RE: Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 8, 2017

From:	"Nekolaichuk, Colin (ENERGY)" <colin.nekolaichuk@ontario.ca>
To:	"Berry, James (ENERGY)" <james.berry5@ontario.ca>, "Campbell, David (ENERGY)" <david.campbell2@ontario.ca>, "Teliszewsky, Andrew (ENERGY)" <andrew.teliszewsky@ontario.ca>
Date:	Wed, 08 Mar 2017 12:30:00 -0500
Attachments:	Response to NDP Hydro Plan Toronto Star Op-ed - Mach 8 2017 CN.docx (23.76 kB)

Thanks, I added a few suggestions, tracked.

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From: Berry, James (ENERGY)
Sent: March-08-17 11:54 AM
To: Campbell, David (ENERGY); Nekolaichuk, Colin (ENERGY); Teliszewsky, Andrew (ENERGY)
Subject: RE: Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 8, 2017

Here's my first cut at our response. David/Colin – let me know if you have any suggested edits.

From: Teliszewsky, Andrew (ENERGY)
Sent: March-08-17 9:09 AM
To: Campbell, David (ENERGY); Nekolaichuk, Colin (ENERGY); Berry, James (ENERGY)
Subject: Fw: Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 8, 2017

Hi.

Should do a reply to Star Op-Ed that is about how they actually are giving money to banks to pay for shares.

Atel/

From: Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB) <Jeffrey.Stinson@ontario.ca>
Sent: Wednesday, March 8, 2017 9:01 AM
To: @OPO-Media Relations and Issues Management; Bevan, Andrew (OPO); McEachern, Gillian (OPO); Donelson, Philip (OPO); Bossin, Bryan (OPO); Tomney, Genevieve (OPO); @CAB-Trans CO; Baker, Carys (ENERGY); Berry, James (ENERGY); Bodrug, Andrew (ENERGY); Campbell, David (ENERGY); Coker, Meaghan (ENERGY); Den Heijer, Kevin (ENERGY); DeWolfe, Julie (ENERGY); Esdaile, Trevor (ENERGY); Festeryga, Katherine (ENERGY); Foster, David (ENERGY); Iqbal, Muhammad (ENERGY); McGrath, Jessica (ENERGY); Moseley-Williams, Kate (ENERGY); Nekolaichuk, Colin (ENERGY); Olsheski, Mark (ENERGY); Ramasra, Raynier (ENERGY); Ruttan, Craig (ENERGY); Singh, Alysha (ENERGY); Teliszewsky, Andrew (ENERGY); Thompson, Rachel (ENERGY); Tresise, Landon (ENERGY); Tretiakov, Ilia (ENERGY); Walman, Evan (ENERGY)
Cc: Sumi, Craig (CAB); Di Giovanni, Robert (CAB); Law, Sally (CAB); Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB); Nutter, George (ENERGY); Halford, Gavin (ENERGY); Electronic Media
Subject: Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 8, 2017

MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

March 8, 2017

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Print Coverage

PUBLICATION: Toronto Star
PAGE: A13
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: ONT
BYLINE: Andrea Horwath
KEYWORDS: ontario,tipping,point,hydro,bills,hurting
ILLUSTRATION: Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath writes that her plan to lower hydro bills "fixes the system for the long-term by returning Hydro One to public hands - because owning it is a win-win that will deliver lower bills, permanently." Andrew Francis Wallace/Toronto Star file photo
WORD COUNT: 724

Ontario is at a tipping point. High hydro bills are hurting families, driving people and employers out of the province and keeping new investment away.

Last week, I released my plan to lower hydro bills by 30 per cent. It includes ending time-of-use pricing, scrapping unfair delivery charges and several other measures that will deliver immediate savings for everyone on their hydro bills.

It also fixes the system for the long-term by returning Hydro One to public hands - because owning it is a win-win that will deliver lower bills, permanently, and put $7 billion back into the province - money that can go into schools and hospitals.

So, when Premier Wynne rolled out her plan, it's fair to say I joined Ontario families in being frustrated. It's a borrowing scheme that gives an additional $40 billion in interest payments to bankers. That's $40 billion that everyday Ontarians will pay for, one way or another.

The difference is clear: Over the next 30 years, the Liberal plan will see as much as $40 billion in additional interest payments flow to banks, while our plan sees the province earn over $7 billion in the same time frame as a result of public ownership. That's $7 billion we can use to reduce rates, invest in schools and hospitals, and build transit.

We've all heard the heartbreaking stories of families, businesses, farmers and community organizations that are close to the breaking point. Despite their enormous efforts and improvements in efficiency and conservation, their bills continue to skyrocket.

I think of the single mom in Kitchener, Ont., who had to choose between paying the hydro bill or buying Christmas presents. I think of Charlene in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont. She works two jobs, her husband works full time and they're drowning from the cost of hydro. I think of the curling club in Welland, Ont., that may have to close its doors because of the hydro bills. It should never have come to this.

We all know that we have to fix the cost of hydro in the province. But the contrast between the plans couldn't be more clear.

My plan helps people. Premier Wynne's plan helps bankers. And Patrick Brown and the Conservatives have no plan at all.

Any relief that borrowed cash provides will be short-term - and, of course, for a premier seeking re-election, that might be enough. Ontarians I've spoken to across the province this week say they're worried that loan will show up on their bills right after the election.

And the Liberal plan does nothing to address the underlying issues in Ontario's hydro system.

Premier Wynne still plans to continue the sell-off of Hydro One, which will drive our bills up even further. And the Liberals refuse to stop unfair rural delivery charges or time of use premiums. Their scheme does nothing to address the private power contracts that continue to drive up our hydro bills and it fails to end oversupply payments, where we actually pay private and foreign corporations for power we don't use.

I want to be very clear: Ontario's New Democrats will give careful consideration to any measure that will help ease the hydro burden Ontarians are facing. But this Band-Aid financing scheme does nothing to address the root cause of the problem. Bad contracts with private and foreign corporations and a sale on public assets are still at the core of the Liberal plan.

In my plan, there are real, concrete measures we can take today that will start reducing bills immediately, including fixing unfair delivery costs, ending mandatory time-of-use rules, capping private profit margins, bringing real oversight to electricity prices and using tax benefits to help hydro users, not bankers.

The NDP plan will actually fix the system, today, and for generations to come. It will lower rates immediately and repair the mess the Conservatives and Liberals have made with their privatization and bad contracts - contracts that benefit private and foreign corporations, and not everyday bill-payers. We will end unfair delivery charges and time-of-use pricing, so people aren't paying a ridiculous premium for doing things like living in a small town or making dinner for their kids.

Our plan is online for all to read (ontariondp.ca/hydroplan). I encourage Ontarians to take a look for themselves.

Andrea Horwath is the leader of Ontario's New Democrats.

PUBLICATION: The Globe and Mail
EDITION: Ontario
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Report on Business
PAGE: B2
BYLINE: By JACQUELINE NELSON
WORD COUNT: 591
DATELINE:

Globe and Mail Investor looks to build power plants for businesses

Staff

A new Canadian venture plans to build small, on-site power facilities for businesses as high energy costs and investor demand for infrastructure converge.

Forum Equity Partners, a Toronto-based alternative investment manager with $1.3-billion under management, is backing an initiative that will seek to put individual, natural gas-fired power plants within Ontario hotels, manufacturing facilities and other businesses. In time, the business plans to expand in Canada and internationally.

The venture, called Forum Vostro Energy Services Inc. (FVES), is expected to have between $300million and $400-million in committed funds by 2019, said Richard Abboud, chief executive officer of Forum. To get FVES up and running, Forum will use capital from its own balance sheet, but it will look to institutional investors for capital in the future.

Mr. Abboud said that the power facilities would have contracted cash flows and clear operating costs that would give these investments at a lower risk profile than many other infrastructure assets.

FVES is being rolled out amid government plans to increase infrastructure development, as well as mounting frustrations among business owners over climbing energy prices in some provinces.

As Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne targets lower residential electricity rates to reduce the burden on families, businesses haven't been promised much relief from soaring power costs in the province.

"Part of the reason why it makes sense is because out costs have gone up," said Atul Mahajan, who helped to found FVES after leaving the role of CEO at Oshawa Power and Utilities Corp., an Ontario public utility, this past year. "And natural gas [costs], thanks to fracking technology, are at an all-time low."

