

Allan Reid, chief operating officer with renewal generation and power marketing at OPG, made the announcement to staff Monday.

The control room in North Bay is moving to Timmins, which will impact 20 employees. A further 20 employees in support, engineering and finance will have an opportunity to be transferred to another OPG operation in the province.

The remaining 26 will remain in North Bay to maintain and operate the water control equipment.

In a previous interview, Reid said the company had been studying the change for years.

IDNUMBER 201703110031
DOCID: 268730633
PUBLICATION: Ottawa Sun
PAGE: N15
DATE: 2017.03.11
SECTION: Comment
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: John Snobelen
SOURCE: Ottawa Sun
KEYWORDS: early,harris,government,friend,wilson,stepped
WORD COUNT: 585

Ottawa Sun *Wynne's paying for McGuinty's blunders*

In the early days of the Mike Harris government, my friend Jim Wilson stepped out of cabinet briefly while a member of his staff was investigated for an alleged breach of confidentiality.

Jim was not accused of any wrongdoing but, in those more noble days, honour and ministerial responsibility were considered more important than political careers.

A few days later a caucus colleague offered that it wasn't fair that Jim resigned.

I asked my colleague a simple question: "Who promised you political life would be fair?" Political life is many things but fair isn't one of them.

Last week, another friend offered that it probably wasn't fair that Premier Kathleen Wynne carries the burden of Dalton McGuinty's disastrous energy policies.

He pointed out it was McGuinty and his then energy minister, George Smitherman, who brought in the Green Energy Act in 2009.

The McGuinty government promised thousands of jobs in a new green economy with minor increases in hydro rates.

Somehow, Ontario never became a green Camelot.

Instead we got expensive, unreliable and unneeded power and a rural landscape filled with subsidized wind turbines.

Ironically, the roughshod way those wind turbines were dumped on rural communities caused the voter backlash that helped to deny McGuinty a third majority government in 2011.

Without the protection of a Liberal majority in the Legislature, McGuinty couldn't escape the scandal of politically motivated gas plant cancellations that wasted up to $1.1 billion.

A little over four years ago, Wynne replaced McGuinty as premier and assumed the role of chief apologist for the Liberals' energy mess.

I'll cut my friend some slack for thinking Wynne was dealt a bad hand.

It couldn't have been comfortable moving into the premier's suite while the OPP investigated the former premier's staff for allegedly destroying records related to the gas plant cancellations.

But Ontarians gave Wynne a chance to set things right.

She was elected with a majority government in June, 2014.

As the third anniversary of that election looms Wynne's poll numbers are lower than the average IQ at a purse dog convention. So what went wrong? Some of the descent to historically low popularity is the natural slide of a government that has been too long in power.

By the time the next Ontario election rolls around the Liberal party will have been in power for 15 long years.

They have a lot of explaining to do.

The stubborn fact that McGuinty and Wynne have made Ontario the most indebted sub-sovereign borrower in the world will forever be a dark cloud over the Liberals.

Wynne won a majority government because voters believed she could right the ship.

I suspect she intended to do just that.

But two years later, the vision of a fairer Ontario has faded into battles with doctors, payments to teacher unions and an incoherent energy policy.

Last week, Wynne was reduced to explaining that cutting hydro rates by 25% was the fair thing to do even while her government imposed a carbon price on gasoline and home heating fuel, ostensibly to reduce consumption.

Even a politician with Wynne's considerable skills can't square that circle.

Wynne won't complain her fall from grace is unfair. She is made of sterner stuff than that.

But fair or not, Wynne may be heading out the front door of Queen's Park if she can't find a way to connect with the voters who are paying for a decade of Liberal mistakes.

