Ministry of Energy Top Issues - March 30, 2017

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Date: Thu, 30 Mar 2017 07:01:23 -0400

Good morning,

Here's what's making news:

- MPP speaks out against $8M Chatham-Kent wind farm project – Windsor Star
- Bankruptcy Rocks Nuclear Industry – The New York Times
- Wynne has no interest in hiking $100K 'Sunshine List' cut-off; 'Fewer people' on tally doesn't mean transparency on salaries, premier says – Toronto Star
- Mayor pledges to protect trees from Hydro One – Windsor Star
- LaSalle mayor remains concerned about Hydro One clearcut plans – CBC News
- NDP critical of Sudbury Liberal MPP Thibeault – Sudbury Star
- Interview with Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault – CP 24
- When it comes to hydro, only some polls really matter to Wynne – Ottawa Citizen
- Leeds-Grenville MPP slams premier for hydro policy, impact on business – St. Lawrence News
- PCs take stand against hydro ads; Critics say advertisements are premature and appear promotional for Liberals – Toronto Star
- Premier Rejects Opposition's Calls to Pull Hydro Ads Promoting Hydro Bills - CKVR -Time: 18:13
- Premier Wynne Defends Hydro Ads - Global - Time: 18:02
- Opposition Calls For Changes To Stop Self-Serving Government Ads - CFPL - Time: 18:14
- Wynne Liberals need to stop the hydro ads and raise awareness for fentanyl: PC Leader Patrick Brown -- Manitoulin Expositor
- The Opposition Is Calling On The Premier To Restore The Auditor General's Power - CFTO - Time: 18:16
- Nicholls and PCs offer no solution to hydro woes -- The Chatham Daily News
- MPP defends government actions on hydro bills – Oshawa This Week
- Group seeks changes to Hydro-Quebec's Northern Pass project in the Eastern Townships – Montreal Gazette
- Town to hold meeting on nuclear waste facility upriver -- Arnprior Chronicle-Guide
- New Empress-Dawn Service Application To Be Filed April 26, Says TransCanada -- Daily Oil Bulletin
- Keep high-tech talent here; Vector Institute – The Toronto Star

MPP speaks out against $8M Chatham-Kent wind farm project

Windsor Star
Thu Mar 30 2017
Page: A8
Section: City & Region
Byline: Ellwood Shreve

A Chatham-area opposition MPP is sounding the alarm over Chatham-Kent's plan to invest nearly $8 million into a wind farm project capable of powering 25,000 homes.

"In my opinion, they should not be going ahead with it," Chatham-Kent-Essex MPP Rick Nicholls said, citing the controversy around the North Kent 1 Wind Turbine project, with concerns raised that vibrations from the construction and operation of the turbines will damage area water wells.

A majority of council recently voted in favour of taking $7.74 million from the municipality's cash reserves for Entegrus, an electrical utility 90-per-cent owned by Chatham-Kent, to buy a 15-per-cent stake in the 100 megawatt project that will see 32 industrial wind turbines built north of Chatham.

If it's proven the wind farm project is damaging wells, Nicholls said that nearly $8 million investment could be lost if the project is ordered to be shut down.

He also questions what will happen to local electricity rates if Entegrus has to eat that kind of a loss.

When asked about the potential impact on water wells, Mayor Randy Hope said: "Things need to be proven scientifically."

He said when the turbine industry began in Ontario, there were concerns raised about several issues from shadow flicker to birds and bats being affected.

"Is it a matter of are these scientifically based, or are these (complaints) that I just don't want turbines?" Hope said.

Bankruptcy Rocks Nuclear Industry
The New York Times
Thu Mar 30 2017
Page: 1
Section: Business/Financial

Westinghouse Electric Company, which helped drive the development of nuclear energy and the electric grid itself, filed for bankruptcy protection on Wednesday, casting a shadow over the global nuclear industry.

The filing comes as the company's corporate parent, Toshiba of Japan, scrambles to stanch huge losses stemming from Westinghouse's troubled nuclear construction projects in the American South. Now, the future of those projects, which once seemed to be on the leading edge of a renaissance for nuclear energy, is in doubt.

"This is a fairly big and consequential deal," said Richard Nephew, a senior research scholar at the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University. "You've had some power companies and big utilities run into financial trouble , but this kind of thing hasn't happened."

Westinghouse, a once-proud name that in years past symbolized America's supremacy in nuclear power, now illustrates its problems.

Many of the company's injuries are self-inflicted, such as a disastrous deal for a construction business that was intended to control costs and instead precipitated the events that led to the filing on Wednesday. Over all, Toshiba has been widely criticized for overpaying for Westinghouse.

But some of what went wrong was beyond either company's control. Slowing demand for electricity and tumbling prices for natural gas have eroded the economic rationale for nuclear power, which is extremely costly and technically challenging to develop. Alternative-energy sources like wind and solar power are rapidly maturing and coming down in price. The 2011 earthquake in Japan that led to the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant renewed worries about safety.

Westinghouse's problems are already reducing Japan's footprint in nuclear power, an industry it has nurtured for decades in the name of energy security. Even before the filing, Toshiba had essentially retired Westinghouse from the business of building nuclear power plants. Executives said they would instead focus on maintaining existing reactors — a more stable and reliably profitable business — and developing reactor designs.

That has made the already small club of companies that take on the giant, expensive and complex task of nuclear-reactor building even smaller. General Electric, a pioneer in the field, has scaled back its nuclear operations, expressing doubt about their economic viability. Areva, the French builder, is mired in losses and undergoing a large-scale restructuring.

Among the winners could be China, which has ambitions to turn its growing nuclear technical abilities into a major export. That has raised security concerns in some countries.

The shrinking field is a challenge for the future of nuclear power, and for Toshiba's revival plans. Its executives have said they would like to sell all or part of Westinghouse to a competitor, but with a dwindling list of potential buyers — combined with Westinghouse's history of financial calamity — that has become a difficult task.

