Ministry of Energy Top Issues - February 18-21, 2017

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Date: Tue, 21 Feb 2017 07:10:55 -0500

Good morning,

Here's what's making news:

- Hydro rates will power debate in legislature; Conservatives, NDP remain critical of Premier Wynne's handling of electricity bills – Toronto Star
- Hydro bills will be the focus as Queen's Park resumes – CBC News
- Few solutions for hospital energy bill – Timmins Daily Press
- Carbon tax will cost local greenhouses up to $220,000 – Today's Farmer
- Carbon pricing goes from bad to worse – Ottawa Sun
- Affordable Hydro Bills A Priority As Ontario Legislature Resumes Tomorrow – Global
- Thunder Bay Hydro Customers Using Less Electricity Than a Decade Ago -- CKPR
- Stopping winter hydro disconnections may mean utilities have to absorb bad debt – CBC.CA News
- Wynne should take auditor's advice – Toronto Sun
- Hydro relief on the way : minister – North Bay Nugget
- OPG to Ask OEB For Rate Increase to Pay for Darlington Refurbishment -- CKPR

Hydro rates will power debate in legislature; Conservatives, NDP remain critical of Premier Wynne's handling of electricity bills
Toronto Star
Tue Feb 21 2017
Page: A6
Section: News
Byline: Robert Benzie and Kristin Rushowy Toronto Star

Hydro, hydro, hydro.

As MPPs return to the Legislature today, Ontario's electricity rates are top of mind for all three major party leaders.

Premier Kathleen Wynne, who has already lowered prices by removing the 8-per-cent provincial portion of the harmonized sales tax from bills as of Jan. 1, is promising more relief for hydro consumers.

"How do we lower people's electricity bills? How do we deal with the reality that electricity bills for many people in the province are not affordable?" Wynne told reporters last week when asked about her government's priorities for this year.

"We've put the 8-per-cent decrease in place and one of the things that I have heard from some people is that that . . . actually isn't enough," the premier said Wednesday.
"They still need to see a greater decrease in their electricity bills.

"The reality is that there has been an increase in everyone's electricity bills, but there are some people who are carrying a disproportionate burden."

Wynne said the Liberal government will introduce "a package of changes" before Finance Minister Charles Sousa tables the budget this spring.

"At this point, those decisions are just being made, but we recognize that everyone across the province has seen increases in electricity ... so we recognize that there's more that we need to do for everyone."

Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown, who leads Wynne in public-opinion polls, said the Liberals are taking action only because an election is set for June 7, 2018.

"With the new session beginning, we're seeing an out-of-touch, self-interested Liberal government that's desperate to cling to power," Brown said in an email on Friday.

"For 13 years, this government has created an affordability crisis in our province. They've driven up hydro rates, slashed health care services and made Ontario an uncompetitive place to do business," he said.

Repeating his party's mantra - and a possible campaign slogan for an election that is 67 weeks away - Brown stressed "life's harder and more unaffordable under the Wynne Liberals.
"No matter how often they backpedal or how many promises they make, Premier Kathleen Wynne always goes back to her old ways," he warned.

While Brown said he would "continue to advocate for a more affordable province," his party is not holding its policy convention until November.

That means the Conservatives will continue to be short on details when asked for their specific plans on reducing electricity rates.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath, for her part, believes "Ontario is at a tipping point.

"From hydro bills that make it impossible for families to get ahead, to soaring housing prices in some communities, to crushing student debt levels that this government continues to profit off, it's getting harder and harder to build a good life here in Ontario, especially for young people," Horwath said Friday.

"It's like Kathleen Wynne hasn't had to open her own hydro bill in the past five years. The premier acts like she has no clue whatsoever of what's going on in people's lives, no clue what's happening at kitchen tables across Ontario," she said.

Horwath - who, like Brown, opposes the Liberals' partial privatization of Hydro One - vowed to "ratchet up the pressure to stop the sell-off" of the provincial electricity transmission utility .

Even though the sale has no impact on electricity rates, which are set by the independent Ontario Energy Board, both the NDP and the Tories believe the initial public offering of shares is hurting the government.

Hydro bills will be the focus as Queen's Park resumes
CBC News
2017-02-21
Byline: Mike Crawley
Three issues will dominate the agenda during the spring session of the Ontario Legislature, starting Tuesday:

1. **1. hydro**
2. **2. hydro; and**
3. **3. hydro.**

Sure, Premier Kathleen Wynne's Liberal government will bring in Ontario's first balanced budget in a decade, despite fears it won't . Yes, there will be fusses over six-figure salaries in the public sector. Indeed, the province's policing system is in for its most significant reform in a generation.