FVES's first idea is to put individual co-generation energy plants, sometimes called combined heat and power (CHP) plants, into businesses, giving them efficient localized power and the heat for less than the cost of being a part of the normal energy grid. FVES would install units up to 40-feet-long that run on natural gas into businesses and manufacturing sites. This saves on transmission costs and waste, as well as promising more reliable power not susceptible to extreme weather and pumping out usable steam, FVES says.

Mr. Mahajan sees a $3-billion market opportunity in Ontario.

Other provinces such as Alberta could also be ripe for expansion due to their high energy costs, he said, and eventually he'd hope to expand the business into the United States and beyond. But Quebec and B.C. would likely be uneconomic for the businesses.

There are other vulnerabilities.

If the government were to artificially reduce electricity costs, this could have an impact on the business plan, Mr. Mahajan said.

To counter that, Mr. Mahajan intends to expand the FVES into other renewable offerings such as solar power and storage. That also helps address the concern that these plants still run on fossil fuels. “It’s a bridge to the future,” Mr. Mahajan said, adding that FVES is “technology agnostic.”

Still, co-generation isn’t right for all businesses. These kinds of power units are also most efficient for businesses such as hospitals or hotels that use power 24/7. For office buildings and other businesses with sleepy hours, there’s less potential to save money.

Mr. Mahajan says that he’s already sourced customers for Forum Vostro and is working through detailed engineering studies. “We are currently in the process of completing these for several clients and hope to start construction in late summer and be up and running early to midnext year,” he said.

PUBLICATION: Toronto Sun
PAGE: A15
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Comment
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Ben Eisen
SOURCE: Toronto Sun
KEYWORDS: public,policy,decisions,frequently,biased,towards
WORD COUNT: 556

Toronto Sun: Long-term pain for short-term gain (A15)

Public policy decisions are frequently biased towards short-term thinking.

Governments make decisions that will affect people's lives for decades, but must operate within a political context in which the next election is never more than a few years away.

This can't be solved completely - but it can be mitigated by politicians with courage and strong communication skills willing to tell the public when it's a bad idea to create significant future costs.

Unfortunately, in Ontario, policymakers have recently been willing to impose longterm costs on Ontarians rather than make hard choices today.

Nowhere is this clearer than fiscal policy.

It's true that the province's Liberal government has faced some tough circumstances when it comes to public finances.

Ontario was hit hard by a nasty recession in 2008/09, which caused spending in some areas (social assistance, for example) to go up, and revenues to dip.

Running budget deficits back then may have been necessary. It has been a matter of discretionary choice, however, for the provincial government not to work quickly in the years following the recession to reduce spending.

Rather than bring spending back down during the recovery approximately as quickly as it went up during the recession to return to balance quickly, the province chose to merely slow the rate of spending growth, while waiting for revenues to gradually catch up.

Crucially, deciding to shrink the deficit only very slowly will have important future consequences - specifically, a veritable mountain of debt that will need to be serviced indefinitely.

What adds insult to injury is that the government sometimes justifies the rapid runup in debt as something done for the benefit of future generations.

This argument is implicitly embedded in claims that rising debt is necessary to finance investments in growth-enhancing infrastructure.

But in reality, infrastructure investments haven't driven the big debt run-up.

A recent study by the Fraser Institute shows two-thirds of the new debt accumulated between 2009/10 and 2014/15 was due to current expenses exceeding revenues - not long-term capital spending on infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges.

In other words, the debt was run up by spending on items being consumed today, while future generations will be stuck with the bill.

It's within this context that the government's decision last week to spread out the repayment of debt resulting from the government's management of Ontario's power system must be understood.

The provincial government has made a number of welldocumented mistakes, which have contributed to skyrocketing hydro bills.

The political fallout has been damaging for the government, which is now trying to put out the fire by spreading the province's repayment schedule of debts over a longer time period, allowing hydro rates to fall in the short term.

Again, the costs of our energy policy mistakes are being pushed onto future taxpayers who will have to pay billions more in interest payments.

Policymaking in Ontario is in the grip of short-term thinking.

To bring sustainable economic prosperity back to the province, Premier Kathleen Wynne's government should refocus on policy fundamentals that encourage long-term growth.

That includes making meaningful commitments to tax competitiveness and fiscal responsibility.

The only other option is to keep kicking the can down the road, all the while worrying about how on Earth we're going to explain our choices to our kids.

Eisen is director of the Fraser

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EDITION: Final
SOURCE: Toronto Sun
KEYWORDS: premier,kathleen,wynne,thing,government,cutting
WORD COUNT: 375

Toronto Sun: Premier Wynne passes the buck (A14)

Premier Kathleen Wynne says it's a good thing her government is cutting electricity bills today by passing on the $25 billion cost to future generations of Ontarians.

Wynne defended this decision - developed with next year's election in mind in the face of public fury over hydro bills - in an interview Monday with Newstalk 1010's John Moore. Here's what she said: "I'm quite comfortable saying to my grandkids that, you know, in order for your mom and dad to be able to do the things that they want to do for you right now, we're going to ask you to pay a little bit for electricity that you'll be using, for a system that you'll be using when you're a bit older. I think that's a reasonable thing to ask of a couple of generations."

Wynne may be comfortable passing the buck to our children and grandchildren but, as Newstalk 1010 commentator James Laidlaw pointed out, what happens 30 to 40 years from now when all the hydro infrastructure today's children helped their parents and grandparents pay for, has to be replaced again? Who's going to help them, as adults pay for that expense, because it won't be their parents and grandparents? Wynne isn't reducing hydro bills 17% on June 1 because of her prudent financial management of the electricity system.

She's doing it by making provincial taxpayers subsidize hydro ratepayers, which accomplishes nothing because taxpayers and ratepayers are the same people.

In the past decade that saw electricity rates double in Ontario, while two provincial auditors general documented how they were wasting billions of dollars on green energy through reckless planning, the Liberals were indifferent to the suffering their electricity policies caused.

When their constituents appealed to Liberal MPPs for help, many were ignored, or received form letters. Some even got back snarky replies from Liberal MPPs.

Wynne and the Liberals didn't come up with their "Rob Peter to pay Paul' hydro subsidy plan because they suddenly care about Ontarians forced into energy poverty because of their inane policies. They came up with it to save their hides. Which is why they can't be trusted to keep any promise they make before next year's election after next year's election, if they win again.

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PAGE: A14
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Comment
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Dennis Skrepnek
SOURCE: Toronto Sun
KEYWORDS: believe,agree,anything,wynne,deferring,hydro
WORD COUNT: 152

Toronto Sun Letter - Let The Young Pay (A14)

I cannot believe I would ever agree with anything Wynne has done or said, but deferring the hydro costs may not be such a bad idea. I am a 60-plus-yearold man and I could care less about anything being or going green. It is far too costly, as we can all see now. If it was up to me, the coal plants would be going strong and we would still be getting affordable hydro. But, oh no, the younger generation wants to save the Earth, making everything green. Nice idea, too damn costly. So Wynne may be right - let the people screaming for green pay for it down the road, years down the road. I do not want green and I certainly do not want to pay green high costs. Let the young folks pay it if green is what they want.

DENNIS SKREPNEK CITY OF KAWARTHA LAKES

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PAGE: A1 / Front
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Allan Benner
SOURCE: Postmedia Network
KEYWORDS: years,increasing,energy,bills,reduce,trend
ILLUSTRATION: File Photo / Alternative plans for reducing electricity rates have led to bickering at Queen's Park. That could be a good thing for people struggling to pay bills.; / Gates; / Carl; / Bradley; / Oosterhoff;
WORD COUNT: 876

Welland Tribune: Hope Centre welcomes competing hydro cuts (A1)

After years of increasing energy bills, any plan to reduce that trend is welcome news to social service agencies.

"The Hope Centre is grateful for (relief efforts) because we've been swamped with hydro bills, from people being disconnected or really far in arrears," said Mark Carl, executive director of the Welland agency.

"If you live in poverty and have no real money at the end of the month, when hydro is going up and food is going up, it's harder and harder for people to make the payments and not get disconnected," Carl said.

"People just can't afford the hydro rates, and they've been coming to the Hope Centre when they're at risk of being disconnected."

Meanwhile, the organization's food bank has seen an increase in demand of about six per cent in the past year, and Carl suspects that increase "is directly related to higher energy costs."

Hydro prices have led to some bickering at Queen's Park among opposition parties.