Toshiba still faces tough questions. The company is also divesting its profitable semiconductor business and plans to sell a stake to an outside investor to raise capital. Most of the companies seen as possible buyers are from outside Japan. Some Japanese business leaders have expressed fears that the sale will further erode Japan's place in an industry it once dominated.

After writing down Westinghouse's value, Toshiba said it expected to book a net loss of $9.9 billion for its current fiscal year, which ends on Friday.

"We have all but completely pulled out of the nuclear business overseas," Toshiba's president, Satoshi Tsunakawa, said at a news conference. Of the huge loss, he added, "I feel great responsibility."

Bankruptcy will make it harder for Westinghouse's business partners to collect money they are owed by the nuclear-plant maker. That mostly affects the American power companies for whom it is building reactors, analysts say. Now, it is unclear whether the company will be able to complete any of its projects, which in the United States are about three years late and billions over budget.

The power companies — Scana Energy in South Carolina and a consortium in Georgia led by Georgia Power, a unit of Southern Company — would face the possibility of new contract terms, long lawsuits and absorbing losses that Toshiba and Westinghouse could not cover, analysts say. The cost estimates are already running $1 billion to $1.3 billion higher than originally expected, according to a recent report from Morgan Stanley, and could eventually exceed $8 billion over all.

Dennis Pidherny, a managing director at Fitch Ratings who is sector head of the United States public power group, said that it was possible that the company's bankruptcy filing could terminate the contracts and that it could be difficult for the utilities to find another builder to take them over.

"There's still quite a bit of work that needs to be completed," he said. "The biggest challenge there is quite simply finding another suitable contractor who can complete the contract and have it completed at a quote- unquote reasonable cost."

That is, if they are constructed at all. Stan Wise, chairman of the Georgia Public Service Commission, said the utilities developing the Alvin W. Vogtle generating station in the state would have to evaluate whether it made sense to continue.

“It’s a very serious issue for us and for the companies involved,” Mr. Wise said. “If, in fact, the company comes back to the commission asking for recertification, and at what cost, clearly the commission evaluates that versus natural gas or renewables.”

In a statement on Wednesday, Toshiba said Westinghouse and affiliated companies were “working cooperatively” with the owners to arrange for construction to continue. In recent days, the affected companies issued statements saying they were monitoring the situation and exploring their options, as did the Energy Department, which has authorized $8.3 billion in federal loan guarantees for the Georgia project.

“We are keenly interested in the bankruptcy proceedings and what they mean for taxpayers and the nation,” said Lindsey Geisler, a Department of Energy spokeswoman. “Our position with all parties has been consistent and clear : We expect the parties to honor their commitments and reach an agreement that protects taxpayers, promotes economic growth, and strengthens our energy and national security.”

Toshiba said Westinghouse had total debt of $9.8 billion. The Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing was made in federal bankruptcy court for the Southern District of New York.

A decade ago, Toshiba was dreaming of a big global expansion when it bought Westinghouse for a surprisingly high $5.4 billion and made plans to install 45 new reactors worldwide by 2030.

At the same time, Westinghouse was trying to install a novel reactor design, the AP1000. Using simplified structures and safety equipment, it was intended to be easier and less expensive to install, operate and maintain. Its design also improves the ability to withstand earthquakes and plane crashes and is less vulnerable to a cutoff of electricity, which is what set off the triple meltdown at Fukushima.

Nonetheless, it was inevitable that expansions at the Vogtle generating station in Georgia and the Virgil C. Summer plant in South Carolina would hit some bumps along the road to fruition, nuclear executives say. Not only was the design new, but, because nuclear construction had been dormant for so long, American companies also lacked the equipment and expertise needed to make some of the biggest components and construct the projects.

Indeed, that may ultimately have been at the root of the troubles. The contractor Westinghouse chose to complete the projects struggled to meet the strict demands of nuclear construction and was undergoing its own internal difficulties after a merger. As part of an effort to get the delays and escalating costs under control, Westinghouse acquired part of the construction company, which set off a series of still-unresolved disputes over who should absorb the cost overruns and how Westinghouse accounted for and reported values in the transaction.

In its bankruptcy filing, Westinghouse said that its top 30 unsecured creditors held over $508 million in claims. Among those creditors are big engineering and construction companies like Fluor and CB&I, and Nuclear Fuel Services, a fuel supplier.

To shepherd its case through Chapter 11, Westinghouse has hired a number of advisers, including the investment bank PJT Partners, the law firm Weil, Gotshal & Manges, and the consulting firm AlixPartners.

Westinghouse also said in its bankruptcy filing that it had taken out an $800 million loan from a group led by Citigroup to support itself through the bankruptcy process.

Wynne has no interest in hiking $100K 'Sunshine List' cut-off; 'Fewer people' on tally doesn't mean transparency on salaries, premier says

Toronto Star
Thu Mar 30 2017
Page: A3
Byline: Robert Benzie Toronto Star

There are no plans to eclipse the “Sunshine List” threshold of $100,000 for disclosing the salaries of provincial public sector workers, Premier Kathleen Wynne says.

The annual tally of civil servants earning six figures and above will be released Friday.

“Increase the amount, which would mean there are fewer people on the Sunshine List? I’m not sure that that accomplishes the transparency that the Sunshine List is intended to engender,” Wynne told reporters Wednesday.

“One hundred thousand dollars is still a lot of money and so we’re going to keep it at that level,” she said.

Each year, the list grows longer, in part, because of inflation.

The $100,000-threshold for disclosure was introduced in 1996. The sum is the equivalent of $147,219 today, according to the Bank of Canada’s inflation calculator.

At the same time, $100,000 today is the equivalent $67,925 in 1996.

Despite that, Wynne said Ontarians expect to be told what their taxpayer dollars are funding.

“People have the right to know where those salaries sit at, so we’ll leave at that,” she said.

