

Re: This is such a great story

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Great stuff

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone on the Rogers network.

From: MacKenzie, Rebecca (OPO)
Sent: Saturday, March 4, 2017 11:58 AM
To: Price_Carol; Bevan, Andrew (OPO); McIntyre, Moira (OPO); Rowe, Mary (OPO)
Subject: This is such a great story

I hope MPP Vernile sees it and it helps her rethink doing an echo.

Cambridge Times **Biggest hydro cuts in history of province, says McGarry**

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.

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