

MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

March 30, 2017

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PRINT COVERAGE

Toronto Star: PCs take stand against hydro ads; Critics say advertisements are premature and appear promotional for Liberals; A9; 2017.03.30

PUBLICATION: Toronto Star

PAGE: A9

DATE: 2017.03.30

SECTION: News

EDITION: ONT

BYLINE: Rob Ferguson Toronto Star

KEYWORDS: progressive,conservatives,stepping,fight,against,wynne

WORD COUNT: 505

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

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

Deputy PC Leader Sylvia Jones has introduced a private members' bill that would restore auditor general Bonnie Lysyk's power to veto government ads if they are judged to be partisan.

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

"If the Liberal party wants to spend money promoting their policies, have at it," she said. "But this is taxpayers' money that should be going to important issues." Energy Minister Glen Thibeault has said less than \$1 million has been spent on the radio and social media ad campaign so far, but more ads are planned.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Toronto Star: Wynne's 'go-bold' re-election strategy; A15; 2017.03.30

PUBLICATION: Toronto Star

PAGE: A15

DATE: 2017.03.30

SECTION: Opinion

EDITION: ONT

BYLINE: Bob Hepburn Toronto Star

KEYWORDS: brutally,frank,premier,kathleen,wynne,ontario

WORD COUNT: 764

Wynne's 'go-bold' re-election strategy

Let's be brutally frank: The odds of Premier Kathleen Wynne and her Ontario Liberals winning re-election in 2018 are slim to non-existent.

The reasons are numerous and obvious:

Wynne's personal popularity stands at just 12 per cent, the lowest of any premier in Canada; the Liberals trail the Conservatives badly in province-wide polls and even fall behind the Tories in their traditional key stronghold of Toronto; her handling of key issues, such as hydro is hugely unpopular; and the cry of "time for change" is powerful given the Liberals will have been in office 15 years come voting day June 7, 2018.

Within the party itself, the mood is grim.

Many sitting Liberal MPPs from the 905 area and suburban 416 ridings, such as Scarborough, believe their seats are already lost. Local riding organizers have virtually given up. Campaign coffers are exceedingly low.

"The fact is the numbers do not lie and the ability to win the next election is in grave, grave doubt," Greg Sorbara, who managed Dalton McGuinty's three winning election campaigns, said last week on TVO's The Agenda. Sorbara said the anger toward Wynne, who he backed in the 2013 leadership race, "is palpable" outside of Toronto.

Despite all the negativity, though, Wynne plans to stick around and lead her dispirited troops into the next election. Indeed, Wynne is considering an aggressive - and progressive - policy agenda that her senior advisers have already started to quietly promote.

Their goal is to win back middle-class working people who, rightly or wrongly, feel Wynne has largely ignored them and their concerns about jobs and the economy.

As they see it, such an agenda can appeal to enough traditional urban Liberals and NDP supporters wary of seeing the Conservatives in power that Wynne might be able to eke out a minority victory.

"Go bold or go home" is how some key Liberals describe the next 14 months leading up to the election.

The initial signs of the new plan will emerge in the April budget.

First, Wynne may announce a raise in the minimum wage to \$15 an hour in 2018. A Forum Research poll last fall found 72 per cent of Liberals nationally and 84 per cent of New Democrats support the idea. The current minimum wage for full-time workers in Ontario is \$11.40 an hour and will increase to \$11.60 an hour on Oct. 6. Alberta, which already has the highest minimum wage in Canada at \$12.20 an hour, has promised to raise it to \$15 an hour by next year. Second, Wynne is expected to move ahead with introducing a guaranteed annual income for low-wage workers and welfare recipients - with no strings attached. The first step would be a three-year pilot project that would set the basic income at about \$1,690 a month for a single person. The non-taxable money would be available to people aged 18 to 65. Numerous studies have recommended such a plan as a way to help alleviate poverty without unduly increasing government costs.

Third, the government may announce sweeping changes in Ontario's labour and employment laws to address issues ranging from precarious work for young people to the rise in layoffs and lost job security in today's business environment. The changes stem from the Changing Workplace Review, a major independent report that Wynne commissioned early last year. The proposals are described as the most dramatic in a generation.