Last year, there were a record 115,432 people on the Sunshine List.

At the time, the government noted the list would have been 83 per cent smaller if the threshold had changed with inflation.

The highest paid public servant in Ontario then was recently retired Ontario Power Generation CEO Tom Mitchell at more than $1.5 million. There is no federal Sunshine List, so Ontarians only know how much provincial and municipal public servants earn.

Successive Liberal and Conservative governments in Ottawa have refused to introduce the salary-disclosure measures that have been the norm at Queen’s Park for a generation.

Mayor pledges to protect trees from Hydro One

Windsor Star
Thu Mar 30 2017
Page: A4
Section: City & Region
Byline: Julie Kotsis

LaSalle Mayor Ken Antaya has vowed to do whatever it takes to protect a wooded area that cost the town $3 million to preserve.

“I don’t care if we have to chain somebody to a bulldozer, we’re going to do it because that area is too important to us,” Antaya said following a presentation to town council by a representative from Hydro One outlining plans for “emergency vegetation maintenance” along the area’s transmission corridor.

Jake Zink, a forestry supervisor with Hydro One, told councillors up to 65 trees need to be removed along the transmission line, which stretches two kilometres from Brunet Park off Normandy Road to Todd Lane.

Zink called it a “serious hazard” and said the work has to be done immediately, although he said the area is on a six-year maintenance cycle and work was last done in 2010.

“This work in April is strictly to target these danger trees that have to come out, they are a public safety concern,” Zink said.

In his report, Zink said some vegetation has reached heights that pose an “imminent risk to the overhead power lines,” and if left untreated, may cause a power outage. Additionally, the dense vegetation is “impeding access for crews to conduct on-going maintenance work or emergency repairs.”

Antaya said he’s skeptical and worried the utility plans to go ahead and clear cut the area and create a meadow in the wake, something he was told last summer by a representative of the utility.

“I’m still concerned that once they get there they’re going to say, ‘Oops, my saw slipped,’ and everything is gone,” he said.

”(They’re) saying this is an emergency measure. An emergency to me is something that occurs very suddenly. This is not sudden. This is something that’s been happening for years. All of a sudden now it’s becoming an emergency.”

Antaya asked Zink for a report clearly outlining what trees are to be cut down before the work starts and has instructed town staff to report any activity in the wood lot.

“We made a big commitment out there,” he said. “We spent over $3 million purchasing and to compile that property so that we could preserve it and … we don’t want it destroyed by any agency, including Hydro One.”

Antaya said he hopes Hydro One will look at ways that will “cause the least disturbance and maintain the integrity of that environmentally significant area.”

LaSalle mayor remains concerned about Hydro One clearcut plans
CBC News
2017-03-29

LaSalle's mayor is expressing concerns about plans to cut trees along a hydro corridor through the town.

Ken Antaya was told in a meeting last summer that Hydro One would clear cut a 45-metre wide swath of forest between Brunet Park and Todd Lane.

At a town council meeting last night, an official with the company said the maintenance would not be so drastic, and that only specific problem trees would have to be trimmed.

But Antaya remains concerned.

"There's not much we can do. We can't stop them from doing what is required for the maintenance of their lines," he said. "The only thing is that when they get in there, and they say, 'Oops! You know, my saw slipped and all of a sudden, you've clear cut everything."

Antaya says the town will do whatever it can to delay the cutting, and would even consider legal action.

NDP critical of Sudbury Liberal MPP Thibeault
Sudbury Star
Thu Mar 30 2017
Page: A3
Section: News

The provincial NDP have criticized Glenn Thibeault, Liberal MPP for Sudbury and minister of energy, for voting against their plan to cut hydro bills by 30 per cent, as well as his support for the privatization of Hydro One.

"Everyday families, businesses, municipalities and hospitals are hurting from the Wynne government's sky-high hydro bills," NDP leader Andrea Horwath said in a release. "But, once again, the Wynne Liberals are focused on Premier Wynne and the Liberal party - not what Ontario people need."

The vote was on an NDP motion, "Addressing the Root Causes of High Hydro Costs," that would have reduced hydro bills for businesses and families by up to 30 per cent. The plan includes eliminating mandatory time-of-use pricing, ending unfair rural delivery charges, and fixing problems in the system like oversupply and exporting power to other jurisdictions at a loss.

The motion would have adopted the NDP's hydro plan and includes reversing the privatization of Hydro One. That move would pay for itself, and bring in an additional $7 billion in revenue to reinvest in Ontario, the NDP said.

Kathleen Wynne's Liberal government has announced their own plan to reduce residential hydro bills, the Fair Hydro Plan, which proposes to give residential consumers an average of a 25 per cent cut on their energy bills - when factoring in the eight per cent reduction implemented Jan. 1 - by refinancing over a longer period a portion of the global adjustment charge.

The plan also includes additional reductions for low-income and rural consumers, as well as savings for many small businesses and farms.

“The cost of electricity has gone up over 300 per cent under the Liberal government, including 50 per cent just since Premier Wynne took office,” Horwath said. “Instead of taking a serious look at the NDP’s comprehensive and achievable plan, Wynne is musing about borrowing and sticking the next generation with as much as $40 billion in interest to buy some pre-election political relief for herself and her party. We’re all going to pay for that, one way or another.

“And she’s still planning to continue the disastrous selloff of Hydro one. She’s still planning to charge time-of-use premiums that punish parents for cooking dinner at dinner time and seniors for staying home during the day. Not only does her approach fail to address the mess the Liberal and Conservative governments made of our hydro system - it drives us further in the wrong direction - including by selling off even more of Hydro One.”

