Ministry of Energy Top Issues - March 6, 2017

From: "Halford, Gavin (ENERGY)" <gavin.halford@ontario.ca>
To: "@ENERGY All" <energy-all2@msgov.gov.on.ca>
Date: Mon, 06 Mar 2017 07:09:29 -0500

Good morning,

Here's what's making news:

- Trans Canada may dodge U.S. steel edict; Keystone XL pipeline's outlook looks 'very positive' amid report on exemption- London Free Press
- Alberta repeats Ontario's blunders- Ottawa Sun
- Toronto mayor refutes report Hydro One in talks to buy Toronto Hydro; Mayor John Tory denies the two companies have been in discussions about the deal for the past few months- The Globe
- John Tory denies report Hydro One is in talks to buy Toronto Hydro- The Star
- Cap and trade's crash and burn- Toronto Sun
- C-K officials welcome pipeline announcement; Project expected to foster economic development- Chatham Daily News
- North Bay Mayor Looks for Confirmation of Job Loss Rumours at OPG- CTV
- Fedeli seeks OPG answers; 'OPG's failure to respond to the municipality has rightfully caused great concern in North Bay'- North Bay Nugget
- OPG, minister silent City's; Senior official in town Monday to speak with employees- North Bay Nugget
- Thunder Bay MPP Comments on Ontario's Hydro Bill Reduction Move – CKPR
- Mauro lauds electricity rate cuts- TB Watch News
- Ontario golf course owner was used to $5,000 hydro bills, but then one for almost $8,000 landed- National Post
- Duguid in Durham to push hydro rate reduction- Ajax News Advertiser
- NDP opens Sault campaign office; rural mayors fear losing their rinks to high hydro costs- Soo Today
- Other provinces lead way on fairer hydro- Toronto Star
- Horwath touts energy plan- Sault Star
- Pettapiece: 'A desperate shell game.' MPP pans Liberals' hydro move-Mount Forest Confederate
- Hatfield Calls Out Wynne Government Over Hydro Cut- Blackburn News
- Bruce Grey MPP Says Taxpayers On The Hook For Hydro Mess- Blackburn News
- Politicians sound off in northern Ontario about Liberal hydro plan- CBC
- Wynne's $35B hydro boondoggle- North Bay News
- Biggest hydro cuts in history of province, says Cambridge MPP Kathryn McGarry- Cambridge Times
- Shedding light on hydro woes; A welcome mea culpa, Feb. 27 Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault admits Ontario messed up on hydro rates with bad decisions, Feb. 24 Politicians can't make electricity cheap again, Feb. 23- The Star
- Sudbury MPP sells hydro plan; 'It's never too late to do the right thing'- Sudbury Star
- Minister on the defensive; Thibeault says Northerners have been 'bearing the brunt'of high energy costs* Timmins Daily Press
- Electricity system was in 'tatters'; 'We had to invest in generation, transmission and distribution,' minister says- North Bay Nugget
- Northern Ontarians Are Relieved With The Recent Hydro Cuts- CTV
- Political bailout with public money- National Post

- Hydro reactions mixed; UWBG head says provincial moves will help; MPP says they will cost more in end- Owen Sound Times
- Province's Hydro bill relief is a step in the right direction, City says- Kawartha Lake Times
- If premier leaves, who takes her place?; Liberals consider alternatives if hydro cut can't save leader- Toronto Star
- Campaign pans price of energy; Canadian Taxpayers Federation uses signs, billboards to get its message across to public- Kingston Whig-Standard
- Tory dismisses report that Hydro One in discussions to buy Toronto Hydro for $3B- CBC
- Upgrades at Catholic schools will help meet province's climate change requirements- CTC News
- Bruce-Grey-Huron Reps Attend Bruce Power Developer Information Session- Blackburn News
- The myths and realities of carbon pricing in Canada and beyond- The Globe
- Prince may get piped in; Natural gas project must now get OEB nod- The Sault Star
- Ontario Liberals are quietly protesting- Waterloo Region
- Local planning key: Study; Research suggests ensuring residents benefit is important to a wind-farm buy-in- The Observer
- PCs ask watchdog for full costing of hydro plan- Inside Toronto
- Milton residents will likely see a $30 monthly reduction in electricity bill- Milton Canadian Champion
- PC Hydro plan coming soon; Liberal plan 'doesn't go far enough' : Brown- North Bay Nugget

***For more top issues, please see eClips:* http://206.75.155.171/eClipsMin/eClips.asp?M=ENE**

Trans Canada may dodge U.S. steel edict; Keystone XL pipeline's outlook looks 'very positive' amid report on exemption

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London Free Press
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: N7
Section: Financial Post
Byline: Geoffrey Morgan
Source: Financial Post
TransCanada Corp.'s Keystone XL project will reportedly be exempt from U.S. President Donald Trump's requirement that pipelines in the U.S. be built with American steel.

News website Politico reported Friday that TransCanada will not be subject to Trump's recent executive order requiring pipeline operators to build projects such as Keystone XL with American steel "to the maximum extent possible." TransCanada spokesperson Matthew John would not confirm whether Keystone XL had been exempt from the executive order but said, "we continue to be encouraged as our Presidential Permit application makes its way through the approval process." The company had already purchased 50 per cent of the steel from an Arkansas mill.

The Washington-based political news site cited an unnamed White House spokeswoman who said that Keystone XL "is currently in the process of being constructed, so it does not count as a new, retrofitted or expanded pipeline" and would therefore not be subject to the recent executive order.

The pipeline's approval process has reportedly progressed to the point at which Canada's ambassador to Washington said he expects a smooth ride for the Alberta-to-Nebraska pipeline.

"I don't see any big hurdles in the way of Keystone from the administration's point of view," David MacNaughton, Canada's ambassador to the U.S., told Bloomberg News.

While the state of Nebraska may still have some issues, the outlook for the pipeline's approval looks "very positive," MacNaughton said.

The buy-American provision had been considered a major obstacle and Keystone's exemption would be a remarkable about-face for Trump, who in multiple speeches stressed that the Keystone XL developer must use American-made steel for the project.

In his speech to Congress this week, Trump said, "We have cleared the way for the construction of the Keystone and Dakota Access pipelines … and I've issued a new directive that new American pipelines be made with American steel." Trump also reportedly told U.S. Steel Corp. CEO Mario Longhi in February that TransCanada would need to buy "steel made in this country and pipelines made in this country," according to Politico.

In Ottawa, the Prime Minister's Office welcomed the Politico report. But the statement from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's spokesman stopped short of confirming that the project has been granted the exemption.

TransCanada's John pointed out that TransCanada had announced in 2012 that it bought half of the pipe necessary for the line back from Little Rock, Ark.-based Welspun Pipes Inc. A 2012 release from TransCanada shows the company purchased 50 per cent of the needed steel from Little Rock, Ark.-based Wel-spun Pipes Inc., while another 24 per cent of the pipe was made at the Chicago-based Evraz North America plc's plant in Regina.

The remaining 26 per cent of the pipe for Keystone XL was manufactured by Gruppo ILVA, an Italian steel producer, and from Welspun's Indian operations.

An industry veteran who asked not to be named said most of the iron used to make steel at Evraz's Regina is bought from the U.S. Midwest. Steel is made from a combination of iron and metallurgical coal.

At Trump's invitation, TransCanada recently re-applied for a presidential permit for Keystone XL, necessary since the line crosses the U.S. border, after former president Barack Obama rejected the line on environmental grounds and said it wouldn't provide enough benefit to the U.S. economy.

"This project will support U.S. energy security, create thousands of well-paying U.S. jobs and provide substantial economic benefits," John said. With files from news wires gmorgan@nationalpost.com Twitter.com/geoffreymorgan

Alberta repeats Ontario's blunders
Ottawa Sun
Sun Mar 5 2017
Page: A18
Section: Comment
Byline: Lorne Gunter
Source: Ottawa Sun
It's one thing to be the first naïve child to follow the white rabbit into his hidey hole. But it's another order of stupidity to be the second.

That makes it doubly staggering to watch the Alberta NDP government (which has been in office nearly two years), willingly, deliberately, cheerfully repeating the same budgeting and "green" energy mistakes committed over the past decade by the Ontario Liberal government - mistakes that have had devastating effects on Ontario's economy and on Ontarians' taxes, electricity bills and lifestyles.

Since 2003, when Ontario's then-premier Dalton McGuinty took his province's first step into green-energy Wonderland, that province's annual deficits have, for many years, been greater than the deficits of all the other provinces combined.

As a result, since the Liberals came into office Ontario's provincial debt has nearly doubled and is currently just under half as big as the national debt.

The Ontario government, now led by Premier Kathleen Wynne, must have been so relieved when Rachel Notley became premier of Alberta because, at long last, there was a government even more fiscally inept than the Ontario Liberals'.

The key problem in Ontario and Alberta (and nationally for that matter) is that "green" energy is not competitive without MASSIVE subsidies.

This is true wherever politicians and activists have tried to replace fossil fuels with “renewable”. The only way to get utility companies interested in wind, solar and other “clean” energy is to give them billions in tax dollars or in higher, regulated electricity prices, or both.

This is glaringly obvious in Ontario where electricity prices have more than doubled since 2009 when the Liberals began subsidizing wind, solar, biomass and other sources.

Ontario consumers now pay for the cost of the power they consume, plus a premium on their power bills every month to pay for foolish long-term contracts the Liberal government signed with green energy providers to encourage (bribe?) them to build wind turbines, solar farms and wood-chip incinerators.

Last year, the average Ontario power bill was 15 per cent electricity and 85 per cent “global adjustment,” the fancy name the Liberals have given to various costs including their failed green-energy contracts.

No wonder Ontario now has the highest electricity bills on the continent and Ontario consumers often find their power bills are almost as high as their mortgage payments or rent.

No wonder, too, so many Ontario businesses have pulled up stakes and moved their plants (and jobs) to cheaper-energy states.

The same is beginning to happen in Alberta.

Last week Alberta Finance Minister Joe Ceci had to admit provincial spending is already 10 per cent above where it was last year - and that was with three months left in the fiscal year.

The biggest single cause of these out-of-control expenditures? The New Democrats’ climate plan is costing five times what was budgeted last spring.

At its largest, Ontario’s provincial deficit was $1,500 per capita in 2010. Alberta’s this year will be $2,600.

Now on top of that, Alberta announced last month they would be handing out free energy-efficient lightbulbs to every resident who wants them and even sending contractors door-to-door to install “green” thermostats and showerheads free of charge - potentially millions of them.

And Albertans will get 30 per cent subsidies for any solar panels they have installed.

The Notley government estimates its bulb-thermostatshowerhead give away will cost just $648 million over five years.

But that is the kind of lowball, politically sellable promise that has landed Ontario in so much fiscal trouble: Make the “green” conversion look cheap and simple so voters will eat it up.

Except going green is anything but cheap and simple. lgunter@postmedia.com

Toronto mayor refutes report Hydro One in talks to buy Toronto Hydro; Mayor John Tory denies the two companies have been in discussions about the deal for the past few months

theglobeandmail.com
Sat Mar 4 2017, 11:01am ET
Section: National
Byline: Jeff Gray
Toronto Mayor John Tory is denying a report from Reuters news agency that talks are under way on a proposed deal to sell city-owned To?ronto Hydro.

“I can confirm that no discussions are taking place with respect to the sale of Toronto Hydro to anyone,” Mr. Tory said Saturday in an e-mailed statement. “In recent months, I clearly indicated that I would not be supporting any proposal to sell Toronto Hydro.”

The mayor was responding to a report on Saturday from Reuters that Ontario’s Hydro One was in talks to buy Toronto Hydro for $3-billion, citing anonymous sources.

The talks have gone on for months, Reuters said, but had not entered the final stages and could fall apart.

The report appeared to contradict Mr. Tory's plans, approved by council last year, to avoid any sell-off of Toronto Hydro and instead reinvest city funds in the utility to help it refurbish its electricity grid, after months of speculation that Mr. Tory was interested in a sale. Any deal to sell Toronto Hydro would need to get through city council, where opponents of any sell-off are believed to hold the upper hand.

Reuters said that a deal to buy Toronto Hydro could also help Hydro One's growth ambitions as a public company after it raised $1.8-billion in one of Canada's biggest IPOs in 2015. Hydro One, backed by the province of Ontario, has a market value of $14-billion.

Under one proposal, Hydro One would pay about half the deal value in cash and the rest in stock, one of the people familiar with the talks told Reuters. A cash-and-stock transaction with Hydro One would allow the city to benefit from Hydro One's dividend as well, the people said.

A spokesman for Toronto Hydro also dismissed the report of any talks.

"There is no truth to this rumour and I am not aware of any talks," said Toronto Hydro spokesman Brian Buchan.

A senior Ontario government official also denies the existence of any talks.

The person with knowledge of the energy file says there have been no talks between Hydro One and Toronto Hydro, and says there have been no talks on the issue between Premier Kathleen Wynne and Mr. Tory. Such talks would not be allowed, the person said, as Hydro One operates at arm's length from government, with privatization legislation preventing government from directing Hydro One decisions.

Mr. Tory's denial appeared to contradict the report that discussions were underway involving Toronto Hydro chief executive Anthony Haines, Hydro One CEO Mayo Schmidt, Ms. Wynne and Mr. Tory, and that such talks were "making progress."

Mr. Tory said Saturday that he has "indicated my support for additional City investment in a Toronto Hydro that remained in public hands."

He said the city is "presently exploring how we can make that investment happen on that basis so that we have a reliable, up to date electricity provider for the people of Toronto."

John Tory denies report Hydro One is in talks to buy Toronto Hydro

thestar.com
Sat Mar 4 2017
Section: News | Toronto Star
Byline: David RiderPatty Winsa

Toronto Mayor John Tory is discounting a leaked news report Saturday that said Hydro One is in talks to buy Toronto Hydro.

"I can confirm that no discussions are taking place with respect to the sale of Toronto Hydro to anyone," said Tory in an emailed statement to the Star.

The story by Reuters cited two unnamed sources with information that Tory and Premier Kathleen Wynne were part of discussions that included Toronto Hydro CEO Anthony Haines and Hydro One CEO Mayo Schmidt to sell the utility for $3 billion.

Tory said he would not support any proposal to sell the municipal electricity distributor and that he was looking for additional investment to ensure Toronto Hydro remained in public hands.

"We are presently exploring how we can make that investment happen on that basis, so that we have a reliable, up-to-date electricity provider for the people of Toronto," said Tory.