All of those are undeniably important. But at the moment, nothing is resonating among Ontario voters quite like the price of electricity. The government knows it, the opposition parties know it. And that means all parties will be doing their utmost in the coming months to gain as much political leverage on hydro as possible.

As I revealed last week, the government is considering a plan that would bring down the average hydro bill by about eight per cent. An announcement is expected soon.

Wynne isn't publicly confirming the figure but is confirming that the thrust of the plan involves an across-the-board reduction. That's a shift from her stance at the end of last year, when she said the focus would be on "the people having the most trouble with their bills."

"We recognize that there's more that we need to do for everyone," Wynne told reporters last week. "Everyone across the province has seen increases in electricity, precipitous increases over the last number of years."

In addition to the across-the-board relief on bills, Wynne is also indicating there will be targeted help for those hurt the most by high hydro costs: rural, northern and low-income households, including measures to soften disproportionately high delivery charges.

Progressive Conservative leader Patrick Brown is dismissing any hydro rate relief from the Liberals as "a shell game."

"What we have is a government that is unwilling to acknowledge its own mistakes, its own mismanagement of the hydro file," Brown said last week in a phone interview. He points the finger for high bills at the Liberals' green energy plan, and for giving too many lucrative wind-power contracts for electricity that isn't needed.

NDP leader Andrea Horwath is also signalling that hydro costs will be a preoccupation for her party during the session.

"It's like Kathleen Wynne hasn't had to open her own hydro bill in the past five years," Horwath told a news conference at Queen's Park on Friday. "The premier acts like she has had no clue what's going on in people's lives."

- Andrea Horwath finds high hydro bill stories 'echoing across the province'

All three leaders have been touring the province since the Legislature adjourned in early December. The cost of hydro has been the overarching theme for Wynne, Brown and Horwath during their travels.

The questions that I keep asking myself: will hydro actually resonate this much with voters a year from now, as the Legislature heads into its final session before the June 2018 election? Or will the Liberals be able to neutralize it as an issue by nudging hydro bills downward, even if only in the short term?

Given how volatile voter sentiment seems to have become in our politics over the past decade or so, I'm counting nothing out.

Few solutions for hospital energy bill
The Timmins Daily Press

Tue Feb 21 2017
Page: A1 / Front
Section: News
Byline: Alan S. Hale
Source: The Timmins Daily Press

When Progressive Conservative Party leader Patrick Brown came to Timmins last week, discussing electricity prices was top of his agenda, and it was a topic everyone seemed eager to talk about. Residents and business owners came out with their bills and horror stories to share, and the tour concerned the Liberal government so much that Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault launched a counter-messaging campaign.

But while discussions in Timmins focused on the impacts of electricity prices mostly on of medical bills and industrial energy expenses, there was little mention of the situation the Timmins and District Hospital finds itself in as its energy costs continue to rise uncontrollably. But neither the government nor the PC Party seems to have much in the way of answers for how to deal with the situation.

The situation has become so dire that at their last meeting, the hospital's board of directors raised the specter of medical service cuts unless funding is increased or energy costs are brought under control.
"We continue to have difficulty meeting all the demands imposed on us. Some of the costs include the carbon tax which is in addition to the increasing price of hydro which affects us quite drastically ," fumed board trustee Leon Laforest. "Unless we start getting increased funding from the province, we're going to have to start cutting somewhere to balance the budget."

The hospital has immense power needs. It consumes about 9.17 million kilowatt-hours per year. In contrast, the average Ontario home uses 9,000 kilowatt-hours every year.

Not only does it have an entire building to light and heat, it has a huge system of computers and servers, as well as medical equipment such as life-support systems and CAT Scan machines that require vast amounts of electricity to operate.

And over the past five years, the cost each kilowatt-hour has risen by 44%. Chief financial officer, Bryan Bennetts said that this has translated into hundreds of thousands in extra spending for a hospital which struggles to maintain a budget surplus.

"Our current annual cost for hydro is approximately $1.2 million," said Bennetts." At our current consumption rate, our hydro cost would have been $825,000 five years ago."

The Daily Press asked both the Energy Minister and Brown what they planned to do about the hospital's mounting energy cost problems in order to avoid health service cuts in Timmins.