Snobelen was a cabinet minister in the Conservative government of Ontario

IDNUMBER 201703110020
DOCID: 268730619
PUBLICATION: Ottawa Sun
PAGE: N11
DATE: 2017.03.11
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Tom Spears
SOURCE: Ottawa Sun
KEYWORDS: months,market,smiths,falls,contamination,wells
ILLUSTRATION: Opp / The burned remains of a flea market on Hwy. 43, just outside Smiths Falls. The blaze contaminated wells in the area, and many residents' water has been undrinkable for four months.;
WORD COUNT: 385

Ottawa Sun *Smiths Falls wells slowly recovering; Contamination l after fire*

Four months after a flea market fire near Smiths Falls left contamination in its neighbours' wells, tests have shown contamination is dropping significantly.

Residents of the neighbourhood in Drummond-North Elmsley can't drink their water yet, but Reeve Aubrey Churchill is hoping they will soon.

Residents had a meeting Thursday evening with the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate

Change and the county health unit.

"They're giving pretty positive results right now," Churchill said.

"It's not perfect yet. It's not at that point where they're going to start using (the water) but it's showing a marked improvement over what it was. It's starting to work."

This is not a case of a single pollutant, he said. There's a large number of chemicals that came from burning materials and the firefighting foam and even the reeve doesn't know the details, because the test results were given confidentially to each property owner who is affected.

The next round of test results will be presented at a meeting in May.

Churchill said the mood of the residents is optimistic, but they're upset with slow action from their insurance company. Residents have been advised to replace plumbing, water heaters and even kettles - anything that had contact with the tainted water.

The insurance company, which he wouldn't name, "is not stepping up and looking after them in the way they should.

"A lot of people are spending a lot of money right now and they haven't got reimbursed yet.

"One lady said she spent $9,000 and she got $3,800 back so far. And some of them have got nothing, so that's not nice."

While they are getting clean water delivered, the water for washing and toilets is left in 1,500-gallon tanks outdoors and the residents have to keep these from freezing. (There's a separate supply of bottled water for drinking.)

"These people have hydro bills now, some of them up to $1,500" because they have to heat the tanks electrically, the reeve said.

"This is an issue. Their hydro bills were anywhere between $200 and $300 before. Now they're $1,500" per month.

There has been purifying equipment on site, but this work stopped Thursday and the ministry will watch to see whether the contamination levels continue to fall on their own, he said.

IDNUMBER 201703110014
DOCID: 268719109
PUBLICATION: The Barrie Examiner
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.03.11
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
SOURCE: The Barrie Examiner
KEYWORDS: going,until,ontario,election,scheduled,place
WORD COUNT: 394

Barrie Examiner ***Brace yourself; still a long way to go***

And it's going to be this way until June 2018. That's when the next Ontario election is scheduled to take place. Last week, the issue was cutting high hydro costs. This week, it's school closures. For whatever reason, it would seem that Progressive Conservative leader Patrick Brown is setting the agenda - or at least more than an Official Opposition boss should.

Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne announced a further 17% cut this summer in residential/small-business hydro rates, after shaving 8% off Jan. 1.

Brown, along with New Democratic Party leader Andrea Horwath, didn't like this one bit - because the savings allowing it happen will be found by financing the costs of electricity generation contracts during longer periods of time.

Which will cost Ontario taxpayers about $40 billion in interest costs during the next 30 years, the opposition says. And produce another line on hydro bills. Despite the PCs not having their own plan yet - Brown says it's coming soon - and the NDP having one with 30% savings, Wynne really didn't have an answer.

Other than hydro rates are too high and people can't afford them.

This week it's school closures, which Barrie residents know all too well, having lost Barrie Central Collegiate, Prince of Wales School and King Edward Public School.

Brown demanded a moratorium vote on school closures in the legislature, citing a flawed provincial formula that education boards only get new capital funding if they close schools.

Fair point, but what really irks parents and students of schools which close is they have no say.

The accommodation review committee (ARC) process is little more than lip service. The proof is that more than 330 schools have been closed under the watch of Wynne and former premier Dalton McGuinty.