Read more:

Wynne insists hydro-rate-relief plan proves she's not out of touch with voters (www.thestar.com)

Ontario trying to duck public scrutiny on Hydro One (www.thestar.com) END

Wynne's pocketbook politics may not be enough o power down anger over hydro (www.thestar.com) END

Toronto Hydro spokesperson Brian Buchan reiterated the mayor's words and said "there is no truth to this rumour, and I am not aware of any talks. . . . This is out of the blue."

Talk of a sale has raised the hackles of the public, as well as city councillors, who would have final say over any deal. Toronto Hydro will contribute $25 million to the city's budget this year.

The city needs millions more to pay for capital infrastructure costs.

Daniel Levitan, the spokesperson for Hydro One, said in an email that the company "will not speculate on rumours."

The province has already sold 30 per cent of Hydro One and will likely sell another 30 per cent in the next 12 months. But the company has already been restructured and is privately run with a new executive team. And employees that make more than $100,000 at the partially privatized utility will no longer be included on the "Sunshine List."

The Star revealed, early last year, that officials in Tory's office and Toronto Hydro had been preparing groundwork for a possible sale of a minority stake in the municipal utility, but that the mayor was not part of those discussions.

But Tory did say in a speech in September that Toronto needed a hard look at selling a minority stake - "unlocking the value that already exists in Toronto Hydro, while keeping it in public hands."

Councillor Cesar Palacio, who is a member of the mayor's executive committee, told the Star in November that he had intervened to stop the privatization and said he would never support a sale of the utility.

About 1,000 constituents had signed petitions demanding the electricity distributor remain wholly owned by the City of Toronto.

The city is looking at whether it should sell the Toronto Parking Authority, which operates "Green P" lots and on-street parking.

Cap and trade's crash and burn
Ottawa Sun
Sun Mar 5 2017
Page: A10
Section: News
Byline: Lorrie Goldstein
Source: Ottawa Sun
The California/Quebec cap and trade market Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne is counting on to fund her $8.3-billion climate action plan just crashed, again.

This is the highly speculative carbon trading stock market Ontario will join next year that Wynne is relying on to fatten her government's coffers by $1.9 billion annually.

This so it can fund its various and sundry green energy initiatives, such as subsidizing Ontario's electricity rates by up to $1.3 billion - which isn't actually a green energy initiative.

The problem now confronting Wynne is that in three of the last four quarterly auctions under the California/Quebec cap and trade carbon pricing scheme, only a fraction of the available carbon permits have been bought by industrial greenhouse gas emitters.

Since the sale of these permits is how governments make money from cap and trade, it means their anticipated revenues from carbon pricing have been repeatedly slashed by hundreds of millions of dollars, throwing the future of their green energy programs into doubt.

Ontario will hold its first internal carbon permit auction later this month, although it’s hard to see how even the Liberals could screw that up since they set all the rules.

But once Ontario joins the California/Quebec cap and trade market next year, all bets are off.

In its just-completed February auction, only 18% of the available carbon permits sold.

That’s particularly alarming because this round of permit sales was expected to be strong, since 88% of available permits sold in the last auction in November, 2016.

That followed two weak auctions where only 35% of the available permits were sold in August, 2016 and 11% in May, 2016.

When the California /Quebec market first crashed last May, Wynne initially took an alarmingly cavalier attitude toward it, suggesting to me she didn’t understand the potential financial implications for Ontario.

Wynne dismissed the crash with a non-answer, saying: “California is ahead of us, and we’ve got some catching up to do. We’re pushing ahead, and there’s a lot of innovation that I know can happen in Ontario, and that’s what our cap-and-trade program is going to be about.”

A week later, perhaps after being briefed by someone who understood what had happened, Wynne acknowledged her government might have to lower its anticipated revenues of $1.9 billion annually from cap and trade in light of the crash of the California/Quebec market.

At that point Wynne told CBC Radio: “It’s a market. We know that there will be highs and lows … It was this round that it was not as good. We just don’t know what the market will be. That ($1.9 billion) is our projection. If we have to revise the projection then we will.”

Of course, if Ontario has to slash its anticipated $1.9 billion in annual revenues from cap and trade, how is it going to pay for Wynne’s $8.3 billion (over five years) climate action plan, without raising taxes or plunging the province even further into debt? Even if Ontario realizes $1.9 billion a year from cap and trade, that will be paid for by Ontarians in the form of higher retail prices for almost all goods and services. Meaning either way, we lose. lgoldstein@postmedia.com @sunlorrie

C-K officials welcome pipeline announcement; Project expected to foster economic development

The Chatham Daily News
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: A1 / Front
Section: News
Byline: Trevor Terfloth
Source: The Daily News

Chatham-Kent officials are welcoming the recent approval of a natural gas pipeline replacement in the area.

Construction of the $250-million pipeline from Union Gas’ Dawn Compressor Station in Lambton County to its Dover Transmission Station in Chatham-Kent is expected to begin in May.

“It’s obviously good news for Union Gas,” said Stuart McFadden McFadden, the municipality’s acting director of economic development, on Friday. “It’s good news for everybody. It’s an old line. It needed to be upgraded.”

Union Gas received approval for increasing the capacity of its Panhandle Transmission System on Feb. 23.

It had filed an application with the Ontario Energy Board last June.

The municipality has long been lobbying for additional natural gas capacity in order to meet the need for existing and future industry, particularly in rural areas.

The project is expected to boost the local economy while providing additional energy for commercial and residential customers in Chatham-Kent and Windsor-Essex.

“If we’re going to continue to grow, we need the extra capacity,” McFadden said. “The way they’re explaining it, it’s a pick up and replace.

“They’re just taking out a smaller line that back in its day was probably sufficient, but today it doesn’t serve their needs. … I don’t see there being any issues.”

The project, expected to be completed by November, will see the construction of a 36-inch gas pipeline over a length of 40 kilometres.

Pipeline construction will begin at the gas company’s compressor station at Bentpath in Dawn-Euphemia Township, and will end at the Dover site at Town Line Road and Belle Rose Line.

“They’re a big employer here and if it makes their life easier and makes their business model more efficient, then that bodes well for everybody,” McFadden said. “If additional capacity is required, it allows them the opportunity to be able to meet those needs.” -With Postmedia Network files
TTerfloth@postmedia.com @DailyNewsTT

North Bay Mayor Looks for Confirmation of Job Loss Rumours at OPG
Source: MCTV
Mar 3, 2017 6: 05 PM (4)

Anchor: Ontario Power Generation is expected to meet with staff early next week to discuss the loss of up to 44 jobs from its North Bay location. That's according to the Mayor of North Bay who says the rumour more over job loss has been circulating for the past few weeks. Al McDonald says OPG hasn't been working with the city as it tries to get clarifications from company officials.

Mayor Al McDonald, North Bay Mayor: No one would talk to us and that's not how different levels of government should work so we're very disappointed not only with OPG but with the provincial government. It's not even a cost saving thing. They're just transferring the jobs to other centers.

Anchor: And the mayor says he expects to have a brief meeting with company representatives Monday.

Fedeli seeks OPG answers; 'OPG's failure to respond to the municipality has rightfully caused great concern in North Bay'

North Bay Nugget
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: A2
Section: News
Source: North Bay Nugget
Ontario Power Generation‘s silence on the future of its North Bay operations is a “betrayal by OPG to behave as good citizens and earn the social licence they need to operate in Ontario,” Nipissing MPP Vic Fedeli says.

Fedeli made the statement in a letter to Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault in which he requests a briefing on the current and future status of Ontario Power Generation‘s operations in North Bay.

“As you are aware, rumours have surfaced regarding the employment status of the 70 men and women at their North Bay facility,” Fedeli writes. “And while I’m certain we both generally don’t comment on rumours, OPG‘s failure to respond to the municipality has rightfully caused great concern in North Bay.

“Minister; seeing how OPG has refused to answer the community, I now look to you to inform us of OPG‘s plans, and for you to set the record straight.

”OPG and North Bay have had a 100-year plus relationship. It is owned by the people of Ontario. Its responsibility is to the people of Ontario and to the communities where it has had partnerships for more than a century.

“If OPG is willing to turn its back on the responsibilities it has under this relationship, what else will it ignore? “If they won’t be open about what it plans to do in North Bay, how can they be trusted to be accountable for the $13 billion OPG will spend to refurbish the Darlington facility?”

OPG, minister silent City's; Senior official in town Monday to speak with employees

North Bay Nugget
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: A1 / Front
Section: News
Byline: Jennifer Hamilton-Mccharles
Source: North Bay Nugget

Ontario Power Generation employees will have their questions answered Monday morning when OPG’s president of renewable generation and power management comes to North Bay.

It’s believed to be the first time employees will have a chance to ask senior management questions pertaining to rumours that the majority of OPG’s employees in North Bay are being transferred to other operations in the province.

The Nugget obtained an internal email which was recently sent to employees.

According to the email, the faceto-face meeting with Mike Martelli was initially scheduled for Feb. 22.

“Due to circumstances outside of our control, this meeting has had to be rescheduled,” it states.

The meeting with employees was rescheduled for Monday at 8 a.m.

It’s expected to take an hour and is being organized by Peter Murray, manager of operations.

Emails sent to Neal Kelly, OPG’s director of media and communications, and Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault were not returned.

North Bay Mayor Al McDonald has expressed his frustration to Thibeault and Nipissing MPP Vic Fedeli has written the energy minister.

“I will see him (Thibeault) Monday in the legislature and discuss this face to face,” Fedeli said.

Trevor Holliday, leader of the Northern Ontario Party, issued a media release Friday afternoon claiming the Liberals are once again stripping jobs from Northern Ontario.

“Approximately 44 jobs are being sent to Cornwall from the North Bay office of the Crown corporation Ontario Power Generation. That being said, Kathleen Wynne has gone on record several times stating we are ‘one Ontario,’” he stated.

“With the constant robbing of good careers/jobs and industries from Northern Ontario, it is showing what we have been saying: We are not one Ontario.”

Thunder Bay MPP Comments on Ontario’s Hydro Bill Reduction Move

Source: CKPR
Mar 3, 2017 6: 04 PM (2)

Anchor: Minister Bill Mauro delivered his sales pitch today regarding his government’s hydro rate cuts. Yesterday Premier Kathleen Wynne announced the plan to reduce electricity bills in Ontario by 25 per cent for residential customers. Mauro held a news conference to speak about the plan, which has the support of the chamber of commerce.

Reporter: Starting this summer, Ontario’s fair hydro plan will provide households with a 25 per cent price break and up to 53 per cent in rural and northern Ontario. Future hydro increases would also be held at the rate of inflation. Municipal Affairs Minister Bill Mauro said they are refinancing the $30 to $50 billion in investments that have been made into the electricity system over the few years. He says this will significantly help reduce the hydro bills people pay now and over time.

Bill Mauro, MPP for Thunder Bay-Atikokan: We're refinancing those over a longer period of time. I acknowledge that comes with a cost. But this will help us to reduce the price point that people pay now and in the years out. I think it's a fair and appropriate thing to do. These assets will be around serving the province for a very long time. And we think it's appropriate that the costs associated with those assets can be spread out over a longer period of time.

Reporter: Chamber of Commerce president Charla Robinson is applauding the changes, saying they will have a positive impact on the economy, businesses and the community.

Charla Robinson, President of Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce: We believe that a lot of small and medium enterprises will be able to take advantage of this cut. There's also some changes to the industrial commercial program that is available – or maybe a larger business that uses more electricity, if they can shift their energy use. Certainly this is something that businesses will be eagerly awaiting the bill that comes in with the rebate in the summer.

Reporter: The opposition parties at Queen's Park say the Liberal's plan will add $1.4 billion per year in interest costs, which they say is really just mortgaging their children and grandchildren's future just to pay for their mistakes. Mauro admits this long-term financing plan should have just been used in the first place.

Minister Mauro: If we had originally structured the investments as 30-year paybacks instead of 20, we wouldn't be having this conversation today. We made an implementation choice to do it over 20 years – we're now choosing to do it over 30.

Mauro lauds electricity rate cuts

Tbnewswatch.com
2017-03-03
Byline: Leith Dunick

Original Web Location

THUNDER BAY – Minister of Municipal Affairs Bill Mauro on Friday shrugged off accusations the Ontario government is slashing electricity rates to lift the Liberals out of polling purgatory.
A day earlier, Premier Kathleen Wynne announced the province would cut residential hydro rates by 25 per cent, refinancing debt over 30 years instead of 20.
The move will provide immediate savings, but ultimately cost billions more in interest costs over the additional 10-year period.
"I think that I've been asked that question every time I've made an announcement for the last six months," Mauro said at a news conference held to explain how the Ontario Fair Hydro Plan would be rolled out this summer.
"I guess I could stop working on behalf of the people of Thunder Bay-Atikokan, if that's the suggestion. There will be other announcements I'll be making in the next 12 or 14 or 16 months that I've been working on for a very long time."
Mauro also bristled at suggestions by Queen's Park opposition parties that the Liberals, mired in third place in a recent Forum poll, waited too long to provide relief to electricity customers overburdened by high monthly bills, pointing to a number of initiatives embarked on by the province designed to help homeowners and the business sector.
"We've brought lots of programs forward already, including a Northern Ontario energy tax credit, including a senior's tax grant and other programs that are being enhanced today as well," Mauro said.
"So I would suggest if their comment is this is a beginning point for our government, they're completely, completely off base."
Mauro acknowledged critics have jumped on the Liberals for stretching the payment plan for up to $50 billion in generation, transmission and distribution assets, over an extra decade, but the Thunder Bay-Atikokan MPP said it's really righting a mistake made in the past.
"If we had originally structured the investments as 30-year payments instead of 20, we wouldn't be here having this conversation today. We made an implementation choice to do it over 20

years. We're now choosing to do it over 30," Mauro said.
"These assets will be serving the people of the province of Ontario over 30 years. I think you can make a great argument that the costs associated with those assets should be spread over the life of the asset and that's what we're doing."
The cost-saving includes an already promised eight per cent reduction that would see the provincial sales tax portion of energy costs eliminated. A new Affordability Fund at the same time will enhance the Ontario Electricity Support Program, which will now be funded by the province, and the Rural or Remote Rate Protection, which provides even more savings to residents living outside major centres. First Nations residents living on-reserve will also receive a delivery credit.
Mauro said electricity costs have risen for a number of reasons, with inflation and the end of coal-generated power.
Charla Robinson, president of the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, welcomed the rate reductions with open arms.
"We believe that a lot of small and medium enterprises will be able to take advantage of this cut … Certainly this is something that businesses will be eagerly awaiting the bill that comes in with the rebate in the summer," Robinson.
"And it definitely will have a positive impact on the economy because we do know this has been having an impact on folks' discretionary spending allowances."