Thibeault said the TADH should take a page from Health Sciences North in Sudbury and find ways to save energy by retrofitting the building.
"They actually instituted a program in which they are conserving their energy, they changed the light bulbs; they've done many, many things. And the savings they are making on their energy bill now is $400,000 a year. They are seeing those dollars go directly back into health care costs," said Thibeault. "I would encourage your local hospital to talk to Hydro One ... and talk about the Save On Energy Program. Because there are actually a lot of programs out there that will help save hospitals money. Those are the things we're encouraging ."

But the Timmins hospital has already been doing retrofit work such as switching to low-energy light bulbs. In the past five years, those changes have cut the hospital's energy needs by 6% or about 550,000 kilowatt-hours. Bennetts said this saved the hospital about $100,000 per year.

“If we wouldn’t have had any energy reduction projects, our current annual cost would be $1.3 million (as opposed to $1.2 million it is now),” he said.

When asked what the PC Party’s plan would be to help the hospital, Brown said he was made aware of the hospital’s concerns about its electricity costs when he last toured the facility. But he offered no policies ideas that would help the hospital specifically. Instead, he said it was more reason why the general energy policy he was in Timmins promoting was so important.

“Here’s another human side of Kathleen Wynne’s hydro crisis: it’s putting hospitals on the brink,” said Brown. “If there’s ever more reason to stop the fire sale of hydro one, rip up the Green Energy Act, and rein in exorbitant executive salaries, it’s that even hospitals can’t afford them.”

Carbon tax will cost local greenhouses up to $220,000
Today's Farmer
Tue Feb 21 2017
Page: A20
Section: News
Source: Today's Farmer

Harrow - On top of a 40 per cent increase in electricity costs in recent years, the introduction of Ontario’s cap and-trade system could see Ontario’s greenhouse operators faced with an additional bill of up to $200,000.

Matt Marchand, president of the Windsor-Essex Chamber of Commerce, says the new carbon trading system is a heavy regulatory burden on small business and will basically mean that by 2020, Ontarians will have sent $466 million to California.

Marchand was one of the guest speakers at a Partners in Progress hosted by the Harrow and Colchester Chamber of Commerce. He noted that soaring electricity costs are driving businesses out of Ontario and the implementation of a carbon tax will only add to the exodus.

He said many are heading south of the border to competing jurisdictions with more affordable electricity rates, lower taxes, and a more business-friendly environment. “This is the dynamic we are facing right now,” said Marchand. “Compared with many of our competing jurisdictions our electricity costs are basically about double.” Marchand said rather than just complain about it, the Chambers of Commerce across Ontario decided to be proactive and do something about it.

He noted that they recently conducted a study on energy costs in Ontario and found that while there are many reasons why electricity is so expensive in the province, the primary cause is that between 2006 and 2014 Ontarians paid an extra $37 billion on their electricity bills, largely due to cost overruns on hydro projects and the implementation of green energy developments.

He said to add insult to injury, on Jan. 1, 2017, the federal government introduced a carbon tax, ostensibly to discourage the use of carbon-based fuels. “Our team at the chamber decided to take a closer look at this and consider the number of coal-fired power plants operating in competing jurisdictions,” he said.

He said they discovered that China has 2,500 coal fired plants in operation and, on average, is adding another one each week.

The European Union has 1,000 and the U.S. has 500 in operation. Marchand noted that about one-third of the electricity produced in the U.S. comes from coal-fired plants. Interestingly, he said at the lower end of the chart was Ontario which now has no coal-fired electrical facilities. “The government has shut them all down so looking at it logically where should we be taxing carbon?” he asked rhetorically. “If you wanted to discourage the use of carbon, which jurisdiction do you think should have a carbon tax?”

He added that common sense would suggest it’s not Ontario, which is essentially being punished for reducing its use of carbon-based fuels in the generation of electricity.

Marchand noted that 50 to 55 per cent of Ontario’s electricity is produced through nuclear plants, about 15 per cent by hydro, three per cent by renewable energy and the balance by natural gas.

He said Chambers of Commerce across Ontario have come together in asking the government to defer the implementation of its carbon and-trade system for a year. However, he said the government has yet to respond.
Marchand says the costs businesses incur through a cap and trade system will increase their cost of doing business and will ultimately put Ontario businesses at a competitive disadvantage.
He said there are basically three classes of facilities identified in the cap-and trade legislation: Facilities that emit 25,000 tonnes of carbon or more annually; facilities that emit between 10,000 to 25,000 annually and those with emissions of 10,000 tonnes annually or less.