While a Liberal government plan would cut rates by an average of 25 per cent, the New Democratic Party says a plan it introduced would save ratepayers 30 per cent on bills.

The Progressive Conservatives referred the Liberal plan to the auditor general while developing an alternative rate reduction plan of its own.

Niagara Falls MPP Wayne Gates said the NDP's plan includes buying back assets of Hydro One, a utility that has been earning hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

Selling it "makes no sense," he said.

Gates said about "94 per cent of the people of the province of Ontario have been very clear - do not sell Hydro One."

He said the promised 25 per cent Liberal cut really only amounts to 17 per cent, because it includes previously announced plans to eliminate the eight per cent HST on electricity bills.

Gates is also concerned about the Liberal plan to cut costs by deferring debt payments. The burden of that debt, would then be borne by future generations.

"I worked my entire life to try and make a better life for my kids and my grandkids. I do not want to give them any more hardship," he said. "It makes absolutely no sense to me."

Progressive Conservative MPP Sam Oosterhoff, representing Niagara West-Glanbrook, called the Liberal plan "a shell game."

He said it fails to address costs associated with the Liberal's Green Energy Act, while extending the payment period which leads to increased interest payments.

"We're seeing some estimates that this could be an extra $25 billion to taxpayers here and down the road," he said. "They're not addressing those root causes within the Green Energy Act that they signed back in the day, backed up by the NDP."

He called the NDP's plan "just absolutely ridiculous."

Oosterhoff said the PC party's plan is still in development but it will be designed to address underlying causes of rate increases - including wages paid to upper management.

He said the Tories asked the auditor general to look into the Liberal plan, alleging that the governing party is "making hugely speculative plans about all sorts of issues that they're not backing up by facts."

"We believe the people of Ontario deserve accountability and transparency," he said.

St. Catharines Liberal MPP Jim Bradley said the PC party ought to be developing its own rate-cutting plan rather than worrying about the auditor general.

"When you don't have a plan yourself, I guess you're calling the auditor to look at someone else's plan," he said.

He said the Liberals introduced a comprehensive plan that recognizes the substantial cost incurred in transforming electrical generation away from fossil fuels like coal.

"We've invested more than $50 billion in generation, transmission and distribution," he said, adding the hydro tunnel recently built in Niagara Falls was part of that initiative.

"The government has determined ... that there should be a fairer way of sharing that cost. That's why they have accepted a recommendation which involves paying for that over a longer period of time," Bradley said.

"We though that on average a 25 per cent cut in the cost of electricity would be fair to people in this province, and also special programs which assist those at the low end of the income scale."

Hydro One vice-president of customer and corporate affairs Ferio Pugliese said the Liberal plan addresses a "sizable amount of the issues, if not most of the issues" that its 1.3 million customers are looking for.

"We're hearing from many of them about the need for relief and affordability. With hydro it's certainly necessary given the escalations that we've seen in recent years," Pugliese said. "Certainly from the point of view of the people we serve, I see it as a welcome change for them, and one that will lead, with policies, to be very sustainable change."

In addition to the average savings across the province, he said many of Hydro One's customers could save even more.

About 75 per cent of its residential customers live in remote areas, which means they have been paying higher rates to recover costs. The Liberal plan would bring rural delivery rates in line with urban areas, "and that will be a very welcome change for our customers," Pugliese said. ABenner@postmedia.com

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DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Cheryl Browne
SOURCE: The Barrie Examiner
KEYWORDS: flawed,provincial,formula,responsible,innocence,simcoe
WORD COUNT: 1045

Barrie Examiner Funding formula 'flawed' (A1)

A flawed provincial formula is responsible for our children's loss of innocence.

Or at least that's what Simcoe North MPP Patrick Brown would have people believe.

The Official Leader of the Opposition was demanding a moratorium vote on school closures at Queen's Park on Tuesday, determined to draw the public's attention from one contentious issue - the high cost of hydro rates - to the closure of community schools across the province.

"It's a flawed provincial formula that school boards only get new capital funding if they close schools," Brown said a few hours before the moratorium vote at Queen's Park.

After Premier Kathleen Wynne caved to mounting political pressure and promised to cut hydro rates by 25%, Brown took up the flag of failed school communities.

No one is better versed in school closures than Barrie Mayor Jeff Lehman, who campaigned to keep Barrie Central Collegiate open.

It closed in June 2016, but not before many acrimonious public accommodation review committee (ARC) meetings and a potential partnership was quashed by the Simcoe County District School Board.

"I agree with Patrick on the impact of school closures. They are very damaging to communities, regardless of whether rural or urban, but particularly rural areas," said Lehman.

"I also agree that the ARC process is a terrible process that pits parents against parents, schools against schools and is largely a token consultation process anyway, so why bother with it?" Lehman lays the blame squarely on the shoulders of the public school board when it comes to not thinking outside the box.

In Barrie Central's case, the proposed partnership to build a new school would have been considered a "major urban revitalization project."

"Turning that down was the fault of the Simcoe County District School Board, not the Ministry of Education. But I will say, we asked the ministry to step in and support the partnership for a new Barrie Central building on several occasions and they always said it was a local decision," he said.

Lehman finished by saying, there should be consequences for school boards that reject community partnerships.

"Especially when they can keep a school open and have a much broader community benefit," he said.

If it was only Barrie Central closing, it would be an anomaly.

Yet Brown's school closing list shows more than 330 schools have been closed since former premier Dalton McGuinty ruled the roost.

The ministry's directive on Monday to school boards reiterating its pledge of $600,000 to assist school boards in finding partnerships - both with other school boards and private businesses - doesn't hold much water with public school board chairman Peter Beacock.

"Anything the ministry is able to do - and partnerships with other school boards - is fine, but there needs to be some sort of incentive to get them to do it," Beacock said. "The partnership has to be of no cost to the school board and then you've still got to look at the facility and look at the number of students."

A look at the current construction of new schools in the area might mean Brown's correct in assuming the formula is skewed so that boards only get funding for building new schools - and schools as community hubs are not taken into the equation.

As former Barrie Central student Matthew Triemstra said after transferring to Barrie North in September, "It's not as much like a family as Central was.

"At Central, you'd walk down the hall and say hi 30 times, because everybody knew you," Triemstra said. "Here it feels like we're not very welcome by the students at all."

Yet, the same type of school closures are playing out across the province.

For example, Midland Secondary School closed last June and its students joined their former rivals at Penetanguishene Secondary School - which will be pulled down once a new Georgian Bay District Secondary School opens in 2018 - on the grounds of the former Midland school.

The new Georgian Bay school funding from the ministry was approximately $23 million but additionally, the Simcoe County District Health Unit has rented offices in the school.

The board used the same manoeuvre in Orillia, when it closed Park Street Secondary School, moved its students to Orillia District Collegiate and Vocational Institute and then built the new Orillia Secondary School on Park Street.

"When the schools aren't in great shape, are you going to put $10-to-$12 million into a school that's an old building? The population of both schools is going down, but neither school is in great shape," Beacock said.

With similarly changing demographics, Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board spokeswoman Pauline Stevenson said they've had to make similar concessions.

The Catholic board combined the Prince of Peace Catholic School at Canadian Forces Base Borden and

Our Lady of Assumption Catholic School in New Lowell into a new school called Our Lady of Grace Catholic Elementary School in Angus.

But because Our Lady of Grace was in a poor state of repair, they tore it down and replaced it with a new facility, Stevenson said.

"Any time we're looking at closing a school, it's a very hard decision everyone takes seriously," Stevenson said. "The board doesn't want to do this. Nobody wants to see their school close because of the community attachment.

"But at the end of the day, we have to make a tough decision," she added. "What's best for the students?" The ministry of education believes it is building new schools.

Ministry spokeswoman Heather Irwin says since McGuinty took over in 2003, it has invested more than $16 billion in school infrastructure, which includes 810 new schools.

It also includes 780 additions and major renovations.

Irwin said it's up to the local board to decide when to build or tear down schools.

"School boards identify and rank their own capital priorities when they submit their business cases to the ministry, based on their own assessments of their local needs," Irwin said.