In the same breath, about 600 Ontario schools are at less than half capacity.

Do taxpayers really think that an efficient use of their dollars? Education is a motherhood issue, which Brown knows. So is keeping the lights on.

The PC leader must also know, or he's being told, that the Liberals are on the ropes. So he's going to keep on swinging.

The problem for voters is that Brown, and Horwath, can't do anything about Liberal policy right now.

Wynne has a majority government, and June 2018 isn't just around the corner. But it's going to be this way, anyway.

IDNUMBER 201703110001
DOCID: 268729395
PUBLICATION: The Sault Star
PAGE: A1 / Front
DATE: 2017.03.11
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Elaine Della-Mattia
SOURCE: The Sault Star
KEYWORDS: energy,released,later,serve,blueprint,needs
ILLUSTRATION: Ernest Doroszuk, Toronto Sun / Ontario Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault scrums with media after Question Period at Queen's Park on Wednesday March 1, 2017.;
WORD COUNT: 862

Sault Star *Long-term energy plan on horizon*

A new long-term energy plan that will be released later this year will serve as a blueprint for Ontario's energy needs for the next decade and beyond, Minister Glenn Thibeault said.

Thibeault said the plan, to be released by early summer, has included extensive consultations of stakeholders and is designed to determine the province's energy needs and future energy direction.

That direction is also set to examine whether or not Ontario should grow its energy export market, he told The Sault Star in an interview.

The plan, reviewed every three years, will look firstly at the provincial needs for power but then determine whether Ontario should just generate electricity for itself or become more of an exporter of power.

"We're currently an exporter of power but do we want to make that one of our priorities. It's a discussion that the long-term energy plan with have with our stakeholders to have those sorts of conversations," he said.

Thibeault, now in his post as Energy Minister for about nine months, spoke at a Chamber of Commerce breakfast Friday touting the Liberal government's recent announcement that Ontario customers will see energy bills cut by an average of 25 per cent as a result of restructuring its programs and extending the burden of fixing an underfunded system over a greater length of time.

Thibeault said Ontario already produces extra energy that when unused in the province, is sold elsewhere, including Michigan.

The Michigan Agency for Energy has appointed Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) to conduct a study on the long-term benefits of electric transmission between the Upper Peninsula and Ontario.

The Upper Peninsula of Michigan is deficient in meeting its energy needs and is in need of a boost.

The study, supported by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, is also supported by Thibeault.

The study, paid for in its entirety by Michigan, will proceed on its own and Ontario doesn't need to insert itself or advocate for the project separately.

"I don't think we need to insert ourselves (in the study). We are already there," he said.

He said it's important to ensure that any sale of Ontario's abundance of energy has a benefit to Ontario's ratepayers, to the province and provide a service to Michigan.

"They're going to be getting clean, green energy," he said.

In the meantime, the ministry will continue to work with Ontario Power Generation and Hydro One about ways to explore opportunities and use their expertise in the process.

"We currently sell power to Michigan and we do make money at the end of the year when we look at our bottom line of where we've spent and sold some of our power although our opposition friends don't often tell that full side of the story," he said.

Thibeault said his ministry will also continue to work through the Ontario ambassador and keeping communication open with the Governor's office to continue to help and promote Ontario energy to the rest of the world.

"It's also something we have to take a deeper look into if that's something we want to start doing, similar to what Hydro Quebec does," he said.

Hydro Quebec has been selling its electricity for about 15 years to markets that have included Ontario, New York State and New Brunswick.

"Many things are being looked at," he said of that process.

Thibeault said Sault Ste. Marie can continue to grow its green energy sector.

The Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre ideas and technology to create storage will be a key to growth, he said.

"It's not just about creating energy, it's also about conservation, demand response and storage," he said. "That's where I think Sault Ste. Marie will continue to be such a leader in the province."

The time of use program implemented by the province - which sets rates according to how much energy is needed or used at different parts of the day and night - is working, he said, saving about five per cent of overall peak demand.