He said any business emitting more than their cap will be required to buy carbon credits. He noted that at present there are only two jurisdictions other than Ontario with a carbon-trading system in place: California and Quebec, "That means basically we will be sending $466 million to California and Quebec by 2020," he said, adding that Ontario's Attorney General is on record saying it will do little to reduce greenhouse gases in Ontario. "We are really concerned about this program and that we will be sending cheques to California and Quebec and having no effect on emissions anyway," he said.
He added that it will be mandatory that small businesses register for what is called a compliance tracking system. He said the impact cap and-trade will have on natural gas and electricity cost alone will cost small greenhouse operators between $80,000 and $220,000 annually.
Consumers will also be charged indirectly 2.3 cents per cubic meter of carbon, which for the average consumer will add $15 to $20 per month to their electricity bill. He noted that the true cost of cap-and-trade will be hidden within consumer's electricity bill and the Chamber has asked the government, for transparency reasons, to disclose that cost on a separate item line. But again, to no avail.

Marchand noted that there are several large greenhouses in the Leamington area that are considering going off the electricity grid altogether, adding that an American company is offering large scale generators powered by natural gas. "It's a multi-million-dollar investment but the payback is three to five years," he said. "It's coming, so don't be surprised when you hear about businesses going off Ontario's electricity grid."
Marchand said another concern is the election of the Trump administration in the U.S., which has pledged to roll back much of President Obama's environmental agenda and doesn't sound like it's particularly interested in a cap-and-trade system.
He said given the skyrocketing cost of energy, the costs of cap-and-trade and the election of Donald Trump who wants to put America first, Ontario's business will be at a significant competitive disadvantage. "We are not here to comment on the merits of cap and-trade, we want to be good corporate citizens but is it really fair to us," asked Marchand.

How cap and trade works Under a cap-and-trade system, a government sets a cap or limit on the amount of greenhouse gas emissions various industries can emit into the atmosphere.

This limit is gradually reduced over time to decrease total pollution levels.

Governments can distribute free carbon emission credits, auction them off or sell them to industries within the overall limit.

Companies that need additional credits can then purchase them from other companies that do not need their full emissions allowance.

The goal of the system is to encourage industries to reduce their carbon footprint by effectively putting a price on pollution.

Carbon pricing goes from bad to worse
Ottawa Sun
Tue Feb 21 2017
Page: A16
Section: Comment
Source: Ottawa Sun

Bad enough Canada’s provinces are imposing carbon prices with the blessing of the Trudeau government, while the Trump administration in the U.S. is heading in the opposite direction.

Putting this new cost on Canada’s businesses and industries - and ultimately, on taxpayers and consumers - through a national carbon price, without the U.S. doing the same, makes no economic sense.

It will simply make our industries less competitive with those of our largest trading partner. But what’s happening is even worse, because our governments are implementing carbon pricing schemes which are primarily designed to raise government revenues, rather than lower industrial greenhouse gas emissions linked to abnormal climate change.

Because it raises the cost of living, for carbon pricing to work it should be 100% revenue neutral.

In other words, while the government raises the cost of fossil fuel energy, it simultaneously lowers other taxes so that the net effect on government revenues is neutral, or zero.

Without revenue neutrality, carbon pricing causes a recession because it raises the cost of most goods and services, leaving people with less to spend.

Worse, carbon pricing would cause a massive recession at the levels it would have to be imposed to meet the emission cuts our governments are promising.

Revenue neutral carbon pricing, on the other hand, insulates the public from the higher cost of living that comes with taxing fossil fuel energy and creates a real world demand for low emission, and thus less expensive, goods and services.

And yet no government in Canada is introducing revenue neutral carbon pricing.

British Columbia’s carbon tax started out as revenue neutral in 2008 but no longer is, as a Fraser Institute study concluded last week. The rest of the country is a lost cause. When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced his national carbon pricing scheme he claimed, incorrectly, that it was revenue neutral because none of the money will go to the federal government.

When Alberta Premier Rachel Notley introduced her carbon tax for Jan. 1, she said, incorrectly, that it was revenue neutral because all the money would go to reducing emissions.