Ontario golf course owner was used to $5,000 hydro bills, but then one for almost $8,000 landed

News - National Post
Fri Mar 3 2017
Section: Canada
Byline: Joanne Laucius, Postmedia News
Permalink

A $5,000 hydro bill is pretty much par for the course for golf club owner Leonard Gendron.

But he was flabbergasted by a December bill for $7,763, even though he was not running the biggest energy drains at the Hammond Golf Club over the winter. The pumphouse to water the course was shut down , as was the air conditioning. In fact, two-thirds of the 16,000-square-foot clubhouse had been closed, and the remainder is heated with propane.

"About $5,000 made sense to me. But when I got my December bill, I was floored," says Gendron, who has been running the course just east of Ottawa for about a dozen years. His family has owned the business for almost 40 years.

"You try to make sense of it and try to figure out why. But there's no big factor. Do I have to save up during the summer and hibernate in the winter?"

Julie Oliver/PostmediaLeonard Gendron sits in the darkened men's change room at the Hammond Golf Club that's been owned by his family for 37 years. His hydro bills run around $5,000 a month in high season, but in December - when the lights are off in two thirds of the clubhouse that is not in use - he got a bill for $8,000. Then, when he was a day late paying, he got hit with a $10,000 "deposit" for future bills. The skyrocketing hydro bills are inexplicable, he says.

Gendron has kept the restaurant in the clubhouse open for the past three winters. Most of the kitchen equipment runs with propane, except for two walk-in fridges and a walk-in freezer.

What followed the whopping December bill was even more surprising.

Gendron had held off paying the bill because he had questions for Hydro One. Soon after, the utility sent him a bill for over $10,000 for a "security deposit." (According to Hydro One, Ontario Energy Board guidelines state that security deposits are collected to guarantee payment of future charges. “Security deposits will be collected when a customer initially applies for service, or if a customer has failed to maintain a good payment history.”)

Both the December bill and the security deposit are due Saturday. Gendron will be paying the December bill on Friday. He’s looking to get the security deposit waived.

Do I have to save up during the summer and hibernate in the winter?

As a business owner, Gendron has been doing his best to reduce electricity consumption and make sense of why electricity is costing so much. He recently changed the air conditioning units, unplugged everything possible and keeps the heat at a minimum in areas that are rarely used. He hired a firm that found Hydro One owed him $10,000 for a credit, but ended up paying the firm half the money. Refurbishing all the indoor and outdoor lighting at the course would reduce his costs, but it would also cost between $12,000 and $36,000, so he is implementing the changes in stages.

“I try to follow it very closely. It’s been a huge concern,” he says.

Trying to anticipate hydro bills is a challenge to a business, says Gendron. There have been inconsistencies he can’t explain. His January bill was back to normal at about $5,000. His “normal” July bill had a delivery charge of about $1,900, while the unusually high December bill had a delivery charge of $1,457. No explanation.

Related

Kevin Libin: Kathleen Wynne’s sleazy, desperate hydro ploy to fool Ontarians is, well, brilliant (business.financialpost.com)

Northern Ontario woman puts Wynne on the hot seat over hydro plan: ‘See that you get good advisers’ (news.nationalpost.com)

Ontario cuts hydro bills by 17%, but ultimately it will cost ratepayers $1.4 billion a year more (business.financialpost.com)

“Being a business owner presents a wide variety of challenges, budgeting being a priority,” says Gendron. “We try to anticipate annual increases, but when Ontario Hydro drops such a high bill for a month when the golf course is closed, it has to be questioned and brought to other business owners’ attention.”

He is contemplating increasing the cost of memberships and green fees because of the escalating hydro costs.

“If I don’t, I won’t be able to stick around.”

Duguid in Durham to push hydro rate reduction
Ajax News Advertiser
Fri Mar 3 2017
Section: News
Byline: Keith Gilligan
Permalink
DURHAM - A day after Premier Kathleen Wynne announced electricity bills would be lowered by 25 per cent, Brad Duguid came to Ajax to sell the idea.

The minister of economic development and growth and Scarborough Central MPP, Duguid was at the head office of Veridian Connections to say the reduction is “a bold, sensible plan.”

Wynne announced a 17-per cent reduction in electricity bills on Thursday, March 2. Combined with an eight-per cent rebate that started on Jan. 1, it works out to a 25-per cent reduction. The latest reduction begins in the summer.

The announcement also includes limiting rate increases over the next four years to two-per cent annually.

The government has been on the defensive as electricity bills have skyrocketed, leaving many residents and businesses suffering and scrambling to try to pay the higher bills.

“We’re here to say to the people of Ajax, Pickering, Whitby and Oshawa that we listened and heard your concerns and we’ve acted,” Duguid said to about 50 people in the lobby of the Veridian headquarters. Joining him were Liberal MPPs in Durham - Tracy MacCharles (Pickering-Scarborough East), Joe Dickson (Ajax-Pickering) and Granville Anderson (Durham).

To achieve the lower rates, the province is refinancing electricity-supply contracts over a 30-year period rather than the current 20-year period.

The government decided “it’s not fair for this generation to pay for it all. We’re reamortizing the cost over 30 years. It’s something that’s very reasonable and it’s something that makes a lot of sense,” Duguid said.

He admitted that would mean “more cost over time, but it’s worth it to families feeling the pinch.

“It’s the largest price cut in Ontario’s history,” Duguid said. “Bills will not increase beyond the rate of inflation for the next four years.”

When the Liberals came to power in 2003, they had to rebuild the electricity system, he said.

“We’ve been replacing and rebuilding about 80 per cent. Now, we have the strongest, most reliable energy systems” in Canada, Duguid said.

Another cost came with replacing “dirty coal,” he said.

Moving to a greener system “was the right decision, but it came at a cost. Ontario now has one of the cleanest, most reliable energy systems.

“Now, we have an energy system that’s clean, reliable and affordable for Ontario residents and businesses,” Duguid added.

Oshawa MPP Jennifer French said in an interview, “Since I’ve been here, there’s been a number of stretch goals they’ve made. It’s almost a hail Mary pass. It’s a problem crying for something. They had to do something.”

French has been attacking the government over electricity costs. She asked residents to bring copies of their hydro bills, which she then gave to Wynne.

“The long-range picture wasn’t factored into this,” French added.

People will see a 25-per cent reduction, she said, but noted, “They’re stretching out this plan. Rather than fixing things, it’s another Band-Aid on top.”

Her constituency office has seen residents come in to complain about the high costs.

“I think people are so desperate, they appreciate any change on their bill right now,” she said.

“The big picture is the system is broken and more tangled. What on earth are businesses going to do?” she asked. “What are we giving our kids?

“The system is broken, frankly, and it’s held together with electrical tape. This isn’t fixing it,” French noted.

“It is kicking it down the road and interests costs will accrue. We’re not talking about that because people are so desperate. How desperate will they be down the road?”

NDP opens Sault campaign office; rural mayors fear losing their rinks to high hydro costs

Sootoday.com
2017-03-04
Byline: Darren Taylor

Original Web Location

It was an urban and rural weekend for Andrea Horwath, Ontario NDP leader.

Horwath was in Sault Ste. Marie Saturday afternoon for the official opening of Sault NDP candidate Joe Krmpotich's campaign headquarters at 24 Queen Street East.

The opening took place as electricity costs seem to be the defining political issue at Queen's Park, as both the governing Liberals and NDP have now unveiled plans to cut electricity costs for consumers (the Progressive Conservatives have yet to unveil theirs).

"Our plan would lead to significant savings in a systemic way…we're not just going to increase the length of the debt and the loans we have in our electricity system in order to give temporary relief for families," said Horwath to an audience gathered at Krmpotich's headquarters.

Krmpotich, a Ward 6 city councillor and United Steelworkers Local 2251 union coordinator, was chosen in January to be the NDP candidate in a yet to be called byelection to fill the vacant Sault riding seat.

Earlier Saturday, mayors of small Algoma communities expressed their electricity cost concerns to Horwath and Algoma-Manitoulin MPP Mike Mantha at a meeting held at the Echo Bay Arena.

Horwath listened to the mayors concerns and pitched her party's newly released electricity price policy.

"It includes getting rid of time of use pricing so that people don't have to do their laundry at three o'clock in the morning, it includes making sure delivery charges are fair, it includes getting rid of some of the contracts the government has signed that are costing us a fortune, and stops the sale of Hydro One," Horwath told reporters.

"As electricity rates rise the way they have, unfortunately these municipal leaders are faced with possibly shutting down an arena, how can that be?'" Horwath said.

"Arenas are the glue for a community…they are key pieces of infrastructure."

"We need to have our rec centres and our arenas but we need manageable electricity costs," said Ted Hicks, Mayor of Johnson Township.

Hicks said the cost of electricity at the Desbarats rink is now over $52,000 a year, more than 40 per cent of the rink's annual total costs.

"We may have to reduce the amount of operating time…if we keep going at the same pace as we have the last five or 10 years," Hicks told SooToday.

Hicks was joined at Saturday's meeting with Horwath and Mantha by Lory Patteri, Bruce Mines mayor, Jody Wildman, Township of St. Joseph Mayor, Lynn Watson, Echo Bay reeve, Batchewana First Nation Chief Dean Sayers, Robert Hope, Hilton Beach Mayor, and Richard Beitz, Laird Township mayor.

Other provinces lead way on fairer hydro
Toronto Star
Sun Mar 5 2017
Page: A16
Section: Editorial

Politicians can't make electricity cheap again, Feb. 23

Bruce Lourie raises some interesting points about why hydro prices in Ontario have gotten so out of hand. Mismanaged contracts and reckless privatization by Liberal and Conservative governments laid the groundwork for today's crisis.

The past 40 years have proven time and again that depending on the private sector and market forces to manage Ontario's hydro system means the needs of everyday Ontarians will come last.

It doesn't have to be this way.

While Mr. Lourie concludes that essentially there is nothing to be done to reduce overall rates and the best the province can offer is relief to the most vulnerable residents, other provinces make clear there is a better option.

When you look at average bills for 750 kilowatt hours, which the Ontario Energy Board considers an average bill, the difference is stark. An Ontario family could expect to pay over $127, while a Montreal family would pay less than half that amount - just $55. In many cities across the country the bill remains under $100.

While there is no overnight remedy to some of the larger issues, there are real, substantive changes we can make today that will begin reducing bills right away, especially for the hydro users Mr. Lourie identified, like rural Ontarians who have limited options for heat and power.

In the longer term, we can steer the Ontario hydro system back toward a publicly owned system that prioritizes the needs and rights of Ontarians over private profits, beginning by halting the sale of Hydro One.

Peter Tabuns, NDP energy critic, Toronto-Danforth

Horwath touts energy plan

Sault Star
2017-03-04
Byline: Brian Kelly

Original Web Location

Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath touts her electricity plan as the one with staying power.

She vows her party's strategy, released Feb. 27, will prompt real long-term change to Ontario's electricity system and savings of up to 30 per cent for the province's residents.

Proposals include pulling the plug on time of use pricing, lowering delivery charges so rural residents pay the same amount as urban dwellers and returning public ownership to Hydro One. Horwath also wants to evaluate power contracts with companies and see if they should be renewed or nixed.
“We're certainly going to be looking at the opportunity to reduce the pressure,” she said.

Horwath zaps Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne's pledge to slash power costs an average of 17 per cent this summer as a costly move to woo voters that will saddle an additional $40 billion on taxpayers by refinancing contracts with electricity generators and makes no effort to fix a system that “is in a mess.”

“It looks like she's trying to refinance her popularity, refinance her ability to get elected, than it is about changing our electricity system so that it's operating in the best interests of people again,” she told The Sault Star in an interview Saturday. “All that Kathleen Wynne has done is make sure that next generation is going to pay through the nose as well.”

Horwath is also critical of the Progressive Conservatives not yet releasing a hydro plan of their own.

“That's very worrisome,” she said. “Nobody really knows what Patrick Brown's plans are.”
On Friday, PC finance critic Vic Fedeli said the Liberal government must stop signing hydro contracts for power the province doesn't need, end the sale of Hydro One and “rein in” the pay of power executives.
Horwath met with several Algoma mayors, including Echo Bay Reeve Lynn Watson, Desbarats Mayor Ted Hicks and Hilton Beach Mayor Robert Hope on Saturday morning.

Horwath said they shared their experiences with “soaring hydro bills” and their concern “about their ability to keep some of their facilities going because their communities are very small.” The arena in Desbarats was cited as an example. Increased electricity cost is putting “stress and strains” on their budgets, said Horwath.
She helped officially open NDP candidate Joe Krmpotich's campaign office on Queen Street East, near Gore Street, on Saturday afternoon.

A crowd of about 30 turned out, including former NDP MPPs Tony Martin and Bud Wildman.

Pettapiece: ‘A desperate shell game.' MPP pans Liberals’ hydro move

Mount Forest Confederate
2017-03-05
Byline: Randy Pettapiece

Original Web Location

QUEEN'S PARK – With an election expected in just over a year, Premier Kathleen Wynne is promising to cut soaring hydro rates by 17 percent. Ontario’s opposition is calling her latest announcement—which will ultimately cost taxpayers billions more—a desperate shell game.

"Of course hydro rates need to come down,” Pettapiece said. “But this announcement doesn’t get to the root of the problem, which is years of failed Liberal energy policies and the terrible contracts they continue to sign.”

Premier Wynne compared her plan to “refinancing the mortgage and setting a new term that stretches over a longer period.” But it comes at a cost: roughly $25 billion in interest costs over 30 years.

“No one should be fooled,” Pettapiece said. “Over the long term, this will cost us more—much more. Our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be paying for this government’s mistakes.”

Pettapiece also slammed the government over what he calls yet another mistake. Reports indicate that the government will today sign even more new green energy contracts.

“This is more high-cost power we do not need and cannot afford,” Pettapiece said. “It’s as if the Liberals have learned nothing. People need to ask why this government would continue signing such bad contracts.”

Opposition Leader Patrick Brown pointed out that many of the contracts signed to date were handed out to Liberal donors; 30 of these companies donated $1.3 million to the governing party.

The government should admit its Green Energy Act has been a failure and repeal it, Pettapiece believes.

“That would start to solve the problem. Pushing the costs onto future generations is not right.”

In 2015, Ontario’s auditor general concluded ratepayers overpaid $37 billion for hydro from 2006 to 2014. The report also showed ratepayers will spend an extra $133 billion by 2032 because of global adjustment fees on hydro bills.

Hatfield Calls Out Wynne Government Over Hydro Cut

Blackburnnews.com
2017-03-05
Byline: ADELLE LOISELLE

Original Web Location

The MPP for Windsor-Tecumseh suggests Thursday's hydro reduction was nothing more than politicking by the Wynne Liberals.