In addition, Wynne will try to convince voters she's got a handle on the economy by tabling the first balanced budget in years in April. Finance Minister Charles Sousa has promised the budget will be packed with measures to help curb fast-rising home prices, especially in the Greater Toronto Area.

In theory, the strategy seems sounds. In practice, though, voters may have simply tuned out Wynne and are no longer listening to anything she says.

For her part, Wynne has tried to remove the most virulent criticism of her government by promising a 25-per-cent cut in hydro rates that kick in this summer and by flip-flopping on her initial support for road tolls on the Don Valley and Gardiner expressways, a move that panders to 905 voters.

Unfortunately, Wynne has tried several times over the past year to gain some traction with voters. She has shuffled her cabinet, offered free university tuition, put a bit more money into health care and more.

None of it has worked. All that desperate Liberals can hope for is that this latest "bold" strategy starts to break that pattern.

Bob Hepburn's column appears Thursday. bhepburn@thestar.ca

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Sudbury Star: NDP critical of Sudbury Liberal MPP Thibeault; A3; 2017.03.30

PUBLICATION: Sudbury Star

PAGE: A3

DATE: 2017.03.30

SECTION: News

EDITION: Final

SOURCE: Sudbury Star

KEYWORDS: provincial,criticized,glenn,thibeault,liberal,sudbury

WORD COUNT: 423

NDP critical of Sudbury Liberal MPP Thibeault

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And she's still planning to continue the disastrous selloff of Hydro one. She's still planning to charge time-of-use premiums that punish parents for cooking dinner at dinner time and seniors for staying home during the day. Not only does her approach fail to address the mess the

Liberal and Conservative governments made of our hydro system - it drives us further in the wrong direction - including by selling off even more of Hydro One." sud.editorial@sunmedia.ca

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The Chatham Daily News: Nicholls and PCs offer no solution to hydro woes; A4;
2017.03.30

PUBLICATION: The Chatham Daily News

PAGE: A4

DATE: 2017.03.30

SECTION: Opinion

EDITION: Final

BYLINE: Dan Gelinas

SOURCE: The Chatham Daily News

KEYWORDS: nicholls,leaflet,chatham,leamington,households,talking

DATELINE: Wheatley

WORD COUNT: 495

Nicholls and PCs offer no solution to hydro woes

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nicholls and the rest of the Ontario Conservatives can write in their leaflets about how they are working to "ensure hydro rates are affordable" but they don't have a leader willing to stand up and be heard and offer a solution. How can we support Brown and his candidates in the next provincial election? Brown calls himself a "pragmatic Conservative" but he stood up to not

supporting unions and in 2006 voted to repeal same-sex marriage. He also voted against several bills aimed at amending the Canadian Human Rights Act to include gender expression and identity. He is interested in following the lead of the alt-right in Canada, taking away rights we have fought for and won over the past 30 years.

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

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

Dan Gelinas Wheatley

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Chatham This Week: Christian farmers searching for answers to rural issues; Attrition, cap and trade take centre stage at district CFFO meeting; A4; 2017.03.30

PUBLICATION: Chatham This Week

PAGE: A4

DATE: 2017.03.30

SECTION: News

EDITION: Final

BYLINE: Louis Pin

SOURCE: Chatham-Kent This Week

KEYWORDS: district,christian,farmers,federation,ontario,annual

ILLUSTRATION: / Clarence Nywening speaks to members of the local Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario district last week. They're worried that a number of factors - including cap and trade and regulations - are driving people out of rural municipalities.;

IMAGES: / Clarence Nywening speaks to members of the local Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario district last week. They're worried that a number of factors - including cap and trade and regulations - are driving people out of rural municipalities. [CHTW_20170330_Final_A4_01_I001.jpg];

WORD COUNT: 595

Christian farmers searching for answers to rural issues; Attrition, cap and trade take centre stage at district CFFO meeting

The Chatham-Kent-Essex district of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario held their annual general meeting in Chatham March 24. The critical issues were expected - cap and trade frustration for hard-hit greenhouses, phosphorous runoff, and attrition in rural populations.

The latter has become a more immediate concern for farmers across Ontario. Young people aren't moving back to farms, some for lack of interest, and other due to the steep costs associated with starting a farm.