The issue is that without revenue neutrality, carbon pricing is simply another government cash grab that will make Canadians poorer and only reduce emissions by causing a recession.

Affordable Hydro Bills A Priority As Ontario Legislature Resumes Tomorrow
Source: Global
Feb 20, 2017 6:07 PM

Anchor: MPPs return to Queen’s Park on Tuesday as the legislature resumes sitting after a two month break. First on the agenda?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: How do we deal with the reality that electricity bills for many people in the province are not affordable, and we will be bringing a plan forward actually before the budget, but it will be part of the budget cycle.

Anchor: Now the Wynne government knows its political survival hinges on containing anger over rising Hydro prices. Already, the government has cut bills by 8 per cent by spending $1 billion a year to rebate the provincial portion of the HST. Look for the government to possibly expand that, and then to tackle something called the global adjustment fee. Now what is that? Well as we look at the Portlands Energy Centre at the Toronto waterfront, to put it simply, it is the difference between the guaranteed prices the Liberal government promised electricity generators in long-term contracts and actually market rates. Now for residential customers, the fee is hidden. It appears on your electricity bill as part of the per kilowatt hour charge.
Anchor: All right, all right, hold on now, because there are plenty of rabbit holes to just fall into on this Ontario Hydro file. But let’s stay focused shall we? The bottom line is to expect more relief on your bill. And here is a hint about how the province plans to play for cash pay for it.

Glenn Thibeault, Ontario Energy Minister: The proposals that we are looking at will require moving some things onto the tax base or creating it on the tax base.

Anchor: And creating it on the tax base is a fancy way of saying more of the money we all pay in taxes will go towards helping lower Hydro bills. But before the Liberals can even tackle that, they have a more immediate hurdle to clear.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: It is unacceptable that people should have their electricity disconnected in the winter months.

Anchor: All parties agree that people should not happen to live without power in the winter just because they cannot pay their bill. Yet, that continues to happen in Ontario in number of places. And legislation that would end winter disconnections is stuck in procedural wrangling. Each party has a plan to get it passed right away, but check out this discussion with the Minister of Energy and what it prompted.

Minister Thibeault: Supported that bill. Bill 27.
Anchor: [Inaudible]
Minister Thibeault: The important thing of that is they don't recognize – I just find it kind of ridiculous that they are coming out now and saying that they want to see this and pull it out when we’re going to start all over again. It is a committee, get it through committee and bring it right back.

Anchor: It took that “discussion” for the Minister to realize he should at least asked utilities to voluntarily stop disconnecting people in the winter, and to have this epiphany:

Minister Thibeault: Yesterday when we were talking about this, I realized that you know what it is time we do not play political games anymore.

Anchor: Now make no mistake. Those political games are being played by all sides here, and with a little more than a year until the next election, it is not hard to guess why. But as MPPs return to the house Tuesday, watch to see how this Hydro disconnection narrative plays out. If the Liberals can’t handle something that everyone agrees on, how can the government ever tackle Hydro prices, something that is so much more shocking?

Transcript captured directly from source. Some typographical errors or omissions are to be expected.

Thunder Bay Hydro Customers Using Less Electricity Than a Decade Ago
Source: CKPR
Feb 20, 2017 6: 00 PM
Anchor: Meanwhile, Hydro customers in Thunder Bay are using twelve percent less electricity than they did a decade ago, according to numbers from the province. Reports filed the Ontario Energy Board show that Hydro use is down for Thunder Bay across the board. The fall isn't restricted to any one property class and shows a dip in residential, commercial, and industrial energy use Thunder Bay Hydro credits the change to a variety of factors: the city lost several large industrial properties between 2007 and now and Thunder Bay's population is also stagnated in the last decade. Both of which may have played a role. Tim Wilson is a vice president at Thunder Bay Hydro. He said one factor that is sometimes overlooked is how the province has promoted conservation and clamped down on inefficient appliances.
Tim Wilson, Vice President, Thunder Bay Hydro: They worked very hard at, for example, participating in at the federal level on incandescent bulbs and things of that nature, making sure that new home construction was at a that a higher standard for insulation values, higher efficiency furnaces were going in so that these midrange ones were no longer available even.
Anchor: Wilson adds that as hydro rates increase customers become more aware of how much energy they use every day which may affect consumption.
Transcript captured directly from source. Some typographical errors or omissions are to be expected.