Percy Hatfield, during Question Period in the Ontario legislature, told MPPs one of his constituents saw his hydro bill rise after the 8% reduction in January.

"Imagine his surprise come January 1 when he saw the promised temporary 8% rebate on his bill, but the bill was actually higher than it was the month before," he said.

Thursday, the Wynne government pledged to cut hydro bills by another 17% on average this summer. Under the plan, the government will stretch out its hydro generator contracts costing it another $1.4-billion.

Hatfield said community facilities are being hit hard too, including the public school board in Windsor-Essex.

"The Greater Essex County District School Board saw hydro costs increase by $50,000 in 2015, and $431,000 in 2016," he told legislators. "Doesn't [Premier Kathleen Wynne] understand that people like Ron and school boards all across this province see this plan for what it actually is? A desperate party playing political games with a hydro system that they made a mess of in the first place?"

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault responded to the question the Liberals inherited a dysfunctional power system, and all customers will see a break with the new reduction plan.

The Conservatives have said the Liberal government plan will only push the costs down the road, while the NDP have offered their plan which would do away with time-of-use billing

Bruce Grey MPP Says Taxpayers On The Hook For Hydro Mess

Blackburnnews.com
2017-03-05
Byline: JANICE MACKAY

Original Web Location

Bruce Grey Owen Sound's MPP says there is nothing fair about Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne's hydro plan.

Bill Walker says spending $14-billion of taxpayers' money to fix the mess the Liberal government created is just shifting the cost to everyone's tax bill.

Walker agrees rate relief is needed for skyrocketing electricity bills, but he is concerned they are using taxpayer money to cover the discount.

Walker says while hydro bills may decrease 25%, you will have to pay that much more in taxes and have fewer government services.

Walker says instead of cancelling expensive energy contracts, the Liberals instead are scheduled to sign more energy contracts Friday, despite running an energy surplus of power.

That forces Ontario to pay the US and Quebec up to a half a billion dollars a year to take the surplus power.

He says the average residential hydro bill has increased over $1,000 a year since the Liberals took office.

And up to 600,000 families were unable to pay their bills last year, with some 60,000 cut off from power.

"We remain the only party that is committed to stopping the bad contracts by repealing the Green Energy Act," says Walker.

He also adds that electricity prices are higher because the Liberal government wasted $1.1-billion on the gas plants scandal, $2-billion on Smart Meters that don't work, and, as confirmed by the auditor general, because Ontarians have been forced to pay a shocking $9.2-billion more than necessary for green energy contracts. Additionally, ratepayers will also continue to be overcharged $170-billion for electricity – meaning over $12,000 in excess costs for every Ontarian.

“Again, this is no real fix – it’s a scheme, a $14-billion misconception, and it will cost you, your children and your grandchildren for many more years in reduced education, healthcare and social services,” says Walker.

Politicians sound off in northern Ontario about Liberal hydro plan

CBC.CA News
Fri Mar 3 2017, 12:14pm ET
Section: Sudbury
Byline: CBC News
Opposition politicians in northeastern Ontario are throwing shade on the province’s plan that it says will lower energy costs for residents and small businesses.

The plan, announced by Premier Kathleen Wynne Thursday, calls for a 17 per cent reduction in hydro bills come the summer. The initiative involves stretching the financing costs of building and refurbishing power plants over a longer period of time than was previously planned.

“Kathleen Wynne said ‘oh yes it will cost a bit more,’” Vic Fideli, the Progressive Conservative MPP for Nipissing said. “It’s 25 billion dollars just in interest.”

The New Democrats, who already released their energy proposals, are charging that the Liberals’ plan is more about refinancing, and less about improving Ontario’s hydro sector.

“Their plan is really a financial restructuring plan,” Nickel Belt MPP France Gélinas said. “It has nothing to do with the energy sector. They’re keeping everything as is.”

The Tories have yet to release their plan for hydro.

Spreading energy costs out longer ‘fairer’

Wynne has acknowledged that the bill for the across-the-board-relief will cost more in the long run, but said the new proposals are “fairer, because it doesn’t ask this generation of hydro customers alone to pay the freight for everyone before and after.”

The plan would keep electricity rates at or below the rate of inflation over the next four years, but government officials said they can’t predict the size of the electricity rate increases after that.

Ontario’s energy minister, and Sudbury MPP, Glenn Thibeault said spreading out the costs of green energy contracts over 30 years will also help.

“When we did those 20 year contracts, we front-loaded the payment so it’s only you and I and this generation that pays for it,” he said.

“We know that our system and the generating capacity that we built will last a lot longer than 20 years.”

The Liberals’ move comes as Wynne’s government trails the PCs by some 14 points in a range of polls and finds itself nearly even with the NDP ahead of next year’s election.

With files from Mike Crawley and The Canadian Press

Wynne's $35B hydro boondoggle
North Bay Nugget
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: A4
Section: Opinion
Source: Postmedia Network
Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne’s electricity plan is shortterm gain for long-term pain.

On June 1, according to the Wynne government, the average residential electricity bill in Ontario will drop from $135 per month to $101.

In return, Ontario taxpayers will be on the hook, according to the Wynne government, for an extra $25 billion in interest payments for the cost of electricity over 30 years.

The Liberals say annual increases to electricity rates - set by the Ontario Energy Board every May 1 and Nov. 1 - will not exceed inflation for the next four years.

But what will happen after that is anyone's guess, since Wynne isn't freezing hydro rates, just temporarily cutting them.

Given the huge number of Ontarians thrown into energy poverty under the Liberals because of their mismanagement of the hydro file - where they spend more than 10% of their income on electricity and home heating fuel alone - we don't oppose this small break for residential hydro customers.

Not when many seniors on fixed incomes are having to choose between paying their electricity bill and eating.

Of course, all Wynne is doing is kicking the hydro financial crisis the Liberals helped to create down the road.

Of course, it will end in astronomical future hydro rate increases and mortgage the future of our children, grandchildren and generations of Ontarians yet to be born.

Of course, Wynne is cynically trying to bribe Ontarians with their own money in order to win next year's election, given that her hydro rate cut is a shell game in which the costs of electricity are being transferred from hydro consumers to taxpayers, who are the same people.

Everyone knows what's going on here. That's how the Ontario Liberals roll.

That said, Ontarians deserve whatever crumbs of their own money Wynne is willing to give them until the June 7, 2018 election, including this hydro rate cut.

Then they should turf Wynne and the Liberals out of office.

First, because of their incompetence on virtually every file they've touched from green energy to health care.

And second, because the Liberals can't be trusted to maintain this promised hydro rate cut a day after June 7, 2018, if they win the next election.

Biggest hydro cuts in history of province, says Cambridge MPP Kathryn McGarry
Cambridge Times
Sat Mar 4 2017
Section: News
Byline: Ray Martin
Permalink
CAMBRIDGE - MPP Kathryn McGarry was at the Bishop Street office of Energy+ on Friday (March 3) to promote Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan, which will slash electricity bills by 25 per cent starting this summer.

"This is the biggest cut in electric rates in the history of Ontario," McGarry told Energy+ staffers. "This will triple the eight per cent cut in the provincial portion of the HST that started at the beginning of the year that people are just starting to see."

The province has been working on reducing the soaring hydro rates for about a year and the plan is designed to help residents and businesses better cope with their electrical bills. The 25 per cent reduction will kick in once all the mechanisms are put in place this summer. Prices would then be capped at the rate of inflation for the next four years.

McGarry explained that all political parties had neglected the province's aging electrical infrastructure for decades and that neglect came to a head with the 2003 blackout. Since then, Ontario has invested more than $50 billion in rebuilding its electrical generation, transmission and distribution assets.

In addition, the decision to eliminate Ontario's use of coal in favour of clean renewable power, and the policies put in place to provide targeted support to rural and low-income customers, have helped to drive up costs.

"Electricity costs rose sharply and residents and business owners in Cambridge spoke out," McGarry said. "They told us the government needed to do more to reduce the costs and make hydro more affordable."

Barbara Shortreed, Energy+ vice-president of customer service and communications, said the utility had heard from customers "loud and clear".

Energy+ conducts a customer service survey every two years and the survey conducted last fall showed that 62 per cent of the survey's 646 respondents complained that their electricity bills were too high.

Shortreed explained that Energy+ controls just 20 per cent of that cost, while outside agency charges make up the remainder of the bill.

"We've been working to do what we can to reduce that bill for our customers by finding new efficiencies, but there is only so much we can do," she said.

Energy+ is also looking forward to the implementation of the Fair Hydro Plan to assist its customers.

Of its 65,000 customers spread across Cambridge, North Dumfries Township and Brant County, eight had their power cut off before the province banned that practice during the winter. Their power has since been restored, with load limiters, which restricts electricity use to some non-paying customers.

"We do everything we can to work with our customers to help them pay their bills," Shortreed said, noting that some low-income customers are receiving assistance through several programs.

Energy+ president Ian Miles said in a statement, "We've heard from many customers who have shared their frustration about the cost of electricity, both residential and business customers. Energy+ welcomes electricity financial relief for all customers in the province and looks forward to the rollout of the Ontario Fair Hydro Plan."

McGarry admitted that mistakes have been made in the past, but "this is a fix that works for today and for the future".

"There will be no loopholes, no exceptions," McGarry said. "Everyone will see this cut in their bills. This is relief that's designed to last."

With this summer's implementation, McGarry said a homeowner that now pays $135 a month on their electricity bill will see it drop to $101 a month.

She explained that the changes in the Fair Hydro Plan are "decades overdue," and the plan will transform the system from being ratepayer-based to taxpayer-based.

Recognizing that the electricity infrastructure that has been built will last for decades to come, the province, is going to refinance those capital investments to ensure that system costs are more equitably distributed over time, McGarry said, adding that the plan will cost more, but it takes the load off current users and spreads it over past, present and future users and will work much like a long-term house mortgage.

In addition, the government will now fund a number of important programs itself, instead of ratepayers - programs like the Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP).

It is also launching a new Affordability Fund to enhance the OESP and the Rural or Remote Rate Protection program.

The new measures are expected to cost the province up to $2.5 billion over the next three years. Meanwhile the province still anticipates a balanced budget in 2017-18.

Asked if the province couldn't provide a deeper cut than the 25 per cent reduction, McGarry said, "This is what we can afford to do."

Asked how Ontario electricity rates now compare with other jurisdictions, McGarry said the province has been compared to 63 other jurisdictions across North America and currently is ranked 31st.

"There has been a lot of misinformation put out there, but we are right in the middle of the pack when it comes to electricity costs," she said.

Asked how much electric costs are impacting the province's economic competitiveness, McGarry said Ontario leads the country in terms of economic growth and the province is " the top jurisdiction for foreign investment".

"This should make us even stronger,' she said.

Shedding light on hydro woes; A welcome mea culpa, Feb. 27 Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault admits Ontario messed up on hydro rates with bad decisions, Feb. 24 Politicians can't make electricity cheap again, Feb. 23

Toronto Star
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: IN11
Section: Opinion
A welcome mea culpa, Feb. 27

Ontario Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault says that being a world leader in green energy was "absolutely the right policy" for the province. And so, as Ontario becomes an economic basket case, Thibeault plays the naif. He says that mistakes were made, that "hindsight is 20-20." Who could have predicted it?

Well, "anybody with some training in economics," that's who. Lots of folks did predict it, but they were branded "deniers." They were shouted down. Their crunching of the numbers didn't support the green dogma, so they were ignored.

I suppose some good could come from the economic mayhem created by Ontario's green energy program. The good could come in the form of lessons for other jurisdictions - lessons on the perils of allowing dogma to trump economics. Lessons on what happens when governments think that costs don't matter. Because Ontario has become a painful, tragic lesson in how not to draft energy policy.

Murray Whitby, Edmonton

I know that the Star is basically the advertising arm for the Liberal party. However, your editorial "A welcome mea culpa on soaring hydro prices" is right over the top. You state that "in 2003, Ontario's energy infrastructure was outdated and unreliable. Rolling brownouts were common." I have lived in Ontario my entire life and the number of rolling brownouts I have witnessed or even heard about is zero.

Your attempt to blame the Conservative party for the incompetence and failures of Wynne/McGuinty suspends the belief that you are in any way a serious newspaper.

David Hawton, Brampton

Your editorial on hydro prices raised some valid points, but whoever wrote it must be smoking funny cigarettes.

The second paragraph says that "over the past 14 years, hydro prices in the province have tripled." I don't know where you got your numbers, but they sure do not agree with mine, and I have been keeping track of my hydro costs since 2003.

From 2003 to 2016, my hydro rates have increased 84.6 per cent, not the 200 per cent you are quoting. And that includes the cost of sales tax added to hydro rates a number of years ago, which alone caused a 6-per-cent increase. For the period of 2003-15, the increase was 62.92 per cent, an average of 4.84 per cent annually. In 2016, they jumped a whopping 13.32 per cent. My numbers are based on the cost per 100 kilowatt hours, including all charges.

We should be very pleased that we no longer suffer brownouts in the hot weather, or smog days, which were a common occurrence in years past. That comes at some cost.

So please, make sure of your numbers instead of feeding the fears of people who believe everything they read or hear, without checking the validity of the numbers quoted.

George M. McCaig, Burlington

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault admits Ontario messed up on hydro rates with bad decisions, Feb. 24

I share Ontario Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault's frustration. Renewable energy is, of course, a factor in rising electricity rates, but it is a small one. A typical residential customer pays just $11 per month for wind power and $9 for solar power, which together account for about 12 per cent of an average residential bill.

In the time when good information is so important, the media need to do a better job of telling this story, and stop lazily and incorrectly singling out green energy.

Keith Brooks, Toronto

Politicians can't make electricity cheap again, Feb. 23

Bruce Lourie neglected to mention the gas plant scandal, obscenely high executive salaries, obscene subsidies for wind/solar and the deregulated electricity market.

Let hydro run the business without government interference the way they did for 80 years prior to 1998. Hydro prices would be more in line with BC Hydro and Quebec Hydro, which never deregulated and have kept their costs low.

Are you listening Patrick Brown or Andrea Horvath?

John Dolik, Toronto

Sudbury MPP sells hydro plan; 'It's never too late to do the right thing'
Sudbury Star
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: A1 / Front
Section: News
Byline: Harold Carmichael
Source: Sudbury Star
The provincial government decided to cut hydro bills for the long term and not to get re-elected in 2018, Sudbury MPP and Ontario Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said Friday.

Thibeault and Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca held a press conference at Greater Sudbury Utilities to sell the province's Fair Hydro Plan. Thibeault and Premier Kathleen Wynne unveiled the plan Thursday.