Interview with Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault

Program: CP24 Live at Noon: 2017-Mar-29

Reporter: Stephen Ledrew Length

Interview: Glenn Thibeault, Energy Minister

Note: Everyone is talking about electrical prices and the bills and they aren't talking about the prices other countries pay but what they are paying when they open up their bills. The Liberals heard that and brought in a plan to reduce it by 25% but that is being paid for by the future. Stephen Ledrew asks Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault why they don't just straighten out the hydro system. The minister says part of the plan involves making structural changes. He defends the $4.6 million salary of Hydro One's CEO saying the executive cut expenses. Ledrew also asks if the province will get back to more water-generated electricity and the minister refers to OPG building Peter Sutherland up north. He says the investment in nuclear energy is paying off as it is low cost and has reduced smog. Also: advertising the Fair Hydro plan.

When it comes to hydro, only some polls really matter to Wynne

Ottawa Citizen
Thu Mar 30 2017
Page: A11
Section: Editorial
Byline: Brian Platt

Hey, remember the Hydro One sale? It's kind of fallen off the radar these days with all the hubbub over electricity rates, but this was the incredibly controversial decision by Premier Kathleen Wynne to effectively privatize the province's transmission utility, gradually selling 60 per cent of it.

(For those of you keeping score at home of controversial Ontario Liberal electricity decisions, this one comes after the Green Energy Act, and after the gas plants cancellation, but before the refinancing of the global adjustment.)

We always knew the government's handling of the electricity file has been unpopular, but The Canadian Press has gotten its hands on years of internal government polling, and it shows just how bad the damage has been.

As far back as December 2013, 70 per cent of Ontarians said the government was on the wrong track with electricity prices.

On Hydro One it was even worse: a 2014 poll found just 25 per cent of the public supported selling it. These numbers have barely moved since then.

It raises some interesting questions about how Wynne's government makes decisions in the face of bad poll numbers. In particular: Why was the government willing to go forward with its Hydro One sell-off, but capitulated completely on electricity prices? It's worth remembering why Hydro One was put on the auction block. The government wanted money to build infrastructure, but borrowing all of it was out of the question given the province's massive debt load. To get the cash, it essentially chose selling Hydro One shares over raising taxes (or a pseudo-tax, such as highway tolls). That's part of it right there: Privatizing Hydro One was likely an easier sell than a tax raise.

But I think there's a bigger factor at play as well.

If any party was going to benefit from the Hydro One privatization, it should have been the NDP.

The Progressive Conservatives have gamely pretended they passionately oppose the Hydro One sale, but any voter motivated about protecting Crown assets would be bonkers to shift their vote to the PCs, who tried to sell off Hydro One the last time they formed government.

But the NDP have gotten zero traction from this. Their vote share hasn't moved in five byelections, and polls consistently show them in third place or barely in second.

When someone is asked if they support selling Hydro One, they're likely to say no. But do they really care enough to change their vote? If you picked 100 people in a shopping mall in Ottawa or Toronto, how many could tell you what Hydro One even does? When Wynne decided to sell a chunk of Hydro One - which remains the single boldest decision she's made since the election - she gambled that it wouldn't be a ballot box issue for voters. And I think she was right.

She holds it up now as an example of courage in leadership. During Tuesday's question period, PC Leader Patrick Brown demanded to know why she ignored the internal polls on Hydro One.

"If the leader of the Opposition is saying to me, 'Premier, why don't you just govern according to the polls?,' I think that gives us an insight into the political methodology that he ascribes to," Wynne responded, which is a pretty good burn.

But let's not get carried away with Wynne's bravery. On electricity prices, she didn't just provide relief to the rural residents who really needed it - she brought in hugely expensive, across-the-board rate cuts that we'll still be paying off decades down the road.

The key difference, of course, is that people were ready to change their votes on this issue.

After losing the Scarborough byelection last summer, Wynne explicitly blamed hydro rates; we see now that the internal polling data was making that clear.

She may not govern according to every poll, but when a poll matters to her election chances, the government suddenly moves with astonishing determination.

Leeds-Grenville MPP slams premier for hydro policy, impact on business
St. Lawrence News
Thu Mar 30 2017
Page: A9
Section: News

Ontario businesses like Swan's Variety in Athens are still paying the price for what Leeds-Grenville MPP Steve Clark says has been the failed leadership of Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne.

Clark asked the premier in question period last Tuesday why she waited so long to act on the hydro crisis that contributed to the closure of Swan's Variety last week. Owner Karen Swan had reportedly cited soaring hydro bills - including the most recent $7,000 charge - as a major reason the 47-year-old family store was forced to close, a release from Clark's office indicated.

"The premier diminishes the hydro crisis and energy poverty she created by calling it a 'mistake.'Speaker, what does the premier have to say to Karen Swan, who just paid for this 'mistake'with her family business?" the Progressive Conservative MPP asked.

Clark said the premier has for years ignored warnings from him and other PC MPPs that unaffordable hydro rates were destroying our communities.

"Now, when her political future is at stake, she suddenly claims to care," said Clark. "They shamelessly spend taxpayer dollars on ads designed to portray themselves as heroes in a disaster they created."

The Leeds-Grenville MPP called it unacceptable for the Liberal government to do a victory lap over a plan that does nothing to address the root causes responsible for soaring hydro rates.

"There's no commitment to tear up the Green Energy Act or dismantle the bloated energy bureaucracy. It just puts the cost on the backs of our children and grandchildren in a desperate attempt to save the premier's political future," said Clark.

No one trusts the Wynne government that created the problem to actually fix it, according to the MPP's release.

"Ontarians will never forget this premier did nothing as hydro rates soared, businesses closed and families were forced from their homes," he stated.

PCs take stand against hydro ads; Critics say advertisements are premature and appear promotional for Liberals

The Toronto Star
2017-03-30
Byline: Rob Ferguson Toronto Star Section: News Page: A9

The Progressive Conservatives are stepping up the fight against the Wynne government's radio ads about a promised 25-per-cent cut to skyrocketing hydro rates this summer.

Deputy PC Leader Sylvia Jones has introduced a private members' bill that would restore auditor general

Bonnie Lysyk’s power to veto government ads if they are judged to be partisan.