Thibeault said it is recognized that there are some unique situations in the province that makes time of use difficult for some. A single individual in a downtown condo and a senior couple in Northern Ontario living in their own home are on the same price plan and perhaps shouldn't be.

As such, independent system operators have been tasked with working on a plan that will offer people a choice - time of use plan or a fixed rate plan - to decide which one is right for them.

To Chamber members, Thibeault reiterated Premier Kathleen Wynne's announcement of last week also reminding Chamber of Commerce members that there are a number of programs out there to help businesses reduce their energy costs and urged them to contact local utility providers to determine what programs they would qualify for.

He said that too often, smaller businesses don't realize that they would qualify for some of the programs that exist.

Thibeault said businesses will also receive lower electricity bills as part of the new plan unveiled by Wynne last week.

Thibeault was to also meet Friday with Sault Mayor Christian Provenzano and the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre.

IDNUMBER 201703110012
DOCID: 268729626
PUBLICATION: Owen Sound Sun Times
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.03.11
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: John Bakker
SOURCE: Owen Sound Sun Times
KEYWORDS: statements,column,dated,march,believe,those
WORD COUNT: 572

Owen Sound Sun Times: What about OPG?

One of Jim Merriams', statements in his column dated March 7, 2017, I believe is very true. "Those who are praising the government for this reduction in rates (electricity) are doing nothing but helping the Liberals re-election plan in the provincial vote to come in June of next year."

This refinancing scheme that is planned does nothing to reduce the real cost of producing energy in this province but will increase our debt to be paid later with interest.

Why does the Wynne government not look at reducing the real costs and look for savings in the system to lower our electricity bill? What about looking at Ontario Power Generation (OPG) which produces approximately 60 per cent of our electricity and has a very significant impact on our bills.

OPG was subject of a scathing report by the Auditor General of Ontario (AGO) in 2013. Some of the highlights of that report are as follows: OPG engaged a consultant in 2012 to look at staff compensation and found that base salary, cash compensation and pension benefits for a significant portion of staff were excessive compared to market data. An AGO analysis showed that total earnings were significantly higher at OPG than total earnings in the Ontario Public Service (OPS), and many of OPGs' senior executives earned more than most deputy ministers.

OPG has contributed disproportionately more to its staff pension plan than the employee does. OPG contributed four or five dollars for every one dollar the employee contributed. The norm in the public service is one dollar employer and one dollar employee.

OPG provides numerous employee benefits, such as relocation benefits, meal and travel allowances, some of which we (AGO) find questionable. For example, one employee who was transferred to another office received over $392,000 in housing and moving allowances after receiving the proceeds of the sale of his house for $354,000.

There were a number of cases between 2005 and 2012 where the annual base salaries for non-union staff exceeded the maximum set out in the salary schedule by $100,000 and one case by more than $200,000.

The report contains more in regard to overstaffing, hiring within families, overtime costs and possibly top heavy management and achievement awards. It is possible OPG has acted upon some of these issues but the extravagant culture and disrespect for their customer is clear. Think of the hardship endured by so many families trying to keep their lights and heat on.

News reports on February 3, 2017 show the Wynne government endorsed a proposal to raise the salary cap for the CEO of Ontario Power Generation to $3.8 million. Apparently the CEO salary and benefits in 2016 totaled $1.59 million. Also approved is $8.0 million for raises for approximately 80 executives. The Energy Minister was all for the increase and was quoted as saying, "For me it is about Safety". He may have missed the part in the 2013 AGO report that states more than 50 per cent of their sample group, including senior staff, with access to confidential nuclear information had never obtained the required security clearance or were working with expired security clearances.

To answer my question, why the Wynne government has not looked at cost savings as opposed to refinancing? They do not have what it takes to take on the big players and OPG is just one of them.

John Bakker

RR5 Owen Sound