The provincial Liberals have been under fire for botched green energy contracts and skyrocketing hydro bills. Wynne's personal popularity level has dropped to 11 per cent, with a provincial election a little more than a year away.

When asked if the 25 per cent cut in residential hydro was being implemented due to a provincial election in 2018, Thibeault said that was not the case.

"It's never too late to do the right thing," Thibeault told reporters. "This is a long-term solution … We had to rebuild a (electricity) system that was in tatters. It didn't have capacity for its own generation. It took time to rebuild and a lot of money."

Thibeault said the Liberal government did not do a very good job of explaining to the public how it fixed the province's electricity system.

"When you look at the system we had in 2003, people forget the blackout (of Aug. 14, 2013)," he said. "People forget we haven't had a smog day since 2014. People had to be told not to go out because of a smog advisory. That's because our government took leadership in investing in a system that was falling apart. I think people understand the system was bad, but they don't understand why their bills went up."

Thibeault said that in 2003, the Liberals found the province's electricity system in poor shape due to decades of neglect and decided to clean it up and also modernize it. That cost was about $50 billion, he said.

"That challenge became an opportunity for us to clean our energy supply mix and address the reliability for our businesses and families all over the province," he said. "We had to invest in generation, transmission and distribution costs."

Nonetheless, the province has acted to cut hydro bills in the wake of growing public anger.

Residential hydro bills across dropped eight per cent in January, thanks to a rebate introduced by the Ontario government.

This summer, they will drop another 17 per cent, courtesy of the Fair Hydro Plan.

Thibeault told reporters in Sudbury the total 25 per cent reduction is being possible because the province will renegotiate longterm contracts to provide electricity, stretching the deals to 30 years from their current 20-year terms.

cash, he has to perform and deliver."

Hydro One CEO Mayo Schmidt earns a $850,000 base salary that could rise to a maximum of $4 million with bonuses.

Anita, who had Wynne on the phone for about 10 minutes, had some parting words of advice for the premier.

"One last thing: see that you get good advisers," she said. "Like, you say '(high hydro bills are) my mistake.' It's not only your mistake. You've got a team there working and some of those are really bad advisers." sud.editorial@sunmedia.ca That renegotiation, while adding some $700 million to $1.4 billion a year in interest to the cost, will take the burden from the present generation of hydro users having to pay the full upfront cost of those contracts, spreading the pain over a longer period.

The reduction will show up in the "Global Adjustment" portion of hydro bills - a total estimated reduction of $2.5 billion a year for the first 10 years.

Thibeault, who was accompanied by Del Duca, who was in the city to appear at a Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce luncheon later in the day, said the total 25 per cent reduction in residential hydro bills will be "the single largest rate-mitigation measure in the province's history."

Del Duca also said annual hydro increases over the next four years would be no higher than the rate of inflation - about two per cent.

Thibeault said the province will also enhance the Rural or Remote Rate Protection Program to provide distribution charge relief to additional customers served by local hydro utilities with the highest rates. An estimated 800,000 electricity customers will benefit as a result.

As well, an expanded Ontario Electricity Support Program will now be funded by the government, instead of ratepayers, resulting in additional saving of $180 to 276 a year for eligible households.

Del Duca said as part of the plan, the province is setting up a $200-million fund to assist lowincome families to reduce their energy costs. He said the fund will be used by local hydro utilities who know their customers and can help them to apply in order to make changes such as switch to light-emitting diode (LED) lights.

In addition, Del Duca said the plan will see delivery charges on bills for people living on First Nation reserves removed, resulting in a saving of about $85/month.

"There is no doubt in my mind these changes are the right thing to do," he said. HCarmichael@postmedia.com

Minister on the defensive; Thibeault says Northerners have been 'bearing the brunt'of high energy costs

The Timmins Daily Press
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: A3
Section: News
Byline: Ron Grech
Source: The Daily Press
Ontario Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault acknowledged that “Northern Ontarians having been bearing the brunt of some of the higher energy costs” in the province.

He believes the 25% reduction presented as the Fair Hydro Plan announced by the Kathleen Wynne Liberal Government on Thursday will go a long way towards providing relief for Northerners.

“We’re holding all rate increases to the cost of inflation; we have made the largest single-rate reduction in electricity rates in Ontario’s history,” said Thibeault.

The Timmins Chamber of Commerce, in its respond to the government’s announcement, welcomed the reduction but expressed some concern about the projected $1.4 billion a year in new interest payments resulting from this announcement.

Not surprisingly, local MPP Gilles Bisson (NDP - Timmins-James Bay) was bluntly dismissive of the plan, calling it a “very short-term fix” that will leave a “real mess” for the next government to clean up after the next provincial election.

Thibeault disagreed, in an interview with The Daily Press, likening the plan to a long-term mortgage that was used to invest in a necessary upgrade of Ontario’s power generation infrastructure 10 to 15 years ago.

“What the Opposition is not talking about is that every party had a responsibility to play in this because every party froze rates, didn’t invest in the system and when you don’t look after assets for decades and as the Premier said, for some 50 years in many cases, the system starts to deteriorate and that came to a head in 2003. So we had to start rebuilding the system in 2003.”

Thibeault said some of those generating assets including hydro electric dams and windmills will last 20, 30 or in some cases even 100 years.

“So why would we make everyone in this generation pay for something that we are all going to utilize” for years to come, said Thibeault, in defence of spreading the costs for this plan over 30 years.

The cut to electricity bills would include the 8% rebate that has already been implemented by the Liberal government, making the actual decrease 17%. The government is also promising that rates will not increase any more than the annual rate of inflation (about 2%) for the next four years.

The government announced the 17% reduction will come into effect this summer.

Electricity system was in 'tatters'; 'We had to invest in generation, transmission and distribution,' minister says
North Bay Nugget
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: A1 / Front
Section: News
Byline: Harold Carmichael
Source: North Bay Nugget
“It’s never too late to do the right thing,” Glenn Thibeault says.

Thibeault, Ontario’s energy minister, made the comment Friday in Sudbury when asked if the 17-percent hydro rate cut to start in June was announced because of the approach of the 2018 provincial election.

“This is a long-term solution,” said the Sudbury MPP. “We had to rebuild a (electricity) system that was in tatters. It didn’t have capacity for its own generation. It took time to rebuild and a lot of money.”

Thibeault said the cut has been made possible by refinancing contracts with electricity generators over 30 years, rather than 20 years.

That renegotiation, while adding some $700 million to $1.4 billion a year in interest, said Thibeault, spreads the pain over a longer period.

Thibeault, who was accompanied by Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca, also said annual hydro increases over the next four years would be held to the rate of inflation - about two per cent.

Back in 2003, Thibeault claims, the Liberals found the province’s electricity system in poor shape due to decades of neglect and decided to clean it up and also modernize it for about $50 billion.

“That challenge became an opportunity for us to clean our energy supply mix and address the reliability for our businesses and families all over the province,” he said. “We had to invest in generation, transmission and distribution.

“I think people understand the system was bad, but they don’t understand why their bills went up.”

Thibeault said the province also will enhance the Rural or Remote Rate Protection Program. An estimated 800,000 electricity customers will benefit.

As well, an expanded Ontario Electricity Support Program will now be funded by the government, instead of ratepayers, resulting in additional savings of $180-276/year for households of eligible size and combined income.

As part of the plan, Del Duca said, the province is setting up a $200-million fund to assist lowincome families to reduce their energy costs. He said the fund will be utilized by local hydro utilities which know their customers and can help them to apply in order to make changes such as switch to light-emitting diode (LED) lights.

Northern Ontarians Are Relieved With The Recent Hydro Cuts

Anchor: With yesterday's announcement that Ontarians will see their Hydro rates cut by another 17 per cent starting in June, reaction is pouring in. Some say it's not enough. Some worry about what's down the road. Most say every little cut helps. CTV's Jessica Gosselin talks to people in Sudbury about their Hydro rate burden.

Reporter: It may be all smiles among these seniors at The Park Side Centre right now, but some of these here to mingle say their smiles disappear when they see their Hydro bill.

Ida Polifroni, Sudbury Resident: I don't wash during the week, I don't use my oven if, I don't have to, during the week. I try to bake or cook in the evening. I batch cook so that I’m utilizing everything all at once. I do my laundry either in the evening or on the weekend. I keep my thermostat set at 16 at night.

Reporter: Polifroni says, even with all these precautions, her Hydro bill continues to go up. Taking a $40 jump just last month. And she's not alone. Brenda Charlebois says she values her family time, but with these high Hydro rates, plans have been cut short.

Brenda Charlebois, Sudbury Resident: Usually once a year we go camping, with the family. Now we can't because we're paying so much into Hydro and all these ridiculous prices.

Shari Larose, Sudbury Resident: You have to have two jobs in the household in order to be able to keep your home now. So what about the seniors, what about the people that don't have the money, what about the people on social assistance? It's very upsetting for all of us.

Reporter: One other Hydro customer told me she wanted to do renovations to her home when she retired, but can't afford it because of her Hydro bills. Adding that's not only is it affected her retirement but now she's afraid she won't have enough money to pay both her taxes and her Hydro at the same time. Jessica Gosselin, CTV News, Sudbury.

Political bailout with public money
National Post
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: A14
Section: Editorials
Source: National Post
If we may paraphrase King Pyrrhus, a few more acts of “fairness” like the one Premier Kathleen Wynne offered the people of Ontario this week and the province will be undone.

Responding to widespread public anger - and, dare we suggest, plummeting poll numbers? - the premier announced that hydro bills would soon be down by 25 per cent. This includes eight per cent from the previously announced removal of the provincial share of the HST from bills, at an annual cost of $1 billion to the provincial coffers. The remaining 17 per cent, Wynne explained, would largely come from Ontario pushing existing costs out to the future. Long-term contracts for power generation from nuclear and “green” energy providers will now be paid out over 30 years, not 20.

This comes at the price, literally, of paying considerably more for hydro over longer. The added interest costs will ultimately amount, it is estimated, to a whopping $25 billion, a figure that’s large even by the formidable standard set by previous Ontario Liberal catastrophes. A further $2.5 billion will simply be paid out, over three years, from the province’s general revenues - a robbing of the proverbial Peter to pay the provincial Paul.

The premier described these steps, as well as some further tweaks and offsets for

vulnerable ratepayers, as fair. Indeed, “fair” was very much her word of the day - it was even written on the little placard that adorned her podium when she made the announcement. “Over time, it will cost a bit more. And it will take longer to pay off. But it is fairer - because it doesn’t ask this generation of hydro customers alone to pay the freight for everyone before and after.”

It feels almost redundant, at this point, to note that the premier and her Ontario Liberal party have an increasingly casual relationship with the truth, particularly when it comes to energy policy. Still, there is nothing “fair” in Thursday’s announcement. It is, in fact, objectively the opposite. Future generations of Ontarians will now be tasked not only with paying off the tab of the Liberals’ spendingorgy of the last 14 years, which has seen the province pile on an astonishing $173 billion in debt. Children today and those not yet born will now be made to assume responsibility for energy infrastructure and generation capacity that, as they pay for it, will likely require major refurbishment or outright replacement a decade before it’s paid off. Future Ontarians will be forced to finance new, needed infrastructure projects while still paying off old ones thanks to Wynne’s latest scheme. And that’s before we even tally up the money diverted from other urgent priorities to cover the increased interest costs, the loss of HST revenue and the outright subsidies from general revenues that also make up this “fair” plan.

If only we could beam the premier 30 years into the future, so she can explain to the burdened Ontarians of the 2040s how “fair” her plan is for them.

This ruse is, at least, transparent in its motives. As ever, the provincial Liberals have decided that their own sagging political fortunes need boosting, and the best way to do that is through the liberal (can that even be called a pun anymore?) spending of public money. Lowering monthly utility bills is smart retail politics. As is their microscopic loosening of provincial alcohol sales: a born-free Ontarian is now able to buy some brands of beer at a few grocery stores, between certain hours and using specific checkout aisles. Ditto the premier’s recent decision to quash Toronto Mayor John Tory’s request for road tolls to finance new transit projects, and the just-announced public consultation towards cracking down on the practice of people selling a concert ticket they lawfully possess for whatever markup the market will bear. The Liberals are clearly aware of their grim electoral prospects and are trying to make nice again with infuriated voters in time for the 2018 election.

It might work. It has before. But let’s at least be clear in our language. Nothing about this hydro remortgaging is fair. This is tantamount to an abuse of power. A government that has veered from one fiscal disaster to another is essentially bailing itself out, a year before an election, using public money. Its very premise is bribing away the anger of today's voters with money stolen from future taxpayers. It might be shrewd politics, but it's not fair.

Here's what it most certainly is: An admission of failure, and a gesture of helplessness. It is offensive to the taxpayers and overtly harmful to the current and future interests of the province of Ontario. It is, in other words, an entirely accurate reflection of this Liberal government's record.

Hydro reactions mixed; UWBG head says provincial moves will help; MPP says they will cost more in end
Owen Sound Sun Times
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: A1 / Front
Section: Local News
Byline: Denis Langlois
Source: Owen Sound Sun Times
Measures announced by Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne to reduce residential electricity bills -including a 17 per cent cut this summer -will bring muchneeded and significant relief to low-income households, especially those in rural areas, says the executive director of the United Way of Bruce Grey.

"I think this is really going to help with energy poverty in our area," Francesca Dobbyn said in an interview.

Dobbyn was invited by provincial officials to Thursday's announcement of Ontario's 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.

Dobbyn said, all together, the measures could result in a 50 per cent reduction in hydro bills for some households in Grey-Bruce.

"This is quite a significant change to the system. It's definitely a significant change to rural Ontario in terms of bringing costs down for our low-density users," she said.

But while Dobbyn praised the plan, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound Progressive Conservative MPP Bill Walker said there is nothing "fair" about the refinancing proposal, noting it will cost taxpayers "in a worst-case scenario" as much as $42 billion over 30 years in added interest costs to "fix the hydro mess" created by the Liberal government.

"While rate relief is needed because Ontarians, businesses and public institutions are being walloped by sky-rocketing hydro bills, I'm troubled that the premier and her government are using taxpayers' money to provide the discount," he said in a statement.

"It's kind of short-term gain for long-term pain because they're not changing the number of what you're going to pay, they're just spreading it out over a lot more years," he added in an interview. "So we're going to pay a lot more interest, which means that's money that's not going to go to programs and services."

Peter Reesor, CEO of the Owen Sound & District Chamber of Commerce, called the plan "a good start," but said it doesn't tackle the central issue of soaring hydro costs.

"The relief will be greatly appreciated but it still doesn't solve the problem in the long run. We're basically passing an even higher debt on this -the cost of hydro -to our children and our grandchildren," he said.