Premier Kathleen Wynne’s Liberal administration “gutted” that veto power in 2015, turning the auditor into “little more than a rubber stamp,” Jones told a news conference Wednesday.

“If the Liberal party wants to spend money promoting their policies, have at it,” she said. “But this is taxpayers’ money that should be going to important issues.”

Energy Minister Glen Thibeault has said less than $1 million has been spent on the radio and social media ad campaign so far, but more ads are planned.

Jones said the money would be better spent warning people about the deadly opioid and fentanyl crisis that is resulting in overdoses among drug users or telling Ontarians how to recognize signs young women have been victimized by human traffickers.

Former premier Dalton McGuinty brought in the Government Advertising Act in 2004 to make sure partisan ads that had appeared during the preceding Progressive Conservative administration could not be repeated.

But by 2015, some Liberals were saying privately that the law and auditor’s veto was too strict and tied the government’s hands.

Changes were brought in defining an ad as partisan if it contains the name, voice or image of a member of cabinet or an MPP - unless the primary audience for the ad is outside Ontario. Ads also cannot contain the name or logo of a recognized political party or “to a significant degree, a colour associated with the governing party, unless the item commonly appears in that colour.”

Wynne defended the ads during an appearance at a west-end high school Wednesday morning, saying they are important to “make sure that people know” about the pending hydro rate cut.

The hydro ads also point citizens to a government website where they can learn about other programs to help low-income people with more assistance on their hydro bills.

Ontario is “the only government in the country that has legislation in place to prevent partisan advertising,” Wynne added.

New Democrats have joined Conservatives in criticizing the ads, saying they are **improper** for two reasons - because the government has not yet introduced legislation on the hydro rate cut, and because they are promotional with an election looming in June 2018.

It’s not **“get your flu shot”** or **“be a donor”** of your organs at death, said Jones, who noted the government ads have been running in conjunction with flyers the Liberals have handed out boasting of the rate cuts.

While the private members’ bill by Jones is unlikely to pass, she reiterated a promise party leader Patrick Brown made last week that a PC government would restore the auditor general’s veto powers if elected next year. New Democrat Leader Andrea Horwath has pledged to do the same.

Opposition Parties Critical of Taxpayer Funded Government Hydro Ads

Source: CKCO

Mar 29, 2017 6:25 PM

Anchor: At Queen's Park, it continues to be enraged by the taxpayer funded ads being run by the Wynne government about hydro rate cuts. The P.C’s and the NDP are demanding that the premier restore the Auditor-General's office with the power to veto ads that are deemed self-serving. Paul Bliss reports.

Reporter: When hydro rates went up 10 times in five years, the Wynne government didn't advertise the increases. But when they cut prices 17 per cent and 8 per cent in one year they put it all over the radio and social media and they're using taxpayers' money to do it.

Unidentified: Speaker, no one believes or trusts that Minister. Back to the Premier.

Reporter: A general sense of contempt towards government in the house these days. The Tories fume over the Wynne government's declawing of the Auditor General who used to have the power to reject self-serving government advertising. The Auditor says the hydro ads are bias and she would not have approved them.

Patrick Brown, Ontario PC Leader: The Premier has forced the auditor general to essentially become a rubber-stamp to allow clearly partisan government advertising to be approved.

Reporter: The ad campaign about the hydro bill cuts is costing roughly a million dollars. This morning we pushed the Premier on whether she'd pull those ads and restore the auditor's power over partisan advertising.

Reporter: You watered it down.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: That did not happen. We introduced new legislation that prevents partisan advertising and the legislation that is in place still prevents partisan advertising. It's the only legislation in the country that does that.

Reporter: The Premier is standing firm. She insists her new advertising standards are solid because it prevents the government from showing the face of the Premier or any of her ministers. Not much of a sacrifice given recent polls show the Premier has the support of only 12 per cent of Ontario voters.

Premier Rejects Opposition’s Calls to Pull Hydro Ads Promoting Hydro Bills

Source: CKVR

Mar 29, 2017 6:13 PM

Anchor: Premier Wynne is refusing to budge. She is rejecting the opposition's call to pull ads promoting her plan to cut hydro bills. CTV's Paul Bliss has the latest.

Reporter: When hydro rates went up 10 times in five years, the Wynne government didn't advertise the increases. But when they cut prices 17 per cent and 8 per cent in one year they put it all over the radio and social media and they're using taxpayers' money to do it.

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Opposition Calls For Changes To Stop Self-Serving Government Ads

Source: CFPL

Mar 29, 2017 6:14 PM

Anchor: Well, the opposition at Queen's Park is calling for changes to stop what it calls self-serving ads produced by the Liberal government. In particular, the conservatives are angry over the government ads about the 25% hydro cut the Liberals are bringing to consumers. The PCs are calling on the premier to restore the Auditor's powers to reject government advertising if it is deemed to be partisan. Kathleen Wynne rejects that.

Patrick Brown, Ontario PC Leader: The Premier has forced the auditor general to essentially become a rubber-stamp to allow clearly partisan government advertising to be approved.

Reporter: You watered it down.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: That did not happen. We introduced new legislation that prevents partisan advertising and the legislation that is in place still prevents partisan advertising. It's the only legislation in the country that does that. And we are going to stand behind it.

Wynne Liberals need to stop the hydro ads and raise awareness for fentanyl: PC Leader Patrick Brown
Manitoulin Expositor
2017-03-29

QUEEN'S PARK – The Wynne Liberal Government has spent nearly a million dollars on self-congratulatory ads touting a non-existent hydro scheme, while ignoring a growing opioid crisis that's spreading across Ontario. Today during Question Period, Ontario PC Leader Patrick Brown asked the Premier to stop the hydro ads and direct the money into a public awareness campaign on the dangers of fentanyl and opioids.