"We understand that decisions to close schools are some of the most difficult decisions school boards will make, and these decisions impact the school community. This is why these decisions are best made at the local level by school boards with the involvement of the community." cbrowne@postmedia.com
twitter.com/cherylbrowne1

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PAGE: A13
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Bruce Chessell
SOURCE: Postmedia Network
KEYWORDS: local,leaders,ontario,leader,andrea,horwath
ILLUSTRATION: Bruce Chessell, Postmedia Network / Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath sat down with local Oxford County leaders Thursday, March 2, including Woodstock Mayor Trevor Birtch, to discuss both her party's new plan to reduce hydro rates and the county's many sustainability initiatives.;
WORD COUNT: 570

Tillsonburg News: An energetic talk with NDP leader; Andrea Horwa Oxford County leaders to discuss hydro rates and sustainable

Local leaders met with Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath Thursday, March 2 to discuss both her party's plan to reduce hydro rates and Oxford County's commitment to sustainability.

Earlier in the week, Horwath announced her party's plan to cut hydro bills for everyone across the province by up to 30 per cent and return Hydro One back to public ownership. On Thursday, she said she was disappointed with the provincial Liberals' announcement promising a 25 per cent cut to hydro rates in Ontario.

"I don't think the premier has done anything but spend $40 billion to protect her political interests," Horwath said. "That's not what the people of Ontario deserve."

Horwath said there are a number of problems with Ontario's energy system, as well as enduring concerns over Premier Kathleen Wynne's plan to privatize Hydro One.

"To simply say that in order to deal with the political problem that the Liberals have, that they are going to increase payments (to refurbish power plants) to the tune of $40 billion and stretch them over the next 30 years isn't good enough," she said. "I think it makes people cynical about politics, and I don't blame them frankly."

Horwath also talked about her discussions with Oxford County's warden, David Mayberry, and Woodstock's mayor, Trevor Birtch. She said the meeting was about learning all of the "amazing" plans the county has.

"What I was able to do was get some detail on all kinds of different pieces," she said. "On demonstration projects, on rail, on energy, on renewables, on transit ... My mind is spinning on all of the things I heard today.

"I have to say it was a pleasure," Horwath added. "It was very inspiring ... This county and the folks that were part of this meeting today have shown that you can have real leadership when it comes to climate change and when it comes to taking responsibility for tackling climate change at the local level."

Mayberry said he thought the discussions with Horwath went well.

"We wanted to make sure that all of the parties - Liberals, Conservative and NDP - understand where Oxford County stands on these issues," he said. "We want to make sure that every party understands that we have our goals, ambitions and drive, and that from that we're expecting and wanting to partner with them and work with whoever's the elected government of the day or future government."

In response to the NDP's hydro plan, Birtch said the recognition of the high cost of nuclear energy from both the NDP and the Liberals has been interesting to see.

"There has been much editorializing from many sources that have been giving individuals within our community the sense that renewable energy projects, such as solar panels and windmills, is what has been increasing the cost of electricity for the home owner," he said. "In the dialogue that we've had in the last few days from the province, what we can clearly determine is that the true increase in cost has been generated by the nuclear industry and the refurbishments that's been happening there.

"Hearing today from the premier that the amortization of those expenses from 20 years being extended over 30 is something I have to give more thought to," Birtch added. "But clearly, we can now use that as a good example to see that renewable energy is not the driver of increased electricity bills."
bchessell@postmedia.com

PUBLICATION: Sudbury Star
PAGE: A10
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Glenn Thibeault
SOURCE: Sudbury Star
KEYWORDS: announced,largest,electricity,rates,history,recognizing
WORD COUNT: 254

Sudbury Star: Our plan the best: Grits (A10)

On Thursday, we announced the largest cut to electricity rates in Ontario's history. Recognizing that ratepayers in and around Sudbury are struggling, we are lowering electricity bills 25 per cent on average for families. Many small businesses and farms would also benefit from the initiative.

For those living in rural communities or with low incomes, the break will be even greater. Rate increases over the next four years will also be held to the rate of inflation for everyone.

Bringing rates down substantially and fixing the system's structure - that's an approach we believe in. It's better for Ontario and it's fairer for families. And Ontario's strong, growing economy allows us to do it while also delivering a balanced budget this spring.

While our plan provides fast, substantial, widespread and long-lasting relief, Patrick Brown and the

Conservatives have yet to bring forward anything credible.

Their main idea - halting the broadening of Hydro One - won't take one cent off electricity bills. It's both wrong and irresponsible for them to continue to repeat that incorrect information.

As they well know, energy rates will continue to be set by the independent Ontario Energy Board, which has a mandate to protect ratepayers.

And Brown's push to rip up energy contracts would lead to increased rates, lawsuits and penalties.

Under our plan, electricity rates will come down, stay down and benefit families and businesses across the province. By providing real, long-lasting relief, our Fair Hydro Plan makes sense for Ontarians.

Glenn Thibeault

Minister of Energy Sudbury MPP

PUBLICATION: Huron Expositor
PAGE: A5
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Peter Epp
SOURCE: Huron Expositor
KEYWORDS: ontario,liberals,using,little,imagination,lower
WORD COUNT: 418

Huron Expositor: Grits' hydro bill plan uses worn-out tactic (A5)

The Ontario Liberals are using little imagination in their plan to lower electricity bills. To achieve a 17 per cent cut this summer, the government will simply do what it has done for the better part of the past decade --push the expense down the road while creating additional debt.

Premier Kathleen Wynne announced the details Thursday. Electricity bills will be cut by 17 per cent, probably in time for June billings. But to allow for those savings, the cost of operating Ontario's massive electricity program will be allowed to pile up as new debt, ultimately costing ratepayers billions of dollars in additional interest payments.

Indeed, it's been calculated the Liberal plan will cost an additional $1.4 billion a year in interest payments over the next decade.

The cost of electricity won't be cut this spring; it will be subsidized. Or more accurately, the Liberals' political fortunes will be subsidized.

That's what Thursday's announcement is all about. With just 15 months before Ontario goes to the polls, it's becoming clear the path to victory will belong to the leader and party best able to convince voters they can solve the province's electricity woes.

Andrea Horwath threw down the gauntlet earlier this week. In a series of roundtable discussions and announcements, the NDP leader set forth her party's plan to solve the energy puzzle.

New Democrats would buy back Ontario Hydro shares recently sold by the Wynne Liberals, would review and push for new terms on contracts signed with private energy users, and would give consumers the option to opt out of timeof-use pricing.

Horwath said those measures, plus others, would save consumers as much as 20 to 30 per cent on hydro bills.

Until the NDP leader announced her plan the Liberals had no substantial answer to the crisis of rising electricity costs.

The Progressive Conservatives, meanwhile, have offered no solution of their own, perhaps content to remain silent while the Liberals strangle on an issue commonly understood to be their creation.

Yet there's a good chance voters will accept the Liberal plan for what it appears on the surface --a 17 per cent cut in electricity bills.

Wynne and her predecessor Dalton McGuinty have collectively doubled Ontario's debt over the last 13 years, and Wynne's own government has yet to table a balanced budget. They have governed Ontario through a blizzard of debt creation, with tacit approval from voters who handed Wynne a majority government in 2014.

Her response to the electricity crisis shouldn't be surprising.

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PUBLICATION: Huron Expositor
PAGE: A11
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
SOURCE: Huron Expositor
KEYWORDS: despite,legislative,session,ontario,liberals,still
DATELINE: QUEEN'S PARK
WORD COUNT: 262

Huron Expositor Press-release from MPP Lisa Thompson addresses legislature (A11)

Despite a new legislative session, the Ontario Liberals are still not taking the impact of skyrocketing hydro rates seriously, and nowhere is it more evident than in Huron-Bruce, says local MPP Lisa Thompson.

With the resumption of the legislature today, Opposition MPPs, including Thompson, hammered the Liberals over their lack of action on the ever-increasing costs of hydro to Ontario families and businesses.

"What the Liberals don't understand is that if they don't start standing up for Ontario businesses- like Snobelen Farms in Huron-Bruce, whose delivery charge is three times the cost of their electricity- we're going to continue seeing jobs and investment flee our province at an alarming rate," said Thompson. "The Premier needs to finally admit that her careless spending is perpetuating the ongoing gouging of Ontario businesses, and start taking real, tangible action to bring down costs."

In response to Thompson's question, Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault chose not to answer, instead punting it to Minister of Economic Development and Growth Brad Duguid, who had no words of comfort for hard-hit Ontarians, saying that he is "proud of the investments" his government has made.