"Succession planning has been an ongoing concern for the CFFO for quite a long time," said Suzanne Armstrong, director of research with the CFFO. "There's a lot of farmland now that we're anticipating in the next decade or so is going to need to change hands ... we want to encourage family farms to be planning well ahead."

"The main thing is a lot of the younger folks are already getting re-educated into more professional careers," said Jacques Tetreault, president of the Chatham-Kent-Essex district. "But what we're trying to do is keep them interested in the agricultural sector ... and that's why it's good to have our high schools and the Ridgetown agricultural college right there."

According to Tetreault farmers in the livestock industry more often take on after their parents than cash crop farmers or vegetable growers, possibly because those in livestock work closer together as a family to manage production.

But young farmers are still struggling to break into the industry and many are forced to find primary work, considering their farming career a part-time job.

"They're farm people, but they have a professional career," Tetreault said. "They'll do professional work in London or wherever, and then they'll come back to the farm ... we've all had to do that. Most of the farmers all had to do that in Essex or Kent County."

"I did that for 30 years, you know," he added. "An offfarm job ... you worked in the factories because they paid so well, and the benefits, and after you put in so much time there you fall back on the farm."

Economic concerns aren't just keeping young people from farms; they're threatening current operations. CFFO president Clarence Nywening talked about cap and trade fallout on greenhouse growers in Chatham-Kent and surrounding municipalities, and how they've petitioned the provincial government to aid businesses currently under pressure.

Some greenhouse growers, he said, are being forced to pay an additional \$5,000 to \$7,000 per acre due to the regulation.

"It hit us like a brick wall," Nywening said. "Hopefully we'll get it rectified and figured out properly ... there was a relief program that was launched as of yesterday. But there's a lot of communication that needs to go on."

The province announced an eight per cent reduction in hydro bills last year and have other cuts coming over the next few months.

But Nywening does not see the current provincial plan as a long-term solution, as it is projected to cost the government more money in the long run.

"It is very frustrating," Nywening said. "It's kicking the can down the road ... let's look at the big picture of this. You keep kicking the can down the road, pretty sure you can't kick it any further."

The district's AGM concluded with a presentation to long-time member Paul Tomen, honoured with a Lifetime Member Award.

Tomen was at the meeting and has been with the CFFO for more than 60 years. He grew up near Pain Court and later continued farming in South Kent, near Erieau.

The Ontario-wide CFFO's annual general meeting will take place March 28.

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The Brockville Recorder & Times: Minister's time better spent solving hydro woes;
A6; 2017.03.30

PUBLICATION: The Brockville Recorder & Times
PAGE: A6
DATE: 2017.03.30
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Steve Clark
SOURCE: The Brockville Recorder & Times
KEYWORDS: editor,relief,rural,hydro,users,coming
WORD COUNT: 503

Minister's time better spent solving hydro woes

To the editor: Re: "Relief for rural hydro users coming: Minister," Letter to the editor, March 28 Recorder and Times.

Rather than writing to local newspapers, I'd encourage Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault to spend his time writing his government's hydro relief scheme that to date exists only in the minds of government members desperate to save their political hides.

Thanks to hundreds of thousands of hard-earned taxpayers' dollars spent on advertising, we've heard plenty of talk about the government's plan to fix the energy crisis they created. But the reality is Minister Thibeault hasn't bothered to table the legislation at Queen's Park.

A cynic would suggest the government is more interested in spending your money to boost the Premier's tanking popularity than actually providing relief to families and businesses suffering every day this government delays.

But delaying is nothing new for the Liberals when it comes to addressing energy poverty. We learned this week that the government's own internal polling told them as far back as December 2013 that soaring energy rates were a serious issue for Ontarians.

And it wasn't just polling telling the government to get rates under control. I, along with our entire Ontario PC Caucus, have for years been warning them that ignoring the issue was forcing families to choose between heating and eating, while driving jobs out of the province.