"A lethal dose of pure fentanyl is as little as 2 milligrams, the weight of 32 grains of table salt or even seven poppy seeds. Preventable deaths are tragically happening across this province," said Brown. "There is a limited advertising budget that the government has. Right now it's being spent, according to the Auditor General, on self-congratulatory ads – partisan Liberal hydro ads."

Brown pointed out that the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, the Ontario Provincial Police, and Ottawa Public Health have all launched some form of an awareness campaign while we've heard "crickets from this government."

"Will you stop the hydro ads and put every cent into this fentanyl crisis? It's the right thing to do," asked Brown.

The Opposition Is Calling On The Premier To Restore The Auditor General's Power
Source: CFTO
Mar 29, 2017 6:16 PM

Anchor: The Premier is refusing to budge. She is reject opposition calls for her to pull taxpayers-funded advertising that promotes her cut to hydro bills. CTV's Paul Bliss is standing by at Queen's Park. Paul, you pushed the matter with the Premier this morning and she is not budging.

Reporter: No, Ken, that's because she needs the good news to settle into the minds of voters. They need to pound the hydro bill cut into our collective consciousness to make sure it's not a problematic issue when the election comes in about 14 months. When hydro rates went up 10 times in five years, the Wynne government didn't advertise the increases. But when they cut prices 17 per cent and 8 per cent in one year they put it all over the radio and social media and they're using taxpayers' money to do it.

Unidentified: Speaker, no one believes or trusts that Minister. Back to the Premier.

Reporter: A general sense of contempt towards government in the house these days. The Tories fume over the Wynne government's declawing of the Auditor General who used to have the power to reject self-serving government advertising. The Auditor says the hydro ads are bias and she would not have approved them.

Patrick Brown, Ontario PC Leader: The Premier has forced the auditor general to essentially become a rubber-stamp to allow clearly partisan government advertising to be approved.

Reporter: The ad campaign about the hydro bill cuts is costing roughly a million dollars. This morning we pushed the Premier on whether she'd pull those ads and restore the auditor's power over partisan advertising.

Reporter: You watered it down.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: That did not happen. We introduced new legislation that prevents partisan advertising and the legislation that is in place still prevents partisan advertising. It's the only legislation in the country that does that.

Reporter: The Premier is standing firm. She insists her new advertising standards are solid because it prevents the government from showing the face of the Premier or any of her ministers. Not much of a sacrifice given recent polls show the Premier has the support of only 12 per cent of Ontario voters.

Reporter: Today a Tory MPP tabled a motion that would force the Liberals to restore the power to the Auditor General allowing her the power to veto partisan government advertising, but don't expect the Liberals to approve that one with their big majority here at Queen’s Park. Reporting live, I’m Paul Bliss. Ken, we'll send it back to you.

Anchor: Thank you, Paul.

Nicholls and PCs offer no solution to hydro woes
The Chatham Daily News
2017-03-29
Byline: Dan Gelinas, Special to The Daily News

This week, MPP Rick Nicholls sent out his leaflet to Chatham Kent Leamington households talking about issues we all face. As I read his bullet points, I focused on his third: “Ensure energy rates are affordable for families and businesses”.

This hit home. Under the Liberals there has been an obscene 140 per cent increase over the past eight years. The Liberals have offered to lower monthly bills by 25 per cent, but we would have to pass on the cost of Liberal scandals to our children and grandchildren for the next 40 years. This is an attempt to look good for the next election and shows voters how gullible they think we are.

The NDP, under Andrea Horwath, were the first political party to come out with a plan to reduce hydro costs by up to 30 per cent, with realistic ideas like buying back the 30 per cent Hydro 1 sell-off. Their plan does not mortgage our children’s future but gives young families and businesses the hope they will have a greater chance to enjoy growth and success.

What surprises me most about the Conservative approach to increasing hydro rates is they have no plan! Under Patrick Brown’s leadership there is no policy on how to help reduce hydro costs.

Brown is no stranger to politics, having been involved for 17 years both federally and provincially. He was part of the Harper Conservative government in Ottawa for nine years and has been leader of the Ontario Conservatives since 2015.

During his leadership campaign Brown made few policy statements to describe where he stood. It’s no surprise. His record in Parliament shows he had one of the worst voting attendance records in the Conservative caucus. Brown has a history of shying away from involvement in issues that concern the voters of Ontario and Canada. He has not and will not take a stand on our problems with Hydro 1.

Nicholls and the rest of the Ontario Conservatives can write in their leaflets about how they are working to “ensure hydro rates are affordable” but they don’t have a leader willing to stand up and be heard and offer a solution. How can we support Brown and his candidates in the next provincial election?

Brown calls himself a “pragmatic Conservative” but he stood up to not supporting unions and in 2006 voted to repeal same-sex marriage. He also voted against several bills aimed at amending the Canadian Human Rights Act to include gender expression and identity. He is interested in following the lead of the alt-right in Canada, taking away rights we have fought for and won over the past 30 years.

Andrea Horwath is demanding this government do the right thing and stop the continuing sale of Hydro 1, stop the $4-million salaries and other financial increases to the CEO, and bring back public ownership.

It’s time to stop the problems and be part of the solutions, it’s time for change.

MPP defends government actions on hydro bills
Oshawa This Week
Wed Mar 29 2017
Section: Opinion/Columns
Byline: Brad Duguid

MPP Jennifer French wrote an op-ed last week that overlooked some important facts about our government’s plan to cut hydro rates by 25 per cent on average for all households. What MPP French and I agree on is that immediate hydro rate relief is needed for families and businesses across the Durham Region. Hydro is a necessity. We have heard from people struggling to deal with bills that have gone up too much and too quickly. Household budgets are stretched and something needed to be done.

This is why Premier Kathleen Wynne announced a plan on March 2 that will lower residential hydro bills by an average of 25 per cent starting this summer. And bills will stay down, with any increases kept at the rate of inflation for at least four years. It is the largest residential hydro rate cut in the province’s history.