Grey County Warden Alan Barfoot said the Liberal government has "finally listened" to concerns over high electricity bills.

County council asked the province last year to "implement structural changes to address the unfair practice" of charging more in delivery fees to rural residents compared to other hydro consumers.

"At the end of the day, (the hydro plan) will help everybody on their hydro bills moving forward because it's just gone up way too fast for what people can currently afford," he said.

The hydro plan, which Wynne called the “largest cut to electricity rates in the history of Ontario,” also includes a promise to hold rate increases to the rate of inflation for at least the next four years.

The province says the plan will provide immediate relief to consumers by “smoothing out” the payment of energy contracts -via the global adjustment charge -over 30 years instead of 20.

In later years, the province says the cost of the refinancing would be recovered from electricity ratepayers.

The Liberal government says its plan will cost $25 billion in extra interest payments over 30 years.

Other measures announced in the plan, which are expected to cost the province $2.5 billion over the next three years, include expanding the Rural or Remote Rate Protection program to provide distribution charge relief to hundreds of thousands of additional customers with the highest rates, including low-density rural Hydro One customers.

It also proposes increasing the Ontario Energy Support Program by 50 per cent -to provide an additional $180 to $276 per year for households of eligible size and combined income -and transferring the cost of the program from hydro bills to provincial revenues.

An Affordability Fund is to be created to provide support to more customers for energy efficiency upgrades.

“One of the things we need is affordability and for some of our lower middle-class income earners that do not fit into existing programs, this affordability plan for electricity improvements to a household is going to be significant,” Dobbyn said.

“We don’t have the details on what it exactly is going to be but it’s to help people who have high consumption but don’t have large dollar amounts to go and make changes to their house; be it new windows or insulation.”

Dobbyn, whose agency runs a utility assistance program for low-income households at risk of disconnection, said she is also pleased social program costs, like for the OESP and the Affordability Fund, will not come from hydro bills.

“So everybody’s bills from the industrial, small business consumer right to the residential user is going to see a drop because of that alone,” she said. “So your rural high-density locations such as the City of Owen Sound are not going to see a 50 per cent drop in their bill but they’re still going to see a significant drop because of the changes in how the social programs are being funded.”

Walker, meanwhile, said the government’s plan does not include measures to cancel expensive energy contracts, repeal the Green Energy Act, stop the sale of Hydro One or address executive salaries in the electricity sector.

“Those are all things that could be done very simply and easily that would provide some relief,” he said.

“The one thing she (Wynne) keeps getting away with is she could have cancelled some of these Green Energy contracts with absolutely no penalty or impact on the taxpayer and she didn’t.”

He said the Liberals were scheduled to sign more energy contracts Friday “despite Ontario running a surplus of power and paying Quebec and the United States up to a half a billion dollars each year to take its surplus.”

A spokesman for Bruce Power said the province’s plan to spread the cost of electricity investments over 10 more years will not impact the nuclear generator.

“In fact, it aligns very well with our long-term vision which sees the site’s horizon extend until 2064,” John Peevers said.

“We are proud to be part of the solution in the discussion on electricity prices as Bruce Power provides 30 per cent of Ontario’s electricity at 30 per below the average residential price and we plan to continue delivering low-cost electricity for decades to come.”

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce said the hydro plan will bring “immediate relief to the business community,” but noted it will continue to advocate for “further amendments to the province’s energy strategy in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of our energy system."

The organization said it is pleased the province's plan includes an expansion to the Industrial Conservation Initiative, a rebate program for small manufacturers and industries that can shift their consumption to off-peak hours.

Province's Hydro bill relief is a step in the right direction, City says
Kawartha Lakes This Week
Fri Mar 3 2017
Section: News
Byline: Mary Riley
Permalink
KAWARTHA LAKES - Every day, Michelle Corley sees people struggling with the high cost of hydro.

Corley is a program supervisor with City of Kawartha Lakes/ County of Haliburton Housing Helps (a division of the City's Human Services department). The program helps lower income homeowners and tenants cope with significant arrears in their electricity bills. (The program does not provide regular assistance, only for those in arrears struggling to catch up, she noted.)

In 2016, she said, 1,100 homelessness prevention and support benefits were issued to Kawartha Lakes and County of Haliburton residents. Of that, 137 households received assistance with their hydro bill arrears.

In her statement on Thursday (March 2) Premier Kathleen Wynne announced hydro rates would be cut by a total of 25 per cent starting this summer, with increases thereafter held to the inflation rate (about two per cent) for the next four years.

According to the Premier, the Province is moving forward with a 17 per cent reduction on monthly bills on top of the eight per cent rebate of the provincial portion of the harmonized sales tax that took effect Jan. 1.

A Toronto Star article reports that overall, the 25 per cent cut will cost the provincial treasury about $1.83 billion a year, although the books will still be balanced in the spring budget. Interest costs will total $25 billion over 30 years, the Star reports, noting the move comes after the average residential hydro bill has jumped from $91 per month in 2005 to $156 last year.

Corley says the Province's action is a step in the right direction, but predicts there will likely be many people who will continue to struggle with hydro bills.

And skyrocketing rents don't help the situation.

"It's not uncommon for us to see people whose hydro costs are 50 per cent of their rent," she says.

A recent Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) survey revealed that rents in Kawartha Lakes are higher than in Peterborough, Corley added. "And, we have a less than one per cent vacancy rate."

Corley noted another problem that contributes to high heating costs is that there is no incentive for landlords to retro-fit their properties, making them more energy efficient when the tenants are paying utilities.

Electricity arrears payments to low income households accounted for 27 per cent of the 2016 Homelessness Prevention Supports budget.

"For those living in very rural areas of our region, electric heat is often their primary heating source," Corley said, "and because of their remote setting the delivery charges on their electricity bill are significant."

In 2016, the Ontario Energy Board established the Ontario Electricity Support Program for low income households. But, Corley said the application process is multi-step, must be completed every two years and results in only $30 to $50 reduction each month.

"It's a lot of work for a few dollars off a very high electric bill," she said.

Corley gave an example of one situation Housing Helps assisted.

“An elderly couple receiving basic pensions faced significant electricity arrears due to billing problems by Hydro One. They heat exclusively with electricity, so their average bill is $415 per month. Hydro One wanted them to pay an additional $200 per month to address the arrears, which they couldn’t afford to do on their fixed income.”

With the proposed changes, Corley said the couple’s average bill would be about $300 per month, still “quite high” on their fixed income.

“But, we commonly see electricity bills averaging $400 per month, so the province’s commitment to lower [hydro bills] is certainly welcome.”

Local MPP Laurie Scott told This Week she has a full time staff member just to deal with the volume of complaints and questions about hydro from her constituents.

“It’s the number-one issue in my riding, and it has been for a long time,” she said. “There are people literally choosing between putting food on the table and heat. I have seniors wearing five layers of sweaters because they can’t afford their hydro.”

Scott said hydro costs have risen 400 per cent since 2003, and blamed the Liberal government “for creating this mess.”

She said the Conservatives have been “screaming for years” about rising hydro rates, and largely blames the Green Energy Act (2009) for “forcing wind and solar contracts” and driving electricity costs up.

“We can use water and nuclear energy” as green energy sources, Scott said. “But, the Liberals continue to roll out [wind and solar] contracts and force them on municipalities that don’t want them. They just aren’t listening.”

Scott said the government’s move to combat electricity bills now is “just a ploy because the election is coming up. Energy poverty has been a huge issue for Ontarians for a long time. People are in dire straights. There was a man who died in Peterborough County after an explosion from trying to heat with a generator. Why didn’t they do something about hydro rate relief long before this?

“That is the question everyone is asking.”

Scott also challenged the Premier’s numbers, saying that average hydro bills in rural Ontario have been more than triple the average of $135 the Wynne government has quoted.

On average, she said, her constituents’ bills, especially in rural areas are about $300 per month.

Calling the rate reduction a “band aid”, Scott said the new electricity plan will only burden future generations.

“Ontarians will be on the hook for an extra $25 billion in interest payments for the cost of electricity over 30 years.”

Scott noted taxpayers are hit twice, because not only must they pay their own hydro bills, but also for municipal hydro through their tax dollars, providing an example.

The following is a breakdown of a summary hydro bill the City received for 51 street lights last August. The total cost of $41,133 breaks down as:

Electricity

$86.00

Retailer (LAS)

$2,326.00

Global Adjustment

$15,793.00

Delivery Charges

$16,125.00

Regulatory Charge

$924.00

Debt Retirement Charge

$987.00

Street Light Charge

$327.00

Sentinel Light Rental

$9.00

HST

$4,756.00

If premier leaves, who takes her place?; Liberals consider alternatives if hydro cut can't save leader
Toronto Star
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: A12
Section: News
Byline: Robert Benzie Toronto Star
The job is not open and no one is plotting regicide to trigger a vacancy.

But there are whispers at Queen's Park about who might replace Premier Kathleen Wynne as Liberal leader if her dramatic 25-per-cent hydro rate cut gambit fails to improve the governing party's popularity.

Asked on Thursday if she will stick around to fight next year's election, Wynne was firm.

"Yes I am," the premier told a huge media throng moments after unveiling the largest electricity rate reduction scheme in Ontario history.

Wynne - who succeeded Dalton McGuinty in 2013 and brought the Liberals back from the dead with a majority victory the next year - is resolute about leading her party into another campaign.

"My job is not finished … I'm going to run in the election in 2018," she said Friday in an interview with Matt Galloway on CBC Radio's Metro Morning.

There is, however, mounting pressure on her from within her own party because little-known rookie Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown stubbornly enjoys a double-digit lead in most public opinion polls.

That's why she stopped Toronto Mayor John Tory's proposal to toll the Gardiner Expressway and Don Valley Parkway, which was fashionable downtown but hated in the 905.

And it's why she is slashing the hydro rates that are particularly crippling in rural Ontario.

"The connection between those issues is that there is an affordability quotient in each one of them," the premier, who has been criticized for ignoring pocketbook matters, told Metro Morning.

Last fall, Wynne fought back tears both behind closed doors at a caucus retreat and later in front of delegates at the party's annual general meeting in Ottawa as she took responsibility for the Liberals' political woes.

While she is well-regarded by her ministers and MPPs - unlike the introverted McGuinty, the sociable premier genuinely enjoys their company - they are mindful that her personal unpopularity could cost them all.

The jangled nerves of many elected members are shared by party insiders who pray the hydro fix is a political panacea.

"I hope this works. If it doesn't, then I think she will have to do some serious soul-searching after the House rises," said one senior Liberal, referring to the legislature's summer break that begins June 1.

If Wynne opts to take one for the team this summer, the Liberals - who choose their leaders at delegated conventions - could hold a leadership election in the fall.

That would give a new leader/premier just enough time for a throne speech to outline a fresh Liberal agenda before Christmas and craft an election-friendly budget by the June 7, 2018, campaign.

But who could succeed the battle-tested and formidable Wynne?

Many names are mentioned - quietly - in the corridors of power.

They include:

Attorney General Yasir Naqvi, a former Liberal party president who represents the riding of Ottawa Centre. Naqvi is especially popular with the Liberals' youth wing.

Health Minister Eric Hoskins, the St. Paul's MPP who backed Wynne after finishing last in the 2013 Liberal leadership contest.

A Rhodes scholar, Hoskins is also an Order of Canada recipient for his aid work in overseas war zones.

Finance Minister Charles Sousa, another 2013 leadership candidate.

Sousa will balance the books this spring and the affable Mississauga South MPP's seat is crucial in the Grit roadmap to electoral victory next year.

Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca, the Vaughan MPP who was instrumental in derailing the Gardiner/DVP toll proposal.

Del Duca is presiding over a massive expansion of public transit, including a subway extension to his 905 riding, which will open this year.

Children and Youth Services Minister Michael Coteau, the Don Valley East MPP, who won praise from the parents of autistic children for a plan to improve therapy.

Coteau was also a key player in the successful 2015 Pan Am Games in Toronto.

Education Minister Mitzie Hunter, the Scarborough-Guildwood MPP. Hunter has quietly and effectively inked union contract extensions with teachers through 2019, eliminating a potential electoral headache for the government next year.

Former minister Sandra Pupatello, the runner-up to Wynne in the 2013 Liberal race. Pupatello, now a successful businesswoman, is a populist firebrand who carries little of the baggage from McGuinty's scandal-plagued final years and none from the Wynne era.

So there would be no shortage of candidates if the premier's job is vacated.

Campaign pans price of energy; Canadian Taxpayers Federation uses signs, billboards to get its

message across to public
Kingston Whig-Standard
Sat Mar 4 2017
Page: A2
Section: News
Byline: Ian Macalpine
Source: The Whig-Standard
The Canadian Taxpayers Federation is erecting billboards all over Ontario to bring the issue of the province's cap-and-trade program to the public and let Liberal MPPs know it is against the program and overall high energy costs.

Christine Van Geyn, the Ontario director for the federation, was in Kingston on Friday unveiling a sign in the Springer Memorial parking lot at Bagot and Queen streets.

The lot is adjacent to LaSalle Mews, where Kingston and the Islands MPP Sophie Kiwala has her constituency office.

The federation's largest billboard is in Toronto, across from the Rogers Centre. Signs will also be in bus shelters and on transit buses.

Billboards, approximately three metres high and nine metres wide, like the one in Kingston, have been put up in Mississauga, Barrie and Midland, with more to come.

"We're putting up billboards all across Ontario to bring awareness and engagement about the high energy bill issue in this province," Van Geyn said.

"We're really in a crisis situation with electricity bills, and now natural gas and gasoline bills being jacked up with cap and trade."

The federation claims that the environmental initiative will cost Ontario taxpayers $2.2 billion, or $1,358 for every person in Ontario, by 2030.

Cap and trade was established by the Ontario government on Jan. 1 of this year to cut down on greenhouse gas emissions. All businesses, factories, homes and institutions have greenhouse gas limits.

If the limits are exceeded, special carbon credits can be purchased to support a green business and balance out the emissions.

But Van Geyn said the only green companies benefitting from the initiative are in California and Quebec.

"That's your money going to Quebec and California to pay for cap and trade," Van Geyn said.

She wants people in Kingston to let Kiwala know their opposition to the program.

"We're going to be encouraging people in the coming days to call her up and tell her what you think about cap and trade," she said. "And what her government's failed decade of policies meddling with the electricity and power sectors have done to the province.

"We want them to repeal this tax as soon as possible because it's doing real damage in Ontario."

According to the Government of Ontario website, cap and trade will cost the average Ontario household about $13 more per month to fuel a car and heat a home.