He went on to claim that Ontario is the most competitive jurisdiction in North America for small and medium sized businesses, a statement that people don't believe.

"It's disappointing that the Liberals are sticking to their tired rhetoric on this. If we had a nickel for every time they've patted themselves on the back or said something will be done and then failed to follow up, we could probably actually afford our hydro bills," concluded Thompson.

PUBLICATION: St. Catharines Standard
PAGE: A3
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Allan Benner
SOURCE: Standard Staff
KEYWORDS: years,increasing,energy,bills,reduce,trend

ILLUSTRATION: Bob Tymczyszyn, Standard File Photo / Alternative plans for reducing electricity rates have led to bickering at Queen's Park.; / Oosterhoff; / Carl; / Bradley; / Gates;
WORD COUNT: 874

St. Catharines Standard: Competing hydro cuts welcomed (A3)

After years of increasing energy bills, any plan to reduce that trend is welcome news to social service agencies.

"The Hope Centre is grateful for (relief efforts) because we've been swamped with hydro bills, from people being disconnected or really far in arrears," said Mark Carl, executive director of the Welland agency.

"If you live in poverty and have no real money at the end of the month, when hydro is going up and food is going up, it's harder and harder for people to make the payments and not get disconnected," Carl said.

"People just can't afford the hydro rates, and they've been coming to the Hope Centre when they're at risk of being disconnected."

Meanwhile, the organization's food bank has seen an increase in demand of about six per cent in the past year, and Carl suspects that increase "is directly related to higher energy costs."

Hydro prices have led to some bickering at Queen's Park among opposition parties.

While a Liberal government plan would cut rates by an average of 25 per cent, the New Democratic Party says a plan it introduced would save ratepayers 30 per cent on bills.

The Progressive Conservatives referred the Liberal plan to the auditor general while developing an alternative rate reduction plan of its own.

Niagara Falls MPP Wayne Gates said the NDP's plan includes buying back assets of Hydro One, a utility that has been earning hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

Selling it "makes no sense," he said.

Gates said about "94 per cent of the people of the province of Ontario have been very clear - do not sell Hydro One."

He said the promised 25 per cent Liberal cut really only amounts to 17 per cent, because it includes previously announced plans to eliminate the eight per cent HST on electricity bills.

Gates is also concerned about the Liberal plan to cut costs by deferring debt payments. The burden of that debt, would then be borne by future generations.

"I worked my entire life to try and make a better life for my kids and my grandkids. I do not want to give them any more hardship," he said. "It makes absolutely no sense to me."

Progressive Conservative MPP Sam Oosterhoff, representing Niagara West-Glanbrook, called the Liberal plan "a shell game."

He said it fails to address costs associated with the Liberal's Green Energy Act, while extending the payment period which leads to increased interest payments.

"We're seeing some estimates that this could be an extra $25 billion to taxpayers here and down the road," he said. "They're not addressing those root causes within the Green Energy Act that they signed back in the day, backed up by the NDP."

He called the NDP's plan "just absolutely ridiculous."

Oosterhoff said the PC party's plan is still in development but it will be designed to address underlying causes of rate increases - including wages paid to upper management.

He said the Tories asked the auditor general to look into the Liberal plan, alleging that the governing party is "making hugely speculative plans about all sorts of issues that they're not backing up by facts."

"We believe the people of Ontario deserve accountability and transparency," he said.

St. Catharines Liberal MPP Jim Bradley said the PC party ought to be developing its own rate-cutting plan rather than worrying about the auditor general.

"When you don't have a plan yourself, I guess you're calling the auditor to look at someone else's plan," he said.

He said the Liberals introduced a comprehensive plan that recognizes the substantial cost incurred in transforming electrical generation away from fossil fuels like coal.

"We've invested more than $50 billion in generation, transmission and distribution," he said, adding the hydro tunnel recently built in Niagara Falls was part of that initiative.

"The government has determined ... that there should be a fairer way of sharing that cost. That's why they have accepted a recommendation which involves paying for that over a longer period of time," Bradley said.

"We though that on average a 25 per cent cut in the cost of electricity would be fair to people in this province, and also special programs which assist those at the low end of the income scale."

Hydro One vice-president of customer and corporate affairs Ferio Pugliese said the Liberal plan addresses a "sizable amount of the issues, if not most of the issues" that its 1.3 million customers are looking for.

"We're hearing from many of them about the need for relief and affordability. With hydro it's certainly necessary given the escalations that we've seen in recent years," Pugliese said. "Certainly from the point of view of the people we serve, I see it as a welcome change for them, and one that will lead, with policies, to be very sustainable change."

In addition to the average savings across the province, he said many of Hydro One's customers could save even more.

About 75 per cent of its residential customers live in remote areas, which means they have been paying higher rates to recover costs. The Liberal plan would bring rural delivery rates in line with urban areas, "and that will be a very welcome change for our customers," Pugliese said.

PUBLICATION: Sarnia Observer
PAGE: A6
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Corina Barlow
SOURCE: Sarnia Observer
KEYWORDS: kathleen,wynne,morning,regarding,lowering,hydro
DATELINE: Sarnia
WORD COUNT: 116

Sarnia Observer Letter: - Hydro increases added deviously (A6)

Kathleen Wynne was on the news last Friday morning regarding lowering hydro rates.

How about keeping them from going up in such devious manners? Bluewater Power went from a bi-monthly billing system to a monthly billing system. In comparing my last bill from the bi-monthly system to the first bill in the monthly system: Our delivery charge used to be $60 for two months. Now it's $36 for one month.

Our regulatory charge used to be around $4.75 for two months. Now it's $3.42 for one month.

And we used less electricity than the two-month statement that I'm comparing it to - so this change is not because of our usage

Corina Barlow

Sarnia

PUBLICATION: Daily Observer (Pembroke)
PAGE: A3
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Milan Ihnat
SOURCE: Daily Observer (Pembroke)
KEYWORDS: ontario,hydro,customers,crying,reductions,electricity
DATELINE: London
WORD COUNT: 75

Pembroke Daily Observer: Letter: Hydro relief all wrong (A3)

Ontario Hydro customers have been crying out for reductions in electricity costs. Kathleen Wynne and the Liberal government responded by increasing electricity costs by $25 billion to $40 billion.

Their solution, to extend financing over a longer term, increases the provincial debt instead of attacking the root of the problem: excessive green energy costs and exorbitant salaries.

This is yet another disrespectful, fiscally irresponsible action on the part of the Ontario government.

Milan Ihnat

London

PUBLICATION: Daily Observer (Pembroke)
PAGE: A1 / Front
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
SOURCE: Daily Observer (Pembroke)
KEYWORDS: ontario,government,electricity,bills,yakabuski,people
ILLUSTRATION: / (See hardcopy for photo);
WORD COUNT: 340

Pembroke Daily Observer: Power price drop, pay later; MPP John Yaka problems with gov't plan to cut hydro bills (A1)

A move by the Ontario government to cut electricity bills by 17 per cent doesn't wash with John Yakabuski.

The Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke MPP says while people will save money on their utility bills in the short term, the cost cut doesn't solve the problem of the electricity system which led to high costs in the first place.

"You are getting immediate savings," he said, "but their actions only take the rate down to what it was in 2015." Since the government is not changing the system, he explained, these costs will go back up and then some, once the financial effects of enacting the cuts are passed John Yakabuski on to those same electricity customers.

Yakabuski said the government is paying for the cuts by refinancing the electricity generation contracts signed under the Green Energy Act over a longer period of time, essentially mortgaging the future for short term gain.

He said this would mean Ontario will be hit with up to $1.4 billion a year in extra interest payments on this refinancing, a cost which will be put on future energy bills.

"They created this mess with the Green Energy Act, which was a disaster," the MPP said. But instead of overhauling the generation system, which now costs billions of dollars to generate power the province doesn't need and is being dumped on the market at below cost, he said the government is trying to head off the tsunami of public anger which threatens to sweep them out of power.

"This is just an attempt to beg the people of Ontario's forgiveness for the mess they created, and forgive by the 2018 election," Yakabuski said.

Under the Liberal government plan, released late last week, residential and small business hydro bills in Ontario will drop by 17 per cent on average this summer.

The plan is to keep electricity rates at or below the rate of inflation over the next four years.