The NDP say they have a plan, but their plan has been widely panned since its release, offering nothing practical or substantial when it comes to reducing electricity costs for Ontario families and businesses.Their plan relies on asking the federal government for help, and future expert panels. We know that Durham residents need hydro relief now.

This is why, starting this summer, every household that pays for electricity in the Durham Region will see this rate cut with no asterisks, loop holes or exceptions. Unlike the NDP’s proposal, this plan will actually reduce hydro bills.

MPP French and the Ontario NDP also continue to ignore the reality that previous governments of all stripes neglected to invest in Ontario‘s electricity system. The grid was old and fragile, and dirty coal plants caused smog alerts and system brownouts. Perhaps the NDP and PCs have forgotten the 2003 summer blackout that swept the province? Our government has not.

The Liberal government made rebuilding our aging and neglected infrastructure a priority. We closed all of Ontario‘s coal plants, built new transmission lines and invested in renewable energy. We now have a clean, reliable system that is going to benefit us for decades. But these major investments came at a cost.

A cost that a single generation of Ontario ratepayers is carrying on its shoulders. That's not entirely fair, since these investments will benefit Ontarians for decades to come. And so, like the mortgage on your house, we're refinancing it and setting a new term that stretches over a longer period - which reflects the use of the infrastructure more fairly.

We can afford to bring bills down because of Ontario's strong economy, which led Canada and the G7 in growth last year. We've created over 700,000 net new jobs since the recession and our unemployment rate is at an eight-year low. After a decade of deficits, the provincial budget will be balanced this year.

Together, we have ensured cleaner air and a reliable energy system for our children. And now we can offer meaningful cuts to hydro bills that will help make life more affordable for years to come.

Group seeks changes to Hydro-Québec's Northern Pass project in the Eastern Townships
Montreal Gazette
Wed Mar 29 2017
Section: Local News

The most important conservation area on Quebec private land will be devastated by a Hydro-Québec transmission line project to New Hampshire, argues SOS Mont Hereford, a group that's calling on the government to rethink the project.

SOS Mont Hereford, was launched on Wednesday in Montreal by Nature Québec, the Estrie Regional Environmental Council, the Appalachian Corridor and the Protected Natural Environments Network. The group is concerned with the current route chosen by Hydro-Québec for its Northern Pass project, which crosses Mont Hereford and is located near the villages of East Hereford and St-Herménégilde, in the Eastern Townships.

SOS Mont Hereford has received support from Quebec singer-songwriter Richard Séguin, who resides in the region, and who is not opposed to the export project by itself. Séguin would like the transmission line to take a slightly different route and have a 15-kilometre section buried. According to Nature Québec CEO Christian Simard, this measure would cost about $60 million on a project valued at $2.7 billion, "which should not hamper the profitability of the project."

However, Hydro-Québec points out that the $2.7 billion figure is for the entire project on both sides of the border. “The $60 million actually represents an extra cost of 56 per cent for the proposed line,” says Lynn St-Laurent, spokesperson for the utility.

The Public Environmental Hearing Office (BAPE) recently published a report stating that Hydro-Québec “should re-evaluate in more detail the possibility of burying the line in the southern portion before a possible authorization of the project by the Quebec government,” adding that “burying the line would avoid the territory of the Hereford Community Forest.”

SOS Mont Hereford believes the fragmentation of the mountain could contribute to the decline of its biodiversity and make it more vulnerable to invasive species.

“The American partner of Hydro-Québec is burying the same line, over 100 km in New Hampshire. So we are asking for the same treatment for Quebec and respect for a protected area,” Simard said.

“Why are Americans acting properly and not Quebecers?”

Through its spokesperson, Hydro-Québec says that different aspects are still on the table with the “partners directly involved in the project.”

“Hydro-Québec has always wished and remains open to exchanges with the stakeholders involved in this project. In fact, as suggested by BAPE, discussions are ongoing with our two partners (Hereford Forest and the Nature Conservancy of Canada),” says St-Laurent, who points out that the territory in question is not a protected area recognized by the government, but an area with a conservation easement.

St-Laurent added that the first studies on the project carried out in 2010 indicated it was preferable to favour a route passing from the western side of the mountain for considerations of integration with the landscape and for the development of recreational tourism activities on the east side, a finding confirmed when project studies resumed in 2015.

The spokesperson indicated that Hydro-Québec had properly assessed the possibility of burying the line as recommended by the BAPE and that discussions were continuing on this subject.

Hereford Mountain is part of the White Mountains of the Appalachians. It is located within an area of over 5,300 hectares bequeathed to the local community for conservation purposes by businessman Neil Tillotson and his wife, Louise.

Town to hold meeting on nuclear waste facility upriver
Arnprior Chronicle-Guide
Thu Mar 30 2017
Page: A2
Section: News
Byline: Derek Dunn

Mounting opposition to a proposed radioactive waste site has Arnprior council calling for a public meeting.

Groups such as the Council of Canadians, Ottawa Riverkeeper, Concerned Citizens of Renfrew County and Area, and Old Fort William Cottagers'Association are concerned that a nuclear waste disposal facility near Chalk River would pose hazardous to a water source for more than one million downriver.

The project, called the Near Surface Disposal Facility, by Canadian Nuclear Laboratories (CNL), would store mostly low-level waste (primarily demolition waste) accumulated from the decommissioning of more than 100 buildings at Chalk River Laboratories. A small amount of mixed waste from sources across Canada -including other nuclear sites and hospitals and universities - will be included at the 30-hectare location. Up to one million cubic metres of radioactive waste could be stored, but only 360,000 are expected. It currently houses 267,000.

Ottawa Riverkeeper's Meredith Brown has numerous questions regarding the plan.

"If there is contamination of our waters, what are the implications for the aquatic ecosystem and for the million Canadians who swim, drink, fish the Ottawa River?" she said in a news release. "I am painfully aware of the need to find responsible ways to safely deal with the radioactive wastes that have been accumulating at the site over the last 90 years."