Cap and trade is projected to generate about $1.9 billion per year in proceeds, said the website. "Ontario will invest this into programs that save homeowners energy and money."

But Van Geyn said cap and trade will add 25 per cent to the cost of electricity over the next four years. "It's something we can't afford."

Van Geyn also scoffed at Thursday's announcement by the provincial government of a 17 per cent decrease of Hydro bills.

The reduction is being achieved by spreading some costs over a longer period of time, akin to amortizing a mortgage over 30 years instead of 20, a move that will ultimately cost ratepayers billions of dollars in extra interest.

“It’s just another one of Kathleen Wynne’s shell games. It’s kicking the can down the road, it’s going to add $14 billion in costs to electricity over the next 10 years,” Van Geyn said.

“Really we should be paying for power as we consume it. We shouldn’t be asking our children and grandchildren to pay for it.” - with a file from Postmedia Network imacalpine@postmedia.com Twitter @IanMacAlpine

Tory dismisses report that Hydro One in discussions to buy Toronto Hydro for $3B

CBC News
2017-03-05
Byline: Muriel Draaisma

Original Web Location

Toronto Mayor John Tory is disputing a news report that says Hydro One is in talks to buy Toronto Hydro for $3 billion.

"I can confirm that no discussions are taking place with respect to the sale of Toronto Hydro to anyone," Tory said in a tweet on Saturday night.

The mayor was referring to a Reuters report published on Saturday that quoted two anonymous sources saying Hydro One and Toronto Hydro have been in talks "for the past few months" but those discussion have not "entered final stages."

According to the sources, described as "people with knowledge of the matter," the talks involve Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, Toronto Hydro CEO Anthony Haines, Hydro One CEO Mayo Schmidt, and Tory himself. The sources also said the talks could collapse.

The report said one proposal under discussion is that Hydro One would buy Toronto Hydro half through cash and half through stock. Such a transaction, according to the report, would enable the city to benefit from Hydro One's dividend.

But in a statement attached to his tweet, Tory dismissed the report.

"In recent months, I clearly indicated that I would not be supporting any proposal to sell Toronto Hydro," he said.

"Rather, I indicated my support for additional city investment in a Toronto Hydro that remained in public hands. We are presently exploring how we can make that investment happen on that basis so that we have a reliable, up-to-date electricity provider for the people of Toronto."

The Reuters report also said the city is looking at other ways to selling off its assets, including putting its Green P parking business up for sale.

Tory, in his tweet and statement, did not dismiss the idea of a possible sale of the Green P parking business. Tory could not be reached for further comment on Sunday.

Last September, Tory spoke to the Toronto Region Board of Trade, saying he has directed city staff to "examine the whole question of how Toronto Hydro is structured and financed."

The mayor said the city will also look at its parking and real estate assets "which may present opportunities to help with city building."

In an interview with Metro Morning a day after that speech, Tory said there was currently no specific proposal on the table to sell any stake of Toronto Hydro. He also said he remained committed to keeping the utility "in public hands."

But he said he said city staff should continue to explore ways to "unlock" value in the public utility.

Toronto Hydro, which operates an electrical distribution system that serves about 740,000 customers in Toronto, is the largest municipal electricity distribution company in Canada.

Owned solely by the city of Toronto, it distributes about 18 per cent of the electricity consumed in Ontario.

Upgrades at Catholic schools will help meet province's climate change requirements

CTV News
2017-03-05
Byline: Colleen MacDonald, CTV London

Original Web Location

The London District Catholic School Board has started a $9.9-million dollar program that will take a large step towards making its 54 schools in the London area more environmentally friendly.

The move is part of Ontario’s Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP), which mandates that businesses and organizations across the province, including school boards meet Ontario’s targets in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The board's schools are being renovated through a partnership with an energy solutions company called Ameresco Canada. The board says its partnership with Ameresco will reduce energy costs while at the same time meet the requirements of the CCAP and avoid cap-and-trade penalties.

The renewal program will replace all fluorescent lighting with LED lamps. Some schools will have upgrades done to their heating/cooling/ventilation systems, building controls, boilers and water heaters, in addition to other electrical and mechanical retrofits.

The board expects the initiative will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 10 per cent. Ontario's climate change action plan requires all ministries to reach a 15 per cent reduction by 2020.

The project will be complete by 2018, and is expected to save the board over $500,000 each year in utility costs.

Bruce-Grey-Huron Reps Attend Bruce Power Developer Information Session

Blackburnnews.com
2017-03-06
Byline: JOHN CHIPPA

Original Web Location

Bruce Power’s Life-Extension Program is moving to a new phase.

Over 150 developers, realtors and municipal officials from across Bruce, Grey and Huron counties received a first-hand look Friday at the expected economic opportunities that will accompany this Program.

The Developer Information Session was part of the joint Nuclear Economic Development and Innovation Initiative between the County of Bruce and Bruce Power. It outlined the planning and development considerations as they relate to the impending economic development opportunities.

The first of six Major Component Replacement Projects will begin in Unit 6 in 2020. In the meantime, the county and Bruce Power continue to work together to have suppliers invest in the area by opening offices in Bruce, Grey and Huron counties, and by hiring local people, which will boost the region’s economy.

James Scongack, Bruce Power’s Vice President, Corporate Affairs and Environment, said the entire region will benefit from the Life-Extension Program, which officially began on January 1st, 2016, and remains on time and on budget.

Scongack added, “Our goal is to maximize the economic impact our $13 billion private, on-site investment has on the community as a whole. Bruce Power is investing billions into our site so it can
provide low-cost, carbon-free electricity for Ontario families and businesses through to 2064, and we want our suppliers and contractors to also invest in our communities, which have supported
the nuclear industry without fail since the 1960s.”

With this unprecedented investment program will also come a need for new housing, which is why the developer session was so important, Scongack added.

Kelley Coulter, Bruce County's Chief Administrative Officer explained, "We wanted the Developer Information Session to be an open forum for discussion and dialogue between the municipal sector, the county's planning department, Bruce Power, developers and realtors. We are encouraging developers and communities to look to the investment opportunities in the area and how we can support regional growth opportunities."

The myths and realities of carbon pricing in Canada and beyond
The Globe and Mail
Mon Mar 6 2017
Page: B4
Section: Report on Business
Byline: JASON CLEMENS, KENNETH GREEN
There's a general, indeed a strong, consensus within the economic community that a properly designed carbon tax can both reduce emissions and improve the economy. We broadly agree with this academic analysis. The problem is that carbon taxes in the real world have to be implemented through a political system that deviates substantially from the academic ideal.

Economists tend to agree that the most efficient way to manage emissions is by placing a price on them that reflects the social costs of the emissions. By placing a price on carbon, emitting firms are incentivized to introduce emission-reducing technologies or change their production. In other words, the introduction of a price on carbon creates incentives for firms (and individuals) to respond to the social costs of emissions.

Critically, however, there are several key assumptions necessary for this approach to be efficient. First, the introduction of a carbon price must replace, not be in addition to, existing regulations.

Second, revenues from carbon pricing (i.e., tax) must be used in their totality to reduce other more costly taxes such as marginal personal or business income taxes. The idea is that revenues from carbon pricing are used to reduce other more damaging taxes so there's a net improvement in incentives for investment and entrepreneurship, which yield stronger economic growth.

Third, and related to the second, revenues from the carbon tax should not be used to subsidize substitutes (wind, solar or other alternative energies) for carbon-emitting activities since the whole point of introducing the price on carbon is to allow the market to determine the optimal substitutes.

No jurisdiction in or outside of Canada, including much-heralded British Columbia, meets these assumptions. No province or country has introduced an "ideal" carbon-pricing system and thus the benefits from it will necessarily be less than theory suggests.

No jurisdiction that introduced carbon pricing has eliminated the corresponding commandand-control regulations. Europe, California and all of the Canadian provinces have retained most, if not all of their existing regulations after introducing carbon pricing.

Moreover, no province or country has maintained revenue neutrality for carbon pricing. Perhaps the closest and certainly most talked about is B.C., which maintained revenue neutrality for the first five years of its carbon tax. However, beginning in 2013-14, B.C.'s carbon tax began generating revenues in excess of the legitimate tax offsets. Indeed, the government's own projections indicate that the carbon tax will generate almost $900-million in net revenues over a sixyear period.

Finally, many jurisdictions - including Ontario - specifically use carbon-pricing revenues to subsidize alternative energy sources such as wind and solar. Subsidizing carbon-intense energy substitutes such as wind and solar short-circuits the market process envisioned by carbon pricing advocates by having governments choose the "right" solution.

Further complicating the economics of carbon pricing are considerations regarding competitiveness and potential leakage. Specifically, adding a carbon tax means that the costs for firms in carbon-intensive industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, and resources are higher relative to their competitors with no such taxes. This creates incentives for firms to switch production from jurisdictions with carbon taxes to those without, which would damage the Canadian economy without providing any environmental benefit. This is made all the more poignant now that it's clear the United States will not introduce a national carbon tax.

Our own federal government has mandated carbon pricing for all provinces by 2018. It’s imperative, therefore, that we understand the realities of carbon pricing as opposed to the theoretical possibilities. The politically altered carbon pricing observed in and outside of Canada, including B.C.‘s carbon tax, will inevitably deliver lower benefits than the theoretical models predict or advocates suggest - and do real harm to the Canadian economy.

Jason Clemens and Kenneth Green are analysts with the Fraser Institute.

Prince may get piped in; Natural gas project must now get OEB nod

The Sault Star
Mon Mar 6 2017
Page: A4
Section: News
Byline: Marguerite La Haye
Source: Special To The Star

The natural gas pipelines Prince residents have been awaiting for almost two years may go into the ground this summer.

The $3-million construction project hinges on whether Union Gas gets the nod from the Ontario Energy Board to extend its pipelines into Prince and three other small communities.

Speaking to a standing-room-only crowd at the community centre, Glen Huard, the company’s manager of construction and growth for the Northeast district, said Union Gas will soon file its application with the OMB.

“We’re hopeful we’ll get a decision from the OEB by the first week in July and start construction immediately after. If all goes well, we would hope to have the community done in an eight-or nine-week construction window,” Huard said.

However, Union Gas will need financial support from customers and the township to help keep the project afloat, he added.

New customers in Prince will pay a surcharge of .23 per m3 consumed, or roughly $500 annually for “the typical house.”

Additionally, the township will be asked to provide Union Gas with voluntary tax relief through rebates on its property taxes. The rebates will continue as long as the customer surcharge is in effect.

Union Gas will also ask council for letters supporting its application to the OMB, Huard said.

He noted that the OEB had already approved the use of surcharges and tax relief to help bring natural gas into sparsely populated areas, where construction and operations costs may exceed total revenues.

He told residents the measures are needed in the wake of the OEB’s rejection of the company’s proposal to charge its 1.4 million present customers a minimal rate hike -$1 to $4 a year - to subsidize the cost of expansion.

Huard also highlighted the need for funding from the province’s recently announced Natural Gas Grant Program, which provides $100 million in grants for expansion into First Nation and rural communities, and urged Mayor Ken Lamming and council to “have a continued dialogue” about the grant’s details when they meet with government officials.

With no provincial funding, the pipeline project would depend on surcharges and tax relief for 22 years, Huard said, but with a grant, the time frame would be reduced.

In a question period following Huard’s presentation, one resident asked how large a grant the township would need to shorten the surcharge period.

Huard replied that he didn’t yet have a figure.

Other residents questioned the $500 annual surcharge and the 22-year timeframe.

Citing a Union Gas telephone survey, they had participated in early this year, they said they'd been told that they'd see $1,000 surcharges for 25 years.

One resident added that if the survey figures were accurate, he'd stick with his propane furnace.

However, Huard said he doubted that a surcharge of .23 m3 would amount to $1,000 a year.

“It might cost you that if you heat your house with the windows open,” he said.

Wendy Landry, the company's manager for municipal and aboriginal affairs, pointed out that customers whose annual surcharges exceeded the $500 average would still see savings over the long term.

“The savings by going to natural gas versus existing heating costs could be as much as $1,500 a year, so if it costs you a little bit on the front end, your return on investment over the long haul would still be better,” Landry said.

She added that a natural gas heating system would increase a home's market value “by quite a bit” if the owner decided to sell.

Landry also speculated that the provincial government would distribute funds from the Natural Gas Grant among the most economically feasible projects, such as the Prince pipeline, so that more communities would get a share.

“Remember, next year's an election year,” Landry said.

When asked if the project could also obtain a federal infrastructure grant, Landry replied that these grants are based on a municipality's need and are typically allocated to road and bridge construction.

Lamming noted, however, that he had asked FedNor staff in Sault Ste. Marie to look into other sources of federal funding for pipelines.

When asked which streets the project would include, Huard listed 13, including those in Gros Cap, which he said would be served in whole or in part if the OEB approved the Union Gas application.

Karen Trudel, the company's project manager for Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie, said homes within 30 metres of the property line would be connected to Union Gas pipelines free of charge.

The cost for any additional length would be $45/metre up to 100 metres, Trudel said.

She also explained that customers whose homes were 100 metres or more from the property line could be approved for a property line meter set, where the meter is mounted at the property line and downstream service is provided by the customer's heating contractor.

“We're trying to do everything we can to accommodate customers who have really long services from the road,” Trudel said.

One resident also asked whether the 2-inch pipeline at Sunnyside Beach could be extended westward to serve residents in the east end of Gros Cap.

Trudel said the option wouldn't be needed unless the overall project fell through, and Union Gas had to expand into Prince one street at a time.

After an hour, when it was clear that not all residents' questions had immediate answers, Huard distributed copies of his business card and invited residents to call him directly or to ask follow-up questions at the township office.

Before adjourning the meeting, council passed a resolution to support the expansion of natural gas into Prince and to commit the township in principle to providing Union Gas with financial support in the form of tax rebates.

Ontario Liberals are quietly protesting
Waterloo Region Record
Mon Mar 6 2017

Page: A9
Section: EDITORIAL
Byline: Geoffrey Stevens
Watch British Columbia.

The six-year-old provincial Liberal government of Premier Christy Clark meets the electorate on May 9, and the outcome is anyone's guess.

B.C. elections are often isolated provincial phenomena with little impact beyond the mountains. This time, however, the outcome will resonate as far east as Ontario where another Liberal premier, Kathleen Wynne, is in even deeper trouble than Clark. A Clark victory would at least buoy Liberal spirits in Ontario.

First, British Columbia. The centre-right Liberals - in some respects they are closer ideologically to Progressive Conservatives parties in other provinces than they are to Justin Trudeau's left-centre federal Liberals - have been in power in Victoria for 16 years, first under Gordon Campbell and since 2011 under Clark.