This move comes as the polls state the government trails the PCs by some 14 points.
SUhler@postmedia.com

PUBLICATION: Ottawa Sun
PAGE: A13
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Comment
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Ben Eisen
SOURCE: Ottawa Sun
KEYWORDS: public,policy,decisions,frequently,biased,towards
WORD COUNT: 560

Ottawa Sun Long-term pain for short-term gain (A13)

Public policy decisions are frequently biased towards short-term thinking.

Governments make decisions that will affect people's lives for decades, but must operate within a political context in which the next election is never more than a few years away.

This can't be solved completely - but it can be mitigated by politicians with courage and strong communication skills willing to tell the public when it's a bad idea to create significant future costs.

Unfortunately, in Ontario, policymakers have recently been willing to impose longterm costs on Ontarians rather than make hard choices today.

Nowhere is this clearer than fiscal policy.

It's true that the province's Liberal government has faced some tough circumstances when it comes to public finances.

Ontario was hit hard by a nasty recession in 2008/09, which caused spending in some areas (social assistance, for example) to go up, and revenues to dip.

Running budget deficits back then may have been necessary. It has been a matter of discretionary choice, however, for the provincial government not to work quickly in the years following the recession to reduce spending.

Rather than bring spending back down during the recovery approximately as quickly as it went up during the recession to return to balance quickly, the province chose to merely slow the rate of spending growth, while waiting for revenues to gradually catch up.

Crucially, deciding to shrink the deficit only very slowly will have important future consequences - specifically, a veritable mountain of debt that will need to be serviced indefinitely.

What adds insult to injury is that the government sometimes justifies the rapid runup in debt as something done for the benefit of future generations.

This argument is implicitly embedded in claims that rising debt is necessary to finance investments in growth-enhancing infrastructure.

But in reality, infrastructure investments haven't driven the big debt run-up.

A recent study by the Fraser Institute shows two-thirds of the new debt accumulated between 2009/10 and 2014/15 was due to current expenses exceeding revenues - not long-term capital spending on infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges.

In other words, the debt was run up by spending on items being consumed today, while future generations will be stuck with the bill.

It's within this context that the government's decision last week to spread out the repayment of debt resulting from the government's management of Ontario's power system must be understood.

The provincial government has made a number of welldocumented mistakes, which have contributed to skyrocketing hydro bills.

The political fallout has been damaging for the government, which is now trying to put out the fire by spreading the province's repayment schedule of debts over a longer time period, allowing hydro rates to fall in the short term.

Again, the costs of our energy policy mistakes are being pushed onto future taxpayers who will have to pay billions more in interest payments.

Policymaking in Ontario is in the grip of short-term thinking.

To bring sustainable economic prosperity back to the province, Premier Kathleen Wynne's government should refocus on policy fundamentals that encourage long-term growth.

That includes making meaningful commitments to tax competitiveness and fiscal responsibility.

The only other option is to keep kicking the can down the road, all the while worrying about how on Earth we're going to explain our choices to our kids.

Eisen is director of the Fraser Institute's Ontario Prosperity Initiative.

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PAGE: A12
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Comment
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Ian Nunn
SOURCE: Ottawa Sun
KEYWORDS: speaking,hydro,costs,prices,consider,first
DATELINE: Ottawa
WORD COUNT: 152

Ottawa Sun Letter - Costing It Out (A12)

When speaking of hydro costs, there are two prices to consider. The first is the real cost to the system operators, which is what they pay the generators. The second cost is the hydro rate, or the cost charged to consumers.

Presumably the first cost is fixed by contract and may not be reduced without paying a penalty. If Premier Kathleen Wynne reduces the rate charged consumers, then she has to make up the shortfall between the reduced rate and what has to be paid to generators. Since she can't print money but only tax citizens, taxpayers will pay the difference one way or another.

The problem of distress on lowincome consumers will be lessened and the political problem may be fixed if the electorate is too stupid to see through the spin. But an egregiously expensive and politically motivated electricity system design will remain untouched.

IAN NUNN

OTTAWA (Point taken.)

PUBLICATION: Orillia Packet & Times
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Glenn Thibeault
SOURCE: Orillia Packet & Times
KEYWORDS: hydro,coming,march,announced,largest,electricity
DATELINE: Ontario Minister Of Energy
WORD COUNT: 254

Orillia Packet & Times Cut to hydro rates (A4)

Re: 'PC Hydro plan coming 'soon,' March 4 On Thursday we announced the largest cut to electricity rates in Ontario's history. Recognizing that ratepayers in and around Orillia are struggling, we are lowering electricity bills 25 per cent on average for families. Many small businesses and farms would also benefit from the initiative. For those living in rural communities or with low incomes, the break will be even greater. Rate increases over the next four years will also be held to the rate of inflation for everyone.

Bringing rates down substantially and fixing the system's structure - that's an approach we believe in. It's better for Ontario and it's fairer for families. And Ontario's strong, growing economy allows us to do it while also delivering a balanced budget this spring.

While our plan provides fast, substantial, wide-spread & long-lasting relief, Patrick Brown and the Conservatives have yet to bring forward anything credible. Their idea main idea - tearing up contracts - won't take one cent off electricity bills. It's both wrong and irresponsible for them to continue to repeat that incorrect information. As they well know, energy rates will continue to be set by the independent Ontario Energy Board, which has a mandate to protect ratepayers. Tearing up contracts would lead to increased rates, lawsuits, and penalties.

Under our plan, electricity rates will come down, stay down and benefit families and businesses across the province. By providing real, long-lasting relief, our Fair Hydro Plan makes sense for Ontarians.

Glenn Thibeault

Ontario minister of energy

PUBLICATION: Orillia Packet & Times
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Jim Merriam
SOURCE: Orillia Packet & Times
KEYWORDS: wynne,announcement,reduction,power,rates,ontario
WORD COUNT: 580

The Wynne government's announcement last week of a reduction in power rates in Ontario is good politics. Too bad it's lousy government.

Something had to be done to ease power poverty in the province and the rate reduction at least begins to address that problem.

Added to the provincial tax rebate announced earlier, the reduction should total about 25 per cent off most electricity bills in the province by this summer.

But here's the rub. The change lifts some of the burden from today's hard-pressed ratepayers and places it on the shoulders of our grandchildren.

The high costs associated with power production - as organized by the Liberal government in the province today - will simply be paid off during a longer period of time.

Many have used the "robbing Peter to pay Paul," analogy to explain the effects of this rate reduction.

More precisely it's robbing future generations to pay for serious mistakes made by this government during the past 14 years in office.

Instead of just cutting power bills for consumers, good government would have addressed the underlying causes of the out-of-control rates.

That might have meant introducing legislation to allow the province an escape clause out of high price contracts for wind and solar power.

Or it might have meant a meaningful examination of all the high-priced bureaucrats in all the various government agencies that have their hand in the power cookie jar.

The system would work better, at a lower cost, if a bunch of these positions were eliminated.

There were all kinds of options available to the deep thinkers at Queen's Park.

But instead of working hard to try to cure the disease, Wynne and crew chose instead to dress it with a flashy bandage that people could confuse with real action. It's more of the smoke and mirrors for which this government is famous.

Those who are praising the government for this reduction in rates are doing nothing but helping the Liberal re-election plan in the provincial vote to come in June next year.

And that would be a shame for which Ontario's people would pay and pay and pay for generations, unless the Wynne Liberals have had some kind of epiphany that would lead them to control spending.

Since 2007, the provincial debt has approximately doubled to $308 billion and appears well on the way to a whopping $350 billion.

An incredibly irresponsible record on fiscal issues for any government in the year before an election.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, the government got here in part because it refused to listen to anybody outside the inner circle at Queen's Park.

I've listed before all the voices that tried to tell the Grits their Green Energy Act was the roadmap to disaster that it has proven to be.

And they continue not to listen to parents, community leaders and others as they close schools and decimate communities across the province in the service of some illconceived bureaucratic standard.

An immediate moratorium on such closings would be an indication that the Liberals are beginning to understand how much damage they're doing in the province.

But schools aren't the only other out-of-control area. There's a looming disaster in health care with the entire system likely to collapse under the weight of the ever-growing bureaucracy.

Pointing all this out time and again is an exercise in frustration, but there's always hope someone might pay attention, as unlikely as that seems. jmerriam@bmts.com

PUBLICATION: Norwich Gazette
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Viewpoints
EDITION: Final
SOURCE: Postmedia Network
KEYWORDS: ontario,liberals,using,little,imagination,lower
WORD COUNT: 420

Norwich Gazette: Grits' hydro bill plan uses worn-out tactic (A4)

The Ontario Liberals are using little imagination in their plan to lower electricity bills. To achieve a 17 per cent cut this summer, the government will simply do what it has done for the better part of the past decade push the expense down the road while creating additional debt.