This is from a letter I wrote to Minister Thibeault's predecessor, Bob Chiarelli: "I have been contacted by constituents who are telling me how these out-of-control rate increases are reducing their quality of life, even forcing some from their homes. Of course, we also know the cost of electricity has chased numerous manufacturers from the province, taking with them the good-paying jobs that support the local economy in Leeds-Grenville. ... "I join them in demanding you and your government do better. It's time to stop travelling down the path your energy policies are taking us before even more damage is done to Ontario families, our businesses, industries and our economy.

"This province was built, in large part, by affordable energy and it's time that we return to the responsible management of this sector. This includes putting an immediate end to bringing online more costly wind and solar energy we don't need and can't afford, while at the same time

reviewing Hydro One and Ontario's energy bureaucracy to put an end to the waste and unnecessary spending." The date of that letter was Dec. 17, 2014. If the former minister had acted then, rather than burying his head in the sand, he could have helped those families and businesses that have suffered so much. Instead, Premier Wynne ignored this crisis until it was a threat to her political future.

No matter what you think of the government's plan (if they ever get around to tabling it) there's one very sad reality. For businesses like Swan's Variety and many families now thousands of dollars in arrears, the relief is too little and comes far, far too late.

Steve Clark, MPP, Leeds-Grenville

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Kincardine News: Electricity cut advertisements put Liberals in contempt of legislature: PCs; A8; 2017.03.30

PUBLICATION: Kincardine News

PAGE: A8

DATE: 2017.03.30

SECTION: News

EDITION: Final

BYLINE: Shawn Jeffords

SOURCE: Postmedia

KEYWORDS: campaign,touting,slash,hydro,rates,liberal

WORD COUNT: 312

Electricity cut advertisements put Liberals in contempt of legislature: PCs

A new ad campaign touting a plan to slash hydro rates puts the Liberal government in contempt of the legislature, Ontario's Progressive Conservatives allege.

In a letter to Speaker Dave Levac on Monday, PC House Leader Jim Wilson asks him to find the government in contempt because the ads set out both a timeline for action and assume a decision - this before the legislation to cut hydro rates has been introduced.

"What we've got here is a clear case of electioneering from the Wynne Liberals using taxpayer dollars," Wilson said in a press release.

"Neither MPPs nor the public even know what the new hydro scheme looks like, what it will cost, and who will get left behind. Clearly, these advertisements serve no purpose other than to promote Kathleen Wynne's re-election."

The ads, running on radio stations across the province, tell listeners that the Liberals made important investments in clean and green energy that come at a cost. The rate cut is about addressing the impact on hydro bills, the ads say.

"We've heard you," a narrator says in one of the spots. "Hydro needs to be fair for everyone across the province and we've made fundamental changes to ensure this in the long-term."

Levac said he takes the matter seriously and would rule on the matter. He did not give a timeframe for his response.

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault defended the ads and said the government has spent under a million on the radio and social media campaign to date. There are more spots coming, likely for television and in print, he said.

"It's important for us to make sure that we let everyone know about the 25% reduction that's coming," he said.

"In terms of the ad campaign, it's going to be in line with all of the other ad campaigns that we've had in the past," he added.

Hanover Post: Politicians urged to stay connected to rural industry, issues; A18; 2017.03.30

PUBLICATION: Hanover Post

PAGE: A18

DATE: 2017.03.30

SECTION: News

EDITION: Final

BYLINE: Don Crosby

SOURCE: Special To Postmedia

KEYWORDS: people,training,background,agriculture,needed,growing

WORD COUNT: 579

Politicians urged to stay connected to rural industry, issues

More people with training or a background in agriculture are needed to fill a growing numbers of roles in the farming industry.

Michael Ryan, president of the Grey County Federation of Agriculture, said there are three to four jobs available for every graduate at the University of Guelph's school of agriculture.

"There are less and less people with a background in agriculture to fill those roles and as farms have grown larger we can't be experts at everything," Ryan told the annual politician's meeting held on the weekend in Elmwood.

"We rely on the support industries around us to provide expertise whether it's agronomists, aerologists, veterinarians, accountants or bankers. They are all important to running a farm business," Ryan said.

Companies are hiring students in second and third year in the agriculture program at University of Guelph for summer jobs.

"And there is such competition for those graduates that they end up with wellpaying jobs after graduation," Ryan said.

Organizers of the annual event invite municipal, provincial and federal politicians from across Grey-Bruce for an update by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and commodity groups on the farming industry.