Located about one kilometre from the river, and almost completely surrounded by water, the waste site would have a mound up to 25 metres high. It is atop a major fault line and fractured and porous bedrock where groundwater flows rapidly into the river.

Concerns about CNL, a consortium of multinational corporations, has also arisen. In 10 years time when its contract expires, after some revenue is generated for the federal government, the group could walk away. Its long-term interest in the land and surrounding neighbours is in doubt.

The ability to influence decision-makers is also tenuous, according to the Council of Canadians. They point out that Harper-era changes to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act mean the project is not subject to cabinet approval. It is strictly in the domain of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC).

However, CNSC is a government agency led by Dr. Michael Binder, a long-time federal bureaucrat.

Arnprior Mayor David Reid has followed the reports by various groups. While admitting he is no expert, he does put his faith in the regulation bodies that oversee the best interests of all Canadians.

"I'm sure the right agencies are working on it," Reid said. "I believe they'll do the right thing."

Reeve Walter Stack, who sits on county council and has followed the issue more closely, said a lot of residents around town and elsewhere are interested in knowing more.

He asked staff to organize a public meeting in a room larger than council chambers, and invite CNL to make a presentation.

The meeting would need to take place fairly soon. On March 17 the project's environmental assessment was completed. Residents have until May 17 to comment on it. After that, the facility could be up and working by the fall of 2018.

New Empress-Dawn Service Application To Be Filed April 26, Says TransCanada
Daily Oil Bulletin
Wed Mar 29 2017

TransCanada PipeLines Limited says it plans to file an application with the National Energy Board (NEB) April 26, 2017 seeking approval for new long term fixed price (LTFP) service on the TransCanada Mainline to Dawn, Ontario from Empress Alberta.

The application to be filed under the board's streamlined regulatory process also will include the tolling methodology for the service, the Dawn LTFP pro forma contract and toll schedule and consequential amendments to the Canadian Mainline gas transportation tariff.

TransCanada negotiated the Dawn long term fixed price service with western Canadian natural gas producers and subsequently offered it to all prospective shippers through an open season that closed March 9, 2017.

In total, 27 new long-haul contracts were executed for a total of 1.5 petajoules per day, said the company. For 90 per cent of the contract quantities, Nov. 1, 2017 was specified as the service commencement date, said TransCanada.

The Dawn service, it said, attracts incremental long term contracts and associated revenues from western Canadian producers seeking to transport gas using existing infrastructure to the Dawn market hub where customers in Eastern Canada and the Northeast United States are increasingly acquiring their gas supply.

Keep high-tech talent here; Vector Institute

The Toronto Star Section: Editorial Page: A14
2017-03-30

In Woody Allen's 1973 comedy, Sleeper, the hero is cryogenically frozen and brought back 200 years in the future - where he's promptly spirited away in a self-driving car.

That futuristic vehicle, which seemed the stuff of fantasy when the movie came out, is now on the verge of becoming reality at companies such as General Motors, Google and Tesla, thanks to leaps in the field of artificial intelligence, or AI.

Indeed, rather than killing jobs (as dystopian science fiction predicted) AI is proving to be the key to opening up whole new frontiers and sources of employment.

Just last year, for example, GM announced 700 new high-tech engineering jobs in Ontario, dedicated largely to researching software and driverless cars.

That's just one example of why it's so important that Canada not just train high-tech talent, but retain it. Innovation, economic growth and future competitiveness depend on it.

So it's good to see the federal and Ontario governments - as well as companies like Google, Air Canada, Loblaws and the Big Five banks - investing $150 million in a new institute devoted to artificial intelligence.

The Vector Institute, affiliated with the University of Toronto, will research new frontiers in AI and figure out how it can be used to make companies more competitive. Most importantly, it is designed to retain, repatriate and attract AI talent to "feed" that expertise into existing Canadian companies and startups.

Happily, on that last front, Vector is already attracting interest from researchers in the United States. In fact, Geoffrey Hinton, a former U of T professor, is one. He will divide his time between Google's offices in Toronto and his position as Vector's chief scientific adviser and says he's already fielding inquiries from others interested in moving back.

There are great opportunities in this approach. Ed Clark, chair of the Vector Institute board, says, "We want those firms to grow to be a great worldwide supplier of AI capability, so that we turn this into a service export to the world, and not have a situation where all Canada does is produce PhDs and send them south." He adds: "We want Toronto, Ontario , to be one of the core intellectual centres of artificial intelligence research in the world."

In fact, Canadian universities are already major incubators of the high-tech talent that will create the next innovations. But keeping this talen here is a challenge. University of Waterloo engineering and math graduates, for example, are heavily recruited for jobs in Silicon Valley.

Part of the attraction is higher wages and better benefits, something Canadian companies may find hard to match. But part of it is job opportunities. Vector can be a step toward providing that.

That will be a key to future prosperity. Says Yoshua Bengio, who heads the Montreal Institute for Learning Algorithms: “AI is going to bring a lot of wealth, but if it’s made elsewhere we aren’t going to get a reasonable share of that wealth, even if we contributed to the original science.”

Right now the administration of Donald Trump has handed Canada an advantage in retaining and attracting AI engineers, mathematicians and scientists. For one thing, he is slashing budgets for scientific research, which is apparently driving some scientists to look here for opportunities.

At the same time, his immigration policies have already benefited Vector. Two researchers on Hinton’s new Toronto-based team are Iranian, one of the countries targeted in Trump’s immigration ban.

Finally, Trump isn’t focused on high-tech innovation but on “making America great again” by bringing back rust belt jobs. Indeed, his big job announcement this week was about ending the “war on coal” and bringing back miners’ jobs. No mention of creating new jobs in areas like green energy.

Far better to be looking ahead and betting on areas of future growth, including AI. Creation of the Vector Institute is a promising step in that direction.