Afternoon Energy Media Summary - March 10, 2017

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Date: Fri, 10 Mar 2017 15:03:10 -0500

Good Afternoon,

Here is a roundup of the day's news:

- Thibault says province exploring Sault to Michigan power sales- Soo Today
- Leone: Drafting an alternative hydro agenda- QP Briefing
- Tying Up Loose Ends: Amendments To Ontario's Cap And Trade Program- Mondaq
- System Restructuring Would Deliver Lasting Relief to Households and Businesses in Northeastern Ontario- Wawa News.
- N American duo eye green grid- Re News
- Innisfil residents ready to revolt against InnPower rate increase- Simcoe.com
- Despite gains, Toronto's air pollution still causing serious health problems- The Star
- Will Kathleen Wynne lead, follow or get out of the way?- CBC Hamilton
- In the shadow of the greenbelt it's all about sprawl: Micallef- The Star
- New long-term energy plan on the horizon- Sault Star

Please see below ***Today in Twitter*** for news articles.

March 10, 2017

Today in Twitter

- @ KarenPtbo - The Ontario Energy Board got an earful from ratepayers...you have to watch this... http:// barrie.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=1 075026 … @Kathleen_Wynne #onpoli
- @ ElaineScoop - Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault visits Sault New long-term energy plan on the horizon | Sault Star http://www.saultstar.com/2017/03/10/new-long-term-energy-plan-on-the-horizon …
- @ PNNCareers - Thank you @GlennThibeault for kicking off PNN's #Ontario @renewableenergy event! http://www. energy.gov.on.ca/en/
- @ SSMCOC_events - ON Energy Minister @GlennThibeault encourages Chamber businesses to look into saveONenergy programs. Learn more @ https:// saveonenergy.ca /
- @ SSMCOC_events - SSM Chamber members hear from @GlennThibeault about @ONenergy Fair Hydro Plan #ssmcoc #toobig2ignore
- @ SooToday - Ontario actively participating in study to sell power to Michigan, says energy minister: One possibility could see… http://dlvr.it/NbRBxb

- @ SarahWPoljanski - How sickening is it that I'm literally watching the clock so I can go put laundry in? When is off peak? This government... #onpoli
  - @ KarenPtbo - @SarahWPoljanski Agreed but Libs arranged it so that if we conserve by using off peak hours & consume less then we get higher rates! #onpoli
  - @ TheVotersSay - @SarahWPoljanski If Ontario Gov hadn't wasted so much money on its "green" energy plan, you'd still be able to do laundry whenever you want

For the day's images, click here

Thibault says province exploring Sault to Michigan power sales
By: Kenneth Armstrong
For: Soo Today
On: March 10, 2017

Energy minister Glenn Thibeault says the province is assisting Michigan in its study to explore the possibility of channeling Ontario-produced electricity to the Upper Peninsula through Sault Ste. Marie.

Thibeault made remarks about the feasibility study, which was requested in the summer by Michigan governor Rick Snyder, at a Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce breakfast this morning.

"We are in initial early stages, but it is something our ministry is committed to working on for the benefit of not only Michigan, but our province," said Thibeault.

Sault Ste. Marie, with its renewable energy assets, is in a good position to potentially provide electricity across the St. Marys River, said Thibeault.

The feasibility study is being conducted by Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) — the regional transmission operator for most of the state — to find cost savings and increased reliability of electricity transmission to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Thibeault said criticism from opposition party leaders about the province's practice of selling power to the United States at a loss is only telling half of the story.

The province routinely produces too much electricity to address the needs of consumers, said Thibeault.

By not doing so, he said the province would risk brownouts and blackouts.

Because the excess electricity has to go somewhere, it often is sold to Michigan, New York or other places at a steep discount.

A 2015 study by the auditor general said in some instances between 2009 and 2014 when too much power was produced, the province paid exporters more than $32-million to take our surplus Ontario power.

Thibeault notes when those states require additional electricity from Ontario to meet their needs, that electricity is sold at market value.

In 2015, for instance, Thibeault said the province made $230 million on electricity exports.

That is a stark contrast, said Thibealt, to the province's power generation gap experienced in 2002 while under a Progressive Conservative government.

"But back in 2002, it cost us $700 million to buy power from the (United States)," said Thibeault.

Steve Butland, councillor for Ward 1, said he was satisfied with Thibeault's remarks about the province's plans to participate in the feasibility study.

"I think it is up to us to ensure Sault Ste. Marie and Sault Ste. Marie Michigan are the focal point of the study," said Butland.

The transmission lines could run under the St. Marys River between the twin Saults, suggested Butland.