Ryan said with fewer members of municipal councils having a background in agriculture it's becoming more important to keep a connection to what's going on in industry and the annual politicians event helps raise that awareness.

At this year's event some of the topics of interest included the need for natural gas in rural Ontario, concern over the closure of rural schools, rising farm property tax assessments and high speed internet.

During his address to the meeting OFA president Keith Currie touched on the breakdown in communication between the provincial government and local school boards and the importance of schools in rural Ontario that serve many functions other than just provide education but are hubs for activity in the community.

"I think that's been lost on government just how important that is in rural Ontario. We're working with a number of groups across the province that are trying to find ways to solve this school closure problem."

Curries said the OFA has had discussions with education minister Mitzie Hunter on this issue.

He noted that while the government is saying there is money to keep schools open, school boards are working to close them.

"There seems to be a disconnect between school boards and the ministry and we're just asking for that clarification to happen so we get the best outcome we're looking for," Currie said.

Currie said it's time the provincial government began putting long-term funding into a promise to bring natural gas to rural Ontario.

"We're asking for \$75 million per year over the next 20 years. After a \$100 million investment there will be around \$200 million coming back in economic return... and after 20 years a minimum of a billion dollars is going to be coming back into rural Ontario," said Currie who is baffled as to why the government doesn't make good on a promise to help fund bringing natural gas to rural Ontario.

"I guess the government of Ontario is going to have to tell their story as to why they won't jump in right now," he said.

Currie said the recent announcement by Premier Kathleen Wynne to reduce hydro rates by 25 per cent is not a long-term solution to the energy needs of rural Ontario.

"Natural gas is the first step to getting there; that's why we're continuing the push," Currie said.

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The Paris Star: Wynne's imminent fall can't come soon enough; A7; 2017.03.30

PUBLICATION: The Paris Star

PAGE: A7

DATE: 2017.03.30

SECTION: Opinion

EDITION: Final

BYLINE: Jim Merriam

SOURCE: The Paris Star

KEYWORDS: latest,shows,premier,kathleen,wynne,pitiful

WORD COUNT: 587

Wynne's imminent fall can't come soon enough

The latest poll that shows Premier Kathleen Wynne with a pitiful 12 per cent support would seem to prove Abraham Lincoln's famous line that you can only fool people some of the time.

I'm sure Wynne and her merry band of advisers were looking for a significant bump in the polls after announcing a further 17 per cent reduction in electricity rates.

Instead the premier's personal popularity is plumbing new depths.

Voters appear to understand that the move did nothing to fix the complex power problems, but rather put payments onto the shoulders of our grandchildren, at increased costs.

That example is illustrative of why Wynne keeps sinking to new lows. Since being elected premier in 2014 she has shown little to no interest in doing what's best for the people of Ontario.

Instead her agenda seems to be driven by what bureaucrats at Queen's Park perceive to be best.

Some pundits suggest a palace revolt to oust Wynne is not in the cards because many Liberal MPPs believe they owe their jobs to her after she led them to victory in the 2014 election.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Sitting Liberals owe their victories to former Progressive Conservative leader Tim Hudak's promise to eliminate 100,000 public service jobs in the province.

Even though that was an idea whose time had come, the proposal managed to turn public service unions and other organized labour groups against the conservatives.

The word went out to the rank and file that other benefits such as maternity leave would not be safe under Hudak and the rest, as they say, is history.

But back to the premier, as I've said before, Wynne has to go and is not likely to do so voluntarily.

She keeps saying the people of Ontario elected her to do a job in 2014 and she intends to see it through to the bitter end.

It would be hard to find any voter in Ontario who supported Wynne's actions that have driven the province's debt well over \$300 billion, rapidly heading towards \$350 billion.

Likewise, it's hard to believe many Ontarians voted for the aforementioned power fiasco that has hospitals laying off staff so they can afford to keep the lights on.

Nor would many have voted to expand the most ineffective level of bureaucracy in the Ministry of Health, the local health integration networks, at the expense of doctors, nurses and other front line workers.

Similarly, it's doubtful that many voters would have looked favourably on the idea of changing the school curriculum without full discussions with parents.