Premier Kathleen Wynne announced the details March 2. Electricity bills will be cut by 17 per cent, probably in time for June billings. But to allow for those savings, the cost of operating Ontario's massive electricity program will be allowed to pile up as new debt, ultimately costing ratepayers billions of dollars in additional interest payments.

Indeed, it's been calculated the Liberal plan will cost an additional $1.4 billion a year in interest payments over the next decade.

The cost of electricity won't be cut this spring; it will be subsidized. Or more accurately, the Liberals' political fortunes will be subsidized.

That's what last week's announcement is all about. With just 15 months before Ontario goes to the polls, it's becoming clear the path to victory will belong to the leader and party best able to convince voters they can solve the province's electricity woes.

Andrea Horwath threw down the gauntlet earlier last week. In a series of roundtable discussions and announcements, the NDP leader set forth her party's plan to solve the energy puzzle. New Democrats would buy back Ontario Hydro shares recently sold by the Wynne Liberals, would review and push for new terms on contracts signed with private energy users, and would give consumers the option to opt out of timeof-use pricing.

Horwath said those measures, plus others, would save consumers as much as 20 to 30 per cent on hydro bills.

Until the NDP leader announced her plan the Liberals had no substantial answer to the crisis of rising electricity costs. The Progressive Conservatives, meanwhile, have offered no solution of their own, perhaps content to remain silent while the Liberals strangle on an issue commonly understood to be their creation.

Yet there's a good chance voters will accept the Liberal plan for what it appears on the surface a 17 per cent cut in electricity bills.

Wynne and her predecessor Dalton McGuinty have collectively doubled Ontario's debt over the last 13 years, and Wynne's own government has yet to table a balanced budget. They have governed Ontario through a blizzard of debt creation, with tacit approval from voters who handed Wynne a majority government in 2014.

Her response to the electricity crisis shouldn't be surprising.

PUBLICATION: North Bay Nugget
PAGE: A3
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: News
EDITION: Final
SOURCE: North Bay Nugget
KEYWORDS: energy,minister,glenn,thibeault,issued,following
WORD COUNT: 279

North Bay Nugget Energy minister issues statement (A3)

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault issued the following statement Tuesday in response to the story OPG announcement political - Mayor, which appeared in The Nugget and online Monday.

"Personnel decisions are a serious matter that affect employees, their families, and communities. As such, we asked OPG to make senior officials available in North Bay, and to prioritize briefing public officials. We regret that leaked information led to a perceived delay in the announcement and any confusion or apprehension this may have caused the community and staff."

Ontario Power Generation informed its 66 North Bay employees Monday that 20 will be transferred to Timmins and 20 more to other OPG operations in the province by the end of the year, leaving 26 in North Bay.

OPG's five regional operations will be reduced to four with the elimination of North Bay.

When contacted, North Bay Mayor Al McDonald claimed OPG had originally scheduled a meeting for Feb. 22 to inform employees, but postponed it to Monday.

"I heard the Ontario government had called OPG and asked them not to make their news public until the province made their announcement about hydro rates," he said.

McDonald said he previously contacted Thibeault about the rumours at OPG in North Bay.

"He told me he wasn't aware of this news, but would get back to me," McDonald said.

"I believe the minister didn't know and the call to OPG to delay the announcement could have only come from the premier's office."

McDonald said the province put more importance on its political announcement than its employees.

"This was strictly a political decision. OPG isn't laying off or reducing staff, they're moving people out of our community."

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PUBLICATION: London Free Press
PAGE: A7
DATE: 2017.03.08
SECTION: Comment
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Milan Ihnat
SOURCE: London Free Press
KEYWORDS: ontario,hydro,customers,crying,reductions,electricity
DATELINE: London
WORD COUNT: 75

London Free Press Letter: - Hydro relief all wrong (A7)

Ontario Hydro customers have been crying out for reductions in electricity costs. Kathleen Wynne and the Liberal government responded by increasing electricity costs by $25 billion to $40 billion.

Their solution, to extend financing over a longer term, increases the provincial debt instead of attacking the root of the problem: excessive green energy costs and exorbitant salaries.

This is yet another disrespectful, fiscally irresponsible action on the part of the Ontario government.

Milan Ihnat

London

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Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake) Cutting costs way better than cuttin

The Wynne government's announcement last week of a reduction in power rates in Ontario is good politics. Too bad it's lousy government.

Something had to be done to ease power poverty in the province and the rate reduction at least begins to address that problem.

Added to the provincial tax rebate announced earlier, the reduction should total about 25 per cent off most electricity bills in the province by this summer.

But here's the rub. The change lifts some of the burden from today's hard-pressed ratepayers and places it on the shoulders of our grandchildren.

The high costs associated with power production - as organized by the Liberal government in the province today - will simply be paid off during a longer period of time.

Many have used the "robbing Peter to pay Paul," analogy to explain the effects of this rate reduction.

More precisely it's robbing future generations to pay for serious mistakes made by this government during the past 14 years in office.

Instead of just cutting power bills for consumers, good government would have addressed the underlying causes of the out-of-control rates.

That might have meant introducing legislation to allow the province an escape clause out of high price contracts for wind and solar power.

Or it might have meant a meaningful examination of all the high-priced bureaucrats in all the various government agencies that have their hand in the power cookie jar.

The system would work better, at a lower cost, if a bunch of these positions were eliminated.

There were all kinds of options available to the deep thinkers at Queen's Park.

But instead of working hard to try to cure the disease, Wynne and crew chose instead to dress it with a flashy bandage that people could confuse with real action. It's more of the smoke and mirrors for which this government is famous.

Those who are praising the government for this reduction in rates are doing nothing but helping the Liberal re-election plan in the provincial vote to come in June next year.

And that would be a shame for which Ontario's people would pay and pay and pay for generations, unless the Wynne Liberals have had some kind of epiphany that would lead them to control spending.

Since 2007, the provincial debt has approximately doubled to $308 billion and appears well on the way to a whopping $350 billion.

An incredibly irresponsible record on fiscal issues for any government in the year before an election.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, the government got here in part because it refused to listen to anybody outside the inner circle at Queen's Park.

I've listed before all the voices that tried to tell the Grits their Green Energy Act was the roadmap to disaster that it has proven to be.

And they continue not to listen to parents, community leaders and others as they close schools and decimate communities across the province in the service of some illconceived bureaucratic standard.

An immediate moratorium on such closings would be an indication that the Liberals are beginning to understand how much damage they're doing in the province.

But schools aren't the only other out-of-control area. There's a looming disaster in health care with the entire system likely to collapse under the weight of the ever-growing bureaucracy.

Pointing all this out time and again is an exercise in frustration, but there's always hope someone might pay attention, as unlikely as that seems. jmerriam@bmts.com

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Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake): Wynne confident Liberals back her (

Premier Kathleen Wynne says she doesn't believe the knives are out for her.

Wynne said Monday morning she isn't worried that if her plan to slash hydro rates doesn't address her plummeting approval ratings, her own ministers and party will be brandishing knives.

Ontario's Liberals are one "cohesive" unit, she said.

"I think that succession planning is often not done well ... in political parties," she said. "I have a strong, loyal team. We're a cohesive group and I look forward to working with them every day."

Wynne said if there are people thinking about running for the Liberal leadership one day, that's a good thing.

"If some of them are thinking one day they may want to be the leaders, excellent," she said. "That will make them better MPPs, better ministers and better constituency workers because they take it to heart and they take it very seriously."

Wynne has repeatedly said that she plans to run in 2018. Asked again last week after launching her plan to cut hydro rates by another 17%, while taking on billions in new debt, the premier said she had no intention to quit politics.

"The pressure on me around electricity prices in Ontario is about people who are struggling to pay their electricity bills," Wynne said.

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ILLUSTRATION: Ernest Doroszuk, Postmedia Network / Ontario PC leader Patrick Brown during Question Period at Queen's Park in Toronto, last Wednesday.;
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Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake) PC Hydro plan coming soon; Liberal far enough' - Brown (A2)

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.