Stopping winter hydro disconnections may mean utilities have to absorb bad debt
CBC.CA News
Mon Feb 20 2017, 5:39am ET
Section: Sudbury
Byline: CBC News
A recent request by Ontario's energy minister to stop winter disconnections could cause hydro rates to increase, according to some utility companies.

On Thursday, minister Glenn Thibeault wrote a letter to all hydro companies asking them not to cut off the hydro to residents having trouble paying their bills during the winter.

In Ontario, a hydro company can disconnect people's electricity if they aren't paying their bill, provided it gives them at least 10 days warning. At one time, companies like Greater Sudbury Utilities would disconnect homes ? unless the temperature dipped below -20 Celcius.

Disconnecting the power is one of the only ways for hydro companies to prevent someone from racking up hundreds, even thousands of dollars in unpaid hydro bills, according to Sudbury utility spokesperson Wendy Watson.

Watson says that was the case when the province banned cold-weather disconnections during the winter of 2002-2003.

"What happened then, is there was no way they could pay their bills. They defaulted, we had to write off a whole bunch of bad debts," she said.

"That impacts the 99.9 per cent of the customers [who] pay their bills on time, because then we have to write-off those bad debts, and that affects everyone's rates. It causes the rates to go up. It's not like a car dealership where you have a car payment, and if you default on the payment, they're going to come and grab the car. We can't do that with

[electricity].”

Band-aid solution?

Smaller utilities could have a particularly difficult time absorbing bad debt, according to Giordan Zin, who is with PUC Hydro. The electricity supplier for Sault Ste. Marie and Espanola has fewer than 40,000 customers combined.

When people don’t pay their bills in Sault Ste. Marie, Zin said PUC uses ‘load limiters’ to allow only a small amount of electricity into the home. In Espanola, the company does disconnect power unless it is below -10 degrees Celcius.

“We’re not Hydro One. We’re not a massive conglomerate. Taking a hit like that will be challenging,” he said.

“Nobody wants to get disconnected in the winter. But it doesn’t solve the problem. We’re just kicking the can down the road. If they want to provide real relief for Ontarians, it’s addressing the rising [commodity] price of electricity that’s gotten out of control.”

The minister’s decision to target companies who disconnect power is a band-aid solution, according to Joseph LeBlanc, executive director of Sudbury’s Social Planning Council.

The charity, which provides emergency funds to people who can’t pay their hydro bill, receives dozens of applications every year from people in the city who are at risk of having their power cut off.

LeBlanc said he’s concerned a moratorium on winter disconnects could cause major issues when the weather warms up.

“I think [people] will be cut off in the spring, without addressing the income security issue. Yes, it would alleviate people freezing to death, but I don’t think that’s where the line is in Ontario 2017,” he said.

The real solution needs to come from making sure people are being paid enough to pay their bills in the first place, he said.

The Ontario Liberals hope to pass legislation banning cold-weather disconnects by next winter.

Wynne should take auditor's advice

Toronto Sun
Sun Feb 19 2017
Page: A5
Section: News
Byline: Lorrie Goldstein
Source: Toronto Sun

One way for Premier Kathleen Wynne’s government to demonstrate openness and transparency would be to take the advice and recommendations of Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk seriously.

Wynne’s government repeatedly hasn’t, even though Lysyk is an independent officer of the legislature, whose job is to protect the public’s interest by holding the government to account in its spending of taxpayers’ money.

The ongoing dispute between Wynne’s government and Lysyk over whether the

government can declare its share of a pension surplus in two public pension plans as an asset, is just the latest controversy in which Wynne and Co. have attacked Lysyk's credibility or ignored her recommendations.

This time they've spent up to $435,000 hiring what the Liberals called an independent panel, which ruled in favour of the government's interpretation of its pension surplus accounting practices, as opposed to Lysyk's.

Lysyk's ruling would make Wynne's election promise to balance the books in 2017, after nine consecutive years of Liberal deficits, significantly more difficult to achieve, even with Liberal measures such as selling 60% of Hydro One to the private sector, which polls show is highly unpopular with the public.

Wynne's bigger problem is she can only sell Hydro One once, whereas a structural deficit continues year after year.

But such controversies are nothing new.

When Lysyk reported in 2014 that through financial mismanagement the Liberals had doubled the cost of their Smart Meter program from $1 billion to $2 billion, then Wynne energy minister Bob Chiarelli claimed Lysyk didn't understand the electricity file because it's complicated.

