

NDP calls on Ontario government to table hydro legislation on Monday...

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NDP calls on Ontario government to table hydro legislation on Monday (Ont-Hydro)
By Allison Jones

THE CANADIAN PRESS

TORONTO _ NDP Leader Andrea Horwath is calling on the Liberal government to table legislation for its hydro bill reduction plan on Monday, saying it's short on details and ``warrants one heck of an explanation."

The legislature is not sitting this week for March Break, but Horwath said Ontarians need to see the planned legislation as soon as possible.

``People deserve to see it in black and white so they can debate it and so the legislature can debate it too," she said.

``Don't hide the details, don't delay, don't come to the legislature just before it rises this summer with a last-minute bill, ultimatums and no time for committees, experts and the people of Ontario to take the time they need to examine the bill. Put this \$40-billion phantom plan on paper and let's have a real debate about what's best for Ontario's future."

The government indicated the legislation won't come as quickly as Monday.

``We will introduce legislation this session, with time for debate and public hearings at committee, ensuring real relief for Ontarians and a way to ensure greater fairness in our electricity system this summer," Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said in a statement.

Premier **>Kathleen Wynne<** announced earlier this month that people will receive an average 25-per-cent cut to their electricity bills starting this summer _ 17 per cent in new reductions plus an eight-per-cent rebate that came into effect Jan. 1. Rates will also increase no higher than inflation for the next four years.

But the plan will ultimately cost ratepayers about \$25 billion more in interest, the government has said. The plan will take part of the global adjustment charge off bills for the next 10 years, but the cost isn't being eliminated, it's being deferred to future ratepayers, racking up interest on that debt in the meantime.

The fact that billions of dollars will ultimately go to bankers and not be spent on schools or roads ``warrants one heck of an explanation," Horwath said.

Both opposition parties doubt the Liberal government's math and say the extra interest costs could be as high as \$40 billion.

"Let's just say I have a healthy amount of skepticism when it comes to any numbers that Liberals provide," said Horwath.

Horwath said it's not clear when the hydro plan's interest payments will come due, but the Liberals have said it won't be for at least 10 years.

Horwath also said it's not clear if it will apply to medium-sized businesses, but the Liberals have said the 25-per-cent reduction won't. Half a million small businesses and farms will qualify, but all other businesses except the largest manufacturers and industrial customers will only see a reduction of between two and four per cent, government officials have said.

On one thing, however, the NDP and Liberals can agree: "The Conservatives have no plan at all," Horwath said.

Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown has said he will announce a plan "soon."

The NDP has proposed an alternative plan to lower hydro bills by 30 per cent, but the Liberals say while their relief will kick in within a few months, the NDP's proposed savings wouldn't take effect for a long time.

The New Democrats' plan calls for ending mandatory time-of-use pricing, reducing the delivery charge for rural customers, renegotiating power contracts, and returning Hydro One to public ownership. The Liberal government has sold 30 per cent of Hydro One and plans to sell up to 60 per cent in total.

The Liberal plan also contains a delivery charge reduction for some rural customers, removing the charge entirely for on-reserve First Nations customers, and expanding a low-income support program.

INDEX: UTILITIES ONTARIO POLITICS

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