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Ingersoll Times: Grits' hydro bill plan uses worn-out tactic (A4)

The Ontario Liberals are using little imagination in their plan to lower electricity bills. To achieve a 17 per cent cut this summer, the government will simply do what it has done for the better part of the past decade --push the expense down the road while creating additional debt.

Premier Kathleen Wynne announced the details March 2. Electricity bills will be cut by 17 per cent, probably in time for June billings. But to allow for those savings, the cost of operating Ontario's massive electricity program will be allowed to pile up as new debt, ultimately costing ratepayers billions of dollars in additional interest payments. Indeed, it's been calculated the Liberal plan will cost an additional $1.4 billion a year in interest payments over the next decade.

The cost of electricity won't be cut this spring; it will be subsidized. Or more accurately, the Liberals' political fortunes will be subsidized.

That's what last week's announcement is all about. With just 15 months before Ontario goes to the polls, it's becoming clear the path to victory will belong to the leader and party best able to convince voters they can solve the province's electricity woes.

Andrea Horwath threw down the gauntlet earlier last week. In a series of roundtable discussions and announcements, the NDP leader set forth her party's plan to solve the energy puzzle. New Democrats would buy back Ontario Hydro shares recently sold by the Wynne Liberals, would review and push for new terms on contracts signed with private energy users, and would give consumers the option to opt out of time-of-use pricing.

Horwath said those measures, plus others, would save consumers as much as 20 to 30 per cent on hydro bills.

Until the NDP leader announced her plan the Liberals had no substantial answer to the crisis of rising electricity costs. The Progressive Conservatives, meanwhile, have offered no solution of their own, perhaps content to remain silent while the Liberals strangle on an issue commonly understood to be their creation.

Yet there's a good chance voters will accept the Liberal plan for what it appears on the surface --a 17 per cent cut in electricity bills.

Wynne and her predecessor Dalton McGuinty have collectively doubled Ontario's debt over the last 13 years, and Wynne's own government has yet to table a balanced budget. They have governed Ontario through a blizzard of debt creation, with tacit approval from voters who handed Wynne a majority government in 2014.

Her response to the electricity crisis shouldn't be surprising.

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Brantford Expositor: Hydro bill cut: 'Something had to be done' (A1)

How people react to the Ontario government's plans to cut electricity bills depends on who is being asked.

The Liberals say the announcement of Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan by Premier Kathleen Wynne and Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault will provide households with a 25 per cent break in their power bills.

Many local small businesses and farms would benefit from the initiative, and people with low incomes and those living in eligible rural communities would receive even greater reductions to their electricity bills, according to the announcement.

And Six Nations and other onreserve First Nations customers will have their own rates.

Brant Liberal MPP Dave Levac said the intent of the plan is to recast an economic energy policy as a social program to protect residents hit by escalating electricity rates caused by an expensive program to retool the province's energy production and distribution grid.

The assistance promised in the plan will come from a refinancing of the government's investment costs over a longer term. Customers will benefit directly in lower bills.

Levac made clear that he wants to steer clear of partisan politics because of his position as Speaker of the Legislature.

"But the evidence is clear from research undertaken by third parties that something had to be done," he said.

"There needs to be a step back from the charge that the higher prices were the result of a heartless government."

Wynne and Thibeault attributed current high electricity rates on decades of under-investment in the electricity system by governments of all stripes. That resulted in the need to spend more than $50 billion in generation, transmission and distribution; and the decision to eliminate Ontario's use of coal and produce cleaner, renewable power created additional costs.

The government's plan to cut rates revolves around five main points: The plan would improve sector efficiency and modernize the province's electricity market, working in collaboration with the Independent Electricity System Operator and the Ontario Energy Board.

The province will expand the rural or remote rate protection plan to provide relief from distribution charges to additional customers service by local distribution companies with the highest rates. About 800,000 customers would benefit from the enhanced program.

An Affordability Fund would be accessible to local distribution companies for customers who do not quality for low-income conservation programs and who are unable to undertake energy efficiency improvements without assistance.

On-territory First Nations customers will receive a 100-per-cent credit of the delivery line on their monthly electricity bills.

An expanded Ontario Electricity Support Program will provide an additional $180 to $276 per year for households of eligible size and combined income.

And Ontario is expanding the industrial conservation initiative program by reducing the threshold from one megawatt to 500 kilowatts and targeting more small manufacturing and industrial consumers.

Six Nations elected Chief Ava Hill praised the 100-per-cent credit of the delivery line on the bills of First Nations customers of Hydro One.

Six Nations and other First Nations had lobbied province for years for a change in rate structure. They considered it unfair to be charged rates and not be eligible for some subsidy programs and other benefits.

"This is huge for First Nations people," Hill said. "I am pleased that the government has listened to us and took action. This is a good step on the path to reconciliation."

The credit follows a landmark One.

agreement last year allowing First Nations to purchase up to 15 million shares in Hydro

Larry Davis, a director of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture representing Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk, said he's glad the government listened to pleas from farmers that power rates were making them uncompetitive and even threatening to drive some out of business. "Something needed to be done," Davis said. "We're moving toward a system of greener energy production and it has made our air cleaner. We had to get off coal-fired power generation, but it's costing us more. Extending the payment period for the investment takes a bit of pressure off us." MMarion@postmedia.com

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Belleville Intelligencer

Brown needs better exposure before election

Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario and Liberal leader, languishes at a record low approval rating, somewhere in the teens. As well, her party trails Patrick Brown, leader of the PC, according to recent polls, by close to 20 per cent. However, the provincial election is not expected until June 2018. This explains much of Wynne's recent political manoeuvring, particularly the announcement concerning the reduction of hydro bills to consumers.

By the time the election has finally taken place, the Liberals will have been in power for 15 years. Patrick Brown, and the PC's, should win easily in 2018, as many Ontarians will seek a change of leadership and management style.

At the moment, too many Ontarians could not name or recognize Brown, or more importantly, what he represents. Brown was formerly an MP in Ottawa but won the provincial PC leadership in May of 2015. Currently he is an MPP for Simcoe North. Becoming better known in 122 ridings across Ontario, within 18 months, of a provincial election will be an arduous task. Depending on local MPPs, to introduce and represent Brown, will be important.

Locally, Todd Smith, Prince Edward-Hastings MPP, has been named the energy critic by Brown. As such, Smith has been rightfully pointing out the mismanagement of the Liberals for many years. Yet, Wynne is betting Ontario voters could care less about the long convoluted history of the energy file. Lowering consumer's electrical bills by as much as 25 per cent is pure politics. A year from now consumer's bills will have decreased considerably. Wynne is hoping consumers, who vote, have really short memories.

Carbon pricing as a means of fighting climate change is favoured by Brown. This will not sit well with many loyal PC members, sitting MPPs, or potential candidates. This is the party for climate deniers. Brown will be walking a tight rope with this file, which potentially, could be a weak link in their platform. Most Ontarians view climate change as extremely important. Brown is ahead of his party in this regard. Of course, one could also claim Brown is simply being political and doesn't really believe in climate change or carbon pricing. How Brown handles this dilemma will be telling.

Health care will always play a major role in any provincial election. Wynne has yet to come to an agreement with the doctors of Ontario. She has had years to resolve payment issues with the Ontario Medical Association and has failed to do so. Previously, Liberals unilaterally cut fees paid to doctors. Brown and the PC's didn't agree with the process, and stated the Liberals have lost the trust of doctors. Yet, where Brown stands on this issue and how he would deal with this disagreement is truly unknown.

Infrastructure and gridlock, particularly through Toronto is costing businesses tremendously. John Tory, mayor of Toronto, advocated tolls as a form of revenue to pay for upgraded infrastructure, and alleviate gridlock. Wynne said no. Wisely, Brown, hasn't articulated much regarding this controversial issue. Upgrading infrastructure is not cheap and will require investment. Where Brown suggests the required revenue comes from will explain a lot to Ontarians.

Most of the present economic news for Wynne surrounding the economy is positive. Economic growth has risen and unemployment has decreased. The deficit has come down considerably, and the books may even be balanced for the election year, but the provincial debt is now at a staggering $316 billion. Ontarians tend to worry about 'the now' not the future. In essence, then, most of the economic news favours the Liberals. But, that can change in 18 months.

Brown, and the PCs, should win the majority of seats from the 2018 provincial election. Yet, history hints, that somehow, the PCs could alter a forecasted victory into another devastating defeat.