This from a long-time politician who trained as a lawyer, as opposed to Lysyk, a former senior executive at Manitoba Hydro who is a chartered accountant and certified internal auditor, with a masters degree in business administration.

In 2015, Lysyk urged Wynne not to gut a law passed by her predecessor, Dalton McGuinty, that gave the auditor general the power to review government advertising for political partisanship.

Wynne ignored this recommendation, took away the auditor general's ability to effectively review government advertising and has since, inappropriately according to Lysyk, repeatedly run politically partisan government ads, costing millions of dollars, that should not have been paid for by the public.

Again in 2015, Lysyk and seven other independent officers of the Legislature took the extraordinary step of urging Wynne not to end their oversight of Hydro One, the deeply troubled provincial electrical utility, as she was gearing up to sell 60% of it to the private sector.

Wynne ignored this advice with the result that Hydro One, which has been the subject of scathingly critical reports by the auditor general and Ontario ombudsman over its poor financial management and unacceptable treatment of customers, is no longer subject to their scrutiny.

Such incidents are an unprecedented undermining of the auditor general and other independent officers of the Legislature, compared to previous governments of all political stripes.

This is alarming because the only powers these guardians of the public purse and public interest have, are those of moral suasion. They can only recommend action, not impose it.

Any government that repeatedly challenges and ignores the advice of the auditor general and other independent officers of the legislature is not committed to openness and transparency, but to exercising power as it sees fit.

And the public interest be damned.

Hydro relief on the way – minister
North Bay Nugget
Sat Feb 18 2017
Page: A2
Section: News
Byline: Gord Young
Source: The Nugget

Ontario residents can expect more hydro relief in a matter weeks, says Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault.

In a telephone interview Friday, Thibeault once again acknowledged wide-spread public concern over hydro rates and repeated the promise that help is on the way.

"I get the rate issue and we continue to look at other solutions," he said, noting the Liberal government is planning to roll out relief package "very quickly."

Thibeault said that will likely be a matter of weeks, noting Premier Kathleen Wynne is aiming for an announcement prior to the provincial budget, which is typically tabled sometime in February or March.

Some reports have suggested options include reducing the "global adjustment" charge on hydro bills. But Thibeault said everything within reason is on the table.

His comments come as Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown tours northeastern Ontario, capitalizing on the heat the Liberals are under over hydro rates. Brown's tour wraps up today in North Bay.

But Thibeault warns that Brown is not offering any solutions.

"They don't have a plan. They're not offering anything," he said, accusing Brown of dealing in "alternative facts."

He was specifically referring to Brown's call for an immediate ban on winter electricity disconnections in Ontario. Thibeault said he can't issue such a directive to the Ontario Energy Board and blamed the Tories for stalling legislation tabled in June that would put an end to winter disconnections for non-payment.

Rather than "playing games," he suggested that partisanship be put aside so the legislation gets passed.

Thibeault also discounted the notion of cancelling renewable energy contracts, suggesting that would cost billions and damage the province's reputation when it comes to attracting business.

He said Ontario has built a clean, safe and reliable electricity system that no longer relies on coal and has eliminated smog days. And, he said, the focus now is to make rates it more affordable.

OPG to Ask OEB For Rate Increase to Pay for Darlington Refurbishment
Source: CKPR
Feb 17, 2017 6: 07 PM

Anchor: As the Wynne Government looks for ways to reduce electricity bills in Ontario the report

any savings they be clawed back due to new rate hikes. Ontario Power Generation is getting ready to ask The Ontario Energy Board to authorize rate hikes to pay for a massive overhaul of the Darlington nuclear power plant. Paul Bliss has details.
Reporter: Refurbishing the four giant nuclear reactors at Darlington will cost $12.8 billion. So on Monday February 27, Ontario Power Generation will go before The Ontario Energy Board and ask for a series of rate increases to pay the tab. Darlington provides Ontario with 20 percent of all the electricity it uses, most for the energy thirsty GTA. Here's the math for the proposed increases, an average $1.05 a month or more annually over the next five years, so the increase would reach $5.25 by the year 2021. That is $63 more per year for the average household. If approved, the hike will represent a 69 percent increase in the amount of money OPG is paid for nuclear over the five years. This application comes as the Wynne government tries to agree on a plan to slash your hydro bills another eight to twelve percent so while that relief may be on the way, some of it will be eroded if the OEB says yes to the application.
Transcript captured directly from source. Some typographical errors or omissions are to be expected.