If she wins on May 9, it will be the fifth consecutive mandate for the B.C. Liberals. But it won't come easily.

A Mainstreet/Postmedia poll two weeks ago had the Liberals in a dead heat with the New Democrats at 37 per cent apiece (with the Greens at 17). Worse, for Clark, her average disapproval rating in three relatively recent polls was 56 per cent. Not good.

Mind you, Ontario's Wynne would kill for numbers like Clark's. The poll aggregator ThreeHundredEight.com put her Liberals 27 per cent in a new consolidation on Feb. 26; that was 14 points behind Patrick Brown's Progressive Conservatives (at

41 per cent - enough for a majority government) and just one point ahead of Andrea Horwath's NDP (26 per cent).

Wynne's own approval rating is disastrous - just 16 per cent, compared with

70 per cent disapproval - and she places a dismal third when Ontarians are asked which party leader they would prefer as premier.

Wynne's problems are not new, but they are getting worse. The enthusiasm that greeted her when she became premier in 2013 (taking over from the uninspiring Dalton McGuinty) was genuine and it carried her to a majority government in 2014. But the zest did not last for long after that election. Today, the Liberals seem tired, grey, uninspired and not very competent.

Their support is concentrated in the old city of Toronto. They trail both the PCs and NDP in 905, northern Ontario and southwestern Ontario and are well behind the Tories in Eastern Ontario.

Recently, in a bid to regain support in 905, Wynne overruled Toronto Mayor John Tory's plan to impose tolls on the overcrowded Gardiner Expressway and Don Valley Parkway. Last week, she announced cuts in the price of electricity (17 per cent added to an earlier eight per cent) - vastly expensive moves designed to soothe angry hydro customers in the north and rural Ontario.

Will it work? Probably not. Liberals are starting to protest - anonymously to date - that Wynne may well drag the party down to defeat in the election scheduled for June 7 next year. Last week, the Toronto Star, the Liberals' most loyal friend among the media, published profiles of seven potential candidates for Wynne's job.

There is a message in all this for the premier.

It is: Turn the ship around in a hurry or turn the helm over to someone else.

No ranking Liberal will say this on the record (yet), but the party is looking for a go-or-stay decision from Wynne this summer, followed by a leadership convention, if required, in the fall to give a new leader time to save the Good Ship Liberal by June of next year.

CORRECTION. Last week's column, in commenting on Andrew Scheer's campaign for the leadership of the federal Conservative party, made this reference to a former chief of staff to prime minister Stephen

Harper: “Harper loyalist Guy Giorno may not be Scheer’s official campaign manager, but insiders believe he is calling the shots.” Not so, say both Giorno and Scheer campaign manager Hamish Marshall. Now an integrity commissioner for various Ontario municipalities, Giorno says he is no longer active in partisan politics and is not supporting Scheer or anyone else. I stand properly chastised.

Cambridge resident Geoffrey Stevens, an author and former Ottawa columnist and managing editor of the Globe and Mail, teaches political science at Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Guelph. His column appears Mondays. He welcomes comments at geoffstevens@sympatico.ca

Local planning key: Study; Research suggests ensuring residents benefit is important to a wind-farm buy-in

Sarnia Observer
Mon Mar 6 2017
Page: B2
Section: News
Byline: Colin Perkel
Source: Sarnia Observer

Involving community members in wind-farm planning and ensuring nearby residents benefit from turbines would go a long way toward winning local buy-in for such projects, a new Canadian study concludes.

The study, published in a recent edition of the Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning, notes that fast-paced development and limits on local decision-making has resulted in strong opposition to wind projects. Those objections can be mitigated by the fair distribution and amount of area benefits, the authors write.

“This comparative case study of policy programs in Canada highlights stark differences in various aspects of perceived economic benefits and support for local wind-energy development,” the authors write. “This work adds to the growing literature that suggests that resistance to wind energy in Canada is at least partially due to the policy levers used in areas going through energy transitions.”

For the paper, Chad Walker and Jamie Baxter with Western University’s department of geography compare approaches to wind-energy development in southwestern Ontario and Nova Scotia.

In Ontario, for example, the study notes that the 2009 Green Energy Act limits community involvement during planning stages resulting in criticism of a top-down, corporate-led pattern of development in which almost all of the province’s more than 6,000 turbines are corporately owned outside of their host communities.

Nova Scotia, on the other hand, has made a concerted effort to sup-port community-owned development and keep the economic benefits in the province, the study says.

“The general lack of financial benefits and opportunities to invest in local wind projects in Ontario may be added to the long list of things responsible for intense pushback to development in the province over the past decade,” Walker said in a statement.

“In Nova Scotia, support for local wind projects was three times higher and perceptions of health effects were three times lower.”

According to the study - titled “It’s easy to throw rocks at a corporation: Wind energy development and distributive justice in Canada” - benefits flowing from wind farms can include tax revenues for municipalities and community funds, as well as payments to landowners for having turbines on their properties. Other benefits involve partial or outright ownership of a project by local citizens or community groups who share in the profits.

The study also finds support for ideas such as providing tax rebates in areas that are home to turbines.

At the same time, however, it finds that financial benefits should not be used to avoid minimizing the risks posed by turbines.

“Ensuring that things like health, noise, and property value loss mitigation are addressed is important regardless of financial benefits distribution,” the authors state.

All in all, the authors conclude that efforts to site new projects should focus on local fairness.

In addition, they say Canada might benefit from a registry in which residents, developers and local politicians can view the range of community benefits that have been used in projects across the country. Such a registry might force developers to think more critically about what they have to offer to local residents, and be a resource for residents to see what's happened elsewhere.

PCs ask watchdog for full costing of hydro plan

InsideTorontocom
Mon Mar 6 2017
Section: News/Ontario
Permalink
TORONTO - The Progressive Conservatives are asking Ontario's budget watchdog to conduct a full costing of the Liberal government's plan to lower hydro bills.

The recently announced 17-per-cent reduction in hydro bills comes this summer thanks to a move akin to refinancing a mortgage over a longer period of time.

Premier Kathleen Wynne has acknowledged it will cost ratepayers more in the long run, but she says savings are needed now because people are struggling.

She said in question period on Thursday that the extra interest costs related to the plan would amount to $25 billion over 30 years.

But the Tories say they're not clear on how the Liberals arrived at that number and have sent a letter to the financial accountability officer, asking him to investigate.

Wynne's $25 billion figure does not appear in the hydro relief announcement's background documents, which say the plan will involve "annual interest costs not exceeding $1.4 billion."

A spokesman for the energy minister said Sunday evening that based on a "conservative" estimate of a five-per-cent interest rate, they "see that number amounting to approximately $25 billion over 30 years."

"The final amount will depend on annual interest rates and expenditures, which will be disclosed yearly, but given the province's strong borrowing ability we're confident it will be in this range," Colin Nekolaichuk said in a statement.

PC Leader Patrick Brown said in the letter to the financial accountability officer that Ontarians may ultimately have to accept those added costs to get savings now "given the extent to which people are struggling," but the impact should at least be clear.

"To be candid, this government has a habit of deliberately using false numbers to cover up their worst policy failures," Brown wrote.

Nekolaichuk said Ontario has a track record of managing debt "responsibly." The province's net debt is more than $300 billion.

Nekolaichuk also noted that credit rating agency DBRS has said it views the hydro relief plan as "credit neutral."

The 17-per-cent cut in bills - in addition to an eight-per-cent rebate that took effect Jan. 1 - means ratepayers will pay about $2.5 billion less per year for the next 10 years, the government has said.

The reduction is coming from refinancing a portion of the global adjustment charge.

That's the charge consumers pay for above-market rates for power producers, which the government says ensures a reliable supply.

The auditor general has estimated the global adjustment charge cost $50 billion between 2006 and 2015 and increased by 1,200 per cent between 2006 and 2013 - meanwhile, the average electricity market price dropped by 46 per cent.

Eventually the costs of refinancing will be added back onto the global adjustment charge, which the energy minister has said won’t happen for at least 10 years.

Brown also questions why Ontario Power Generation is going to be responsible for the refinancing and not the Ontario Electricity Financial Corporation, which manages hydro debt.

Several other measures to reduce hydro bills were announced Thursday, including expanding a low-income support program, cutting delivery charges for some rural residents and eliminating them for on-reserve First Nations customers, and establishing a new fund to help people make energy efficiency improvements.

Milton residents will likely see a $30 monthly reduction in electricity bill
Milton Canadian Champion
2017-03-05
Byline: Julie Slack
Original Web Location
Milton residents will likely see about a $30 monthly reduction in their electricity bills under a new hydro plan approved by the provincial government on Wednesday (March 1).

Halton MPP Indira Naidoo-Harris discussed what it will mean for locals at Milton Hydro on Friday afternoon.

Ontario is lowering electricity bills by 25 per cent on average for residential customers across the province to ensure greater fairness.

Naidoo-Harris said it's unfair that today’s generation Is paying the price for past mistakes the government made.

She said it cost the province $20 billion to provide Ontario residents with clean, reliable electricity.

That included the elimination of coal-fired plants that has essentially wiped out smog days all-too common in the past. It also ensured that brownouts and blackouts are a thing of the past, she said.

“We had to find a way to do it that’s fair for today and future generations,” Naidoo-Harris said, likening the situation to a roof that needs repairs.

A leaking roof needs a patch job, but ultimately it has to be fixed, and we invested in it,” she said. “Between 2005 and 2015, we put in $50 billion to provide clean and reliable electricity.

“We had to decide: do we want a regular roof, a tin roof, a roof that last 10 years, 20 years or longer,” she said. “We invested in the future.”

Still, that investment should not be shouldered just by this generation.

“We asked today’s generation to shoulder costs unfairly. We asked this generation to pay for all of it,” she said, noting that is why Premier Kathleen Wynne and the government decided to implement what they’re calling Ontario’s Fair Hydro Plan.

Small businesses and farms in Halton will also benefit from the initiative. People with low incomes will receive even greater reductions to their electricity bills.

Rate increases over the next four years will be held to the rate of inflation for everyone.

“This is the single-largest reduction to electricity rates in Ontario’s history,” Naidoo-Harris said.

The 25 per cent reduction includes the 8 per cent rebate of the provincial portion of the harmonized sales tax that took effect on Jan. 1.

Sources say the massive reduction in rates will come mostly by “smoothing out” the financing costs of electricity generation contracts over longer periods.

It’s the equivalent of refinancing a mortgage to enjoy lower payments over a longer time on nuclear reactors, natural gas-fired power plants, and wind turbines.

“We’re refining the system with new terms that over time will take longer to pay off, but it’s more fair,” she added.

Milton Hydro CEO Frank Lasowski said there are some 34,000 urban customers and another 2,000 rural customers here. The median hydro bill for an urban customer is $130 to $140/month, while a rural customer could pay up to $300/month during winter months. Locally, however, rural customers do not enjoy the same rate reduction as that of rural northern property owners, he said.

He said the provincial government's news is welcomed.

"The rate reductions will benefit all customers who are struggling with their current bills," he said. "The financial benefit for those on lower incomes will be of greatest assistance. Milton Hydro will work with the government to implement the changes as quickly as we can once all the details have been finalized."

In addition, the new plan will see on-reserve First Nations customers receive a 100 per cent credit of the delivery line on their monthly electricity bills.

Despite the high cost the hydro rate relief will add, the government said it continues to project a balanced budget for 2017-18, and will provide a full update on its fiscal plan in the spring budget.

PC Hydro plan coming soon; Liberal plan 'doesn't go far enough' : Brown

North Bay Nugget
Mon Mar 6 2017
Page: A5
Section: News
Byline: Bob Brunton
Source: Postmedia Network

Patrick Brown says the Tories' soon-to-be released plan to cut Ontario hydro rates will be for more than homeowners, farmers and small businesses.

"It will be across the board, it will affect everyone," the Progressive Conservative Party leader said Friday morning - almost 24 hours after the governing Liberals announced they're lowering electricity rates.

Premier Kathleen Wynne's government said Thursday it will cut hydro costs by 17 per cent this summer, following an eight per cent reduction Jan. 1.

The new cuts will not only affect Ontario households, but many small businesses and farms. People with low incomes and those living in eligible rural communities would receive even greater reductions to their electricity bills.

Rate increases during the next four years would be held to the rate of inflation for everyone.

"Very shortly we will be having our own hydro announcement and we're going to detail some of the fixes we see in the system," Brown said. "It will be soon … in the near future."

The Ontario Tory boss said his party's plan will include details on how it would be implemented and how it would be financed.

The Liberal plan, however, does not directly affect some large hydro users.

"The focus of our announcement is on reducing the electricity bills of families, farms and small-to medium-sized businesses across Ontario by an average of 25 per cent," said Natasha Demetriades of the Energy Ministry.

"However, hospitals, post-secondary institutions and municipalities will still see a modest reduction in their electricity bills with the removal of social programs from the rate base (charges in the electricity bill) to the tax base (government revenues). Taking social programs off of the rate base is part of our plan to make the electricity system more fair.”

She said some broader public institutions have already taken advantage of energy saving programs.

Because eligibility is based on electricity consumption, most municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals would not be eligible for the Liberal hydro rate break because their electricity use is too large, Demetriades said.

But a 25 per cent hydro cut would be substantial for these institutions.

Ontario’s New Democratic Party announced an extensive plan Monday to save all provincial households as much as 30 per cent on their hydro bills -including immediate measures like eliminating time-of-use premiums and unfair, higher delivery charges, to repair the hydro system permanently - including a return of Hydro One to public hands.

“I think the NDP and Liberals were in damage control on this file,” Brown said Friday. “That’s why they came up with these schemes, because it’s about their own political survival and we’re looking at pretty ugly polling numbers.

“But ultimately this is a mess they own.”

The Liberals’ plan to find hydro savings is to finance the costs of electricity generation contracts during longer periods of time.

But NDP leader Andrea Horwath has said this plan will cost Ontario taxpayers $40 billion in interest costs during the next 30 years.

“I really believe the Liberal hydro plan fell short” said Brown, Simcoe North MPP. “At $1.4-billion in interest (annually) we’re paying to make up for mistakes that continue to be committed. We’re borrowing money to make up for bad contracts.”

He said the PC hydro plan will deal with such issues as generation, bad contracts and even ongoing contracts.

“It (the Liberal plan) doesn’t go far enough right now,” Brown said. “Right now the Liberals have now raised our hydro rates since coming into office (in 2003) 400 per cent -400 per cent, and they’re offering a 17 per cent rebate simply by borrowing money and paying for contracts over a longer time.”

Ontario Energy Board data says the off-peak or cheapest electricity prices in this province have nearly doubled between Nov. 1, 2009 and Nov. 1, 2016.