FW: Media Call Summary: April 12, 2017

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Date: Wed, 12 Apr 2017 17:53:22 -0400

Hi all,

See below for agency media calls. The following requests came through MO:

Allison Jones, CP
Hi, do you have any update on whether/how the Windstream judgment will be paid?

Response:
The judgement was paid in full on March 15 through the federal government.

Antonella Artuso, Toronto Sun
I'm doing a follow up on Todd Smith's presser today for a weekend article. Is an industrial hydro rate under consideration? And if not, why not? What happens to companies that don't qualify for ICI? Are you worried about losing manufacturing jobs to other jurisdictions? Are you expecting hydro increases to level out now?

Response:
Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan will provide an average of 25 per cent relief on electricity bills to as many as half a million small businesses and farms. This is the single largest rate reduction in the province's history, with rates also held to inflation for the next four years.

For larger customers and industrials, all customers above 1MW peak demand will qualify for the expanded Industrial Conservation Initiative, which can save program recipients up to one-third on electricity bills. The Fair Hydro Plan cuts the threshold in half, to 500kW, for manufacturing and greenhouse facilities. The expansion of the program to 1MW meant that 1,000 new businesses qualified, and we expect that many more will qualify under the expansion to 500kW. Right now there are approximately 50,000 Class B consumers, which include industrial, commercial, municipal facilities, and other types of customers. The Minister has recently visited a number of Ontario businesses, including Dynaplas in Scarborough, Plascoat in Brampton, and BWXT in Cambridge, all of which will now or already qualify. We are also partnering with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Association to raise awareness of energy conservation and cost-savings programs available to businesses in the province.

These are just some of the businesses contributing to Ontario's growing economy. Ontario has created 697,600 new jobs since the recession of 2008, and our unemployment rate has dropped to 6.4% near its lowest level in 8 years. And in the first three quarters of 2016 Ontario led all G7 nations when it came to economic growth. This is due to a highly competitive business climate – our corporate tax rate is 13% lower than the average combined federal-state corporate income tax in the U.S. In recent good news, on March 30 Ford announced it will be creating 300 jobs through an advanced manufacturing program in Windsor and maintaining 500 more in a $1.2-billion partnership. Ford is also establishing an Ottawa Research and Engineering Centre, which will draw on the expertise of Ontario's highly skilled workers to deliver the next generation of connected car technology.

Under the Fair Hydro Plan, all businesses, regardless of their size or consumption, will benefit from a 2 to 4 per cent reduction on their bills. Other programs such as Save On Energy can help businesses save on their electricity bills through energy audits and efficiency upgrades and strategies.

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Subject: Media Call Summary: April 12, 2017

Media Call Summary

Agencies : 1 inquiry, 1 update

Agency: OEB

Topic : Disconnections for Union Gas

Reporter & Outlet : Brian Hill, Global TV

Response Type : Agency spokesperson

Reporter's Questions

Union Gas disconnections in Bruce-Grey County brought to our attention by Francesca Dobbyn from the United Way.

Is the OEB aware of this situation and has any action been taken to reconnect these customer / discipline Union Gas?

Can you please provide any relevant information on this?

Response:

The OEB's February 23, 2017 Decision and Order prohibiting winter disconnections applied only to electricity utilities.

We were made aware of complaints regarding Union Gas disconnections in Bruce-Grey County earlier this week and are currently reviewing the individual cases.

The OEB requires all Ontario's gas utilities to have and abide by a written policy regarding their disconnection practices. This same policy must also be available on the gas utility's website.

Union Gas' policy on disconnection for non-payment, indicates that a residential customer may be disconnected after being given 10-days written notice in advance of the disconnection.

If consumers have been improperly disconnected, OEB will take appropriate measures.

The OEB will be looking at gas disconnection and billing policy as part of our customer service rules review.

This review is part of the OEB's ongoing commitment to protect the interests of Ontario's energy consumers and ensure they are well-served by a financially viable sector.

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UPDATE FROM APRIL 11:

Agency: OEB

Topic : Isolation / Vault Access and Conditions of Service for Toronto Hydro

Reporter & Outlet : Brian Hill, Global TV

Response Type : Agency spokesperson

Reporter's Questions

It was brought to our attention that Toronto Hydro recently changed its Conditions of Service and has begun charging a user fee for "customer isolation."

Prior to March 1, 2017 customers were allocated one isolation/vault access per year "free of charge." This is outlined clearly in Section 2.3 of Toronto Hydro's 2015 rate application approved by the OEB.

Wondering what the OEB's position is on this change (which can result in customers being billed as much as $2,100 for the isolation)?

Toronto Hydro's rate application is quite explicit in its rationale for providing this service free of charge - it's a safety concern and they want to ensure customers perform required maintenance and repairs.

We've also spoken with an electrician who fears customers will neglect required maintenance as a result of this change - or worse, turn to unlicensed electricians who will perform the work without the isolation. This is exceptionally dangerous.

A more basic question I'd also like answered: Does Toronto Hydro have the right to make this change to its Condition of Service given the explicit reference to customer isolation as detailed in its 2015 OEB approved rate application? (I.e.are customers being billed twice for the same service?)

Response:

The OEB requires all distributors to have a Condition of Service that is consistent with the Distribution Service Code (Section 2.4), applicable codes, legislation and the OEB Rate Handbook – all of which help protect the interests of Ontario's energy consumers.

Local distribution companies are within their rights to revise their Conditions of Service and are obligated to follow the process set out by the OEB to ensure customers are aware of any changes.

We are reviewing this matter to determine whether any further action is required on OEB's part.

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Ministry : 0 inquiries

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Minister's Office : 0 inquiries