Nor would any of us have voted to close rural schools in favour of some bureaucratic standard on school populations, risking the health, education and safety of students, parents and others who will clog the roads of rural Ontario during major winter storms.

Nor would many have voted for Wynne to provide \$14,000 subsidies to buyers who can afford to purchase expensive electric cars, while the poorest among us have little access to transit.

The premier wasn't elected to drive jobs out of the province, to dictate how Toronto handles its traffic woes, or to turn rural Ontario into a semblance of a Third World country.

The list goes on and on and gets more and more troubling.

Wynne has shown little leadership ability and less concern for the people she is supposed to be serving.

The best advice for the premier: Don't let the door hit you on the way out. jmerriam@bmts.com

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Wallaceburg Courier Press: Christian Farmers searching for answers; Attrition, cap and trade take centre stage at district CFFO meeting; A4; 2017.03.30

PUBLICATION: Wallaceburg Courier Press

PAGE: A4

DATE: 2017.03.30

SECTION: News

EDITION: Final

BYLINE: Louis Pin

SOURCE: Postmedia Network

KEYWORDS: essex,district,christian,farmers,federation,ontario

ILLUSTRATION: Louis Pin, Postmedia Network / Clarence Nywening, president of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, was in Chatham on March 24 for the local district's annual general meeting. Though he and many farmers are frustrated with recent provincial regulations, he says there are positive initiatives being put in place by Ontario farmers to strengthen their industries - and their communities.;

WORD COUNT: 565

Christian Farmers searching for answers; Attrition, cap and trade take centre stage at district CFFO meeting

The Chatham-Kent Essex district of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario held their annual general meeting in Chatham on Friday. The critical issues were expected - cap and trade frustration for hard-hit greenhouses, phosphorous runoff, and attrition in rural populations.

The latter has become a more immediate concern for farmers across Ontario. Young people aren't moving back to farms, some for lack of interest, but many are unable due to the costs associated with starting a farm.

"Succession planning has been an ongoing concern for the CFFO for quite a long time," said Suzanne Armstrong, director of research with the CFFO. "There's a lot of farmland now that we're anticipating in the next decade or so is going to need to change hands ... we want to encourage family farms to be planning well ahead."

"The main thing is a lot of the younger folks are already getting re-educated into more professional careers," said Jacques Tetreault, president of the Chatham-Kent-Essex district. "But what we're trying to do is keep them interested in the agricultural sector ... and that's why it's good to have our high schools and the Ridgetown agricultural college right there."

According to Tetreault, he often sees farmers in the livestock industry take on after their parents a little more often, possibly because they work closer together as a family to manage their production.

But those young farmers are still struggling to break into the industry with rising rates and many are forced to find primary work, and to consider their farming career a part-time job.

"They're farm people, but they have a professional career," Tetreault said. "They'll do professional work in London or wherever, and then they'll come back to the farm ... we've all had to do that. Most of the farmers all had to do that in Essex or Kent County."

Economic concerns aren't just keeping young people from farms; they're also threatening current operations.

CFFO president Clarence Nywening talked about the effect cap and trade has had on greenhouse growers in Chatham-Kent and surrounding municipalities, and how they've been petitioning to provincial government to aid businesses currently under pressure.

Some greenhouse growers, he said, are being forced to pay an additional \$5,000 to \$7,000 per acre in lieu of the regulation.

"It hit us like a brick wall," Nywening said. "Hopefully we'll get it rectified and figured out properly ... there was a relief program that was launched as of yesterday. But there's a lot of communication that needs to go on."

The province announced an eight per cent reduction in hydro bills last year, and have other cuts coming over the next few months.

The CFFO - and Ontario residents - have been promised a major cut in hydro costs, but Nywening does not see the current provincial plan as a long-term solution, which will eventually cost the government more money in the long run.

"It is very frustrating," he said. "It's kicking the can down the road ... let's look at the big picture of this. You keep kicking the can down the road, pretty sure you can't kick it any further."

The district's AGM concluded with a presentation to long-time member Paul Tomen, honoured with a Lifetime Member Award.

Tomen was at the meeting and has been with the CFFO for more than 60 years. He grew up near Pain Court and continued farming in South Kent, near Erieau.

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