In a September SooToday article, Tom Vair, who was then Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre's executive director, said the Sault and area was at capacity for renewable energy projects because of the state of aging transmission lines to southern Ontario.

Adding more solar or wind projects in the area could overwhelm the transmission lines.

Creating a corridor to Michigan instead, said Vair, could be an opportunity to expand green energy projects in the area.

Vair has since taken a deputy CAO position with the city of Sault Ste. Marie.

In addition to the various wind and solar projects in the Sault and area, a 7-megawatt battery project currently under construction in the city's east end is scheduled to go online in April, said Butland — with a second battery project in the works.

"We are way ahead of the curve than anybody else is, so let's take advantage of it as best we can," he said.

Leone: Drafting an alternative hydro agenda
By: Rob Leone
For: QP Briefing
On: March 10, 2017

With the Liberals and the NDP laying out their marquee pocketbook policy of reining in hydro costs, all eyes are focusing on what the front-runner Tories might do to reduce the sizable costs. However, despite repeated questions, the PC Leader Patrick Brown seems content to wait it out.

I have to admit, this hydro-palooza of policy talk has got me energized! So in the absence of an official PC policy on hydro, readers will be stuck with some version of the Rob Leone plan.

Here are my Coles notes on what a conservative energy policy might look like in 2018.

First, we're paying astronomically more because of the policy decisions of the Ontario Liberals. The Tories must aggressively make many of the points Bryne Purchase outlined in his recent QP Briefing article. The bulk of the $50 billion in new energy generation that the government has spent has been caused by Liberal policies. Rates in Ontario were stable until the Green Energy Act started escalating all kinds of costs from generation (feed-in-tariff program), to transmission (all this micro-generation was scattered all over the place), and time-of-use pricing didn't shift nearly enough people to use electricity during off-peak hours, thereby forcing people to pay more. There's more, but you get the drift. They can't shift the blame.

Second, we need to restore some economic principles back into the electricity sector. Hydro is in this odd place where we have an oversupply of energy, yet costs continue to rise, when the opposite should happen. Demand for electricity has dampened over the past 10 years, and we are still paying more, when the opposite should happen. Energy policies need to get back to market principles.

Third, if the green energy contracts are the problem, do something about the contracts. Here the Tories must channel a bit of Trump. The Wynne Liberals are just bad negotiators. This government can't negotiate its way out of anything without costing taxpayers billions. Reason enough to get rid of them, and if the Tories are smart, this could emerge as a dominate narrative for them in 2018. Don't sign any more contracts, and plan to do something with the existing ones.

Fourth, a PC government could explore the creation of new diversified generation companies. The idea here is to let contract holders convert their contracts into shares of a generation company and make payments to shareholders in the form of dividends. With diversification, the shareholders would have more steady revenue. Wind blows most when the sun doesn't shine (please don't read a pun into that) and when the sun is blazing, wind is often still. Peaking plants are needed when there are sudden weather shifts and such but otherwise stay dormant. The reality is that we still pay when these generators aren't pumping out electricity. Creating companies that combine wind, solar, and peaking plants would be a way to end the costly policy of paying producers for no energy production and selling surplus energy to the United States at a severe discount. And, if you need more generation in the future, a series of these new companies could bid for the right to generate allowing Ontario to choose the best price (and maybe even the greenest mix).

Fifth, since Trump is offering a window of trade renegotiation, perhaps it's high time we pressure the federal government to create a free tariff zone with countries that have clean energy grids. The fact is that many Ontario businesses are suffering due to high energy costs, and this could be a way of taking their concerns to heart and fighting for them. Products imported from "dirty grid" countries are obviously going to be cheaper, so imposing a carbon tariff (doesn't that sound better than a carbon tax?) would give made-in-Ontario products a fairer shake.

By the time the next election rolls around, all the easy stuff will be done.

It's time to be innovative and forward thinking. Energy policy could use a hefty dose of common sense.

[Tying Up Loose Ends: Amendments To Ontario's Cap And Trade Program]
By: Nivedhya Ramaswamy
For: Mondaq
On: March 10, 2017

On January 1, 2017, Ontario's Cap and Trade Program came into effect. We authored an overview of the Cap and Trade Program in our November 2, 2016 Special Edition of EnviroNotes! Since then, the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (the "MOECC") has hosted a practice auction of emission allowances; scheduled the first exclusive Ontario auction for March 22, 2017; released its Compliance Offset Credits Regulatory Proposal (the "Offset Proposal"); and released regulatory amendments to the Cap and Trade Program Regulation on December 28, 2016 (discussed below).

The next steps in Ontario's carbon pricing initiatives include: (1) implementing the Offset Proposal in early 2017, which provides a framework for carbon offset credits and a corresponding opportunity for businesses not subject to the cap and trade regime to sell carbon credits in the carbon marketplace; (2) reporting the results of Ontario's exclusive auction on April 3, 2017; and (3) linking its cap and trade market with Québec and California in 2018.

Regulatory Amendments to the Cap and Trade Program Regulation

These amendments clarify technical, administrative and policy requirements for participants, and further align Ontario's Cap and Trade market with Québec and California. The following is an overview of the amendments:

1. Expanding the eligibility criteria for voluntary participants:

Emissions associated with indirect useful thermal energy (IUTE), such as steam that is generated at one facility and used at another facility, will count towards the threshold for opting into the Cap and Trade Program (i.e. 10,000 tonnes of emissions/year). The policy behind this amendment is to ensure that all emitters receive the same treatment, regardless of whether IUTE is generated at the site or imported for use. Participants under this new eligibility criteria will be allowed to apply for free allowances in 2018 for the IUTE emissions during the 2017 compliance year. Notably, the compliance obligation for IUTE emissions remain with the supplying facility and therefore participants eligible for free allowances for IUTE emissions will not have to submit allowances for these emissions.
2. Allowing clearing houses to register as market participants:

This provides clearing houses the ability to serve as an intermediary between registered sellers and buyers of carbon credits. Clearing houses will be exempt from the holding limit and from the prohibition of holding allowances and credits owned by another participant. However, they will be subject to a time limit of five days before allowances and credits must be transferred.
3. Further aligning Ontario's Cap and Trade Program with Québec and California:

The changes in reporting business relationships include the requirement to report parents and subsidiaries of non-corporation partnerships and the requirement to disclose auction account representatives that are consultants and/or advisors.
The changes in financial assurance include allowing bidders to combine different forms of assurances and allowing the Financial Services Administrator to draw on these assurances for bidding.
The amendments also allow the collection of personal information from account agents who are approved in Québec and California, and are being designated as account agents in Ontario.
4. Clarifying the scope of participants:

An electricity generator that is currently not required to register in the Cap and Trade Program, and that uses fuel other than natural gas or petroleum products, will have a compliance obligation for the resulting emissions from all fuel combustion.
New owner/operator of a participating facility has the compliance obligation for the entire compliance period. The prior owner/operator can transfer allowances to the new owner/operator by request to the MOECC.
Market participants must be residents of Canada or have an establishment in Canada.
5. Exceptions to the prohibition on sharing information:

The changes now allow sharing information related to auction participation between related persons. The policy behind this amendment is to facilitate participation in auctions, which may require approvals from parent corporations.
Complementary changes were made to the Quantification, Reporting and Verification of Greenhouse Gas Emissions Regulation (O. Reg. 143/16) as well as to the incorporated Methodology for the Distribution of Ontario Emission Allowances Free of Charge and Guideline for Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reporting.

[System Restructuring Would Deliver Lasting Relief to Households and Businesses in Northeastern Ontario]
By: Staff Post
For: Wawa News
On: March 10,2017

Ontario is lowering electricity bills by 25% on average for all residential customers and half a million farms and businesses, as part of a significant system restructuring that will address long-standing policy challenges and ensure greater fairness.

Starting this summer, Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan would provide households with this 25% break. Many small businesses and farms in northeastern Ontario would also benefit from the initiative. People with low incomes and those living in eligible rural communities would receive even greater reductions to their electricity bills. As part of this plan, rate increases over the next four years would be held to the rate of inflation for everyone.

These measures include the 8% rebate introduced in January and build on previously announced initiatives to deliver broad-based rate relief on all electricity bills.
Taken together, these changes will deliver the single-largest reduction to electricity rates in Ontario's history.
Recently, electricity rates have risen for two key reasons:
Decades of under-investment in the electricity system by governments of all stripes resulted in the need to invest more than $50 billion in generation, transmission and distribution assets to ensure the system is clean and reliable.

The decision to eliminate Ontario's use of coal and produce clean, renewable power, as well as policies put in place to provide targeted support to rural and low-income customers, have created additional costs.

The burden of financing these system improvements and funding these key programs has unfairly fallen almost entirely on the shoulders of today's ratepayers. To relieve that burden and share costs more fairly, two system fixes are being undertaken.

Recognizing that the electricity infrastructure that has been built will last for many decades to come, the province would refinance those capital investments to ensure that system costs are more equitably distributed over time. In addition, a number of important programs, such as the Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP), will now be funded by the government instead of by ratepayers.
The province will also launch a new Affordability Fund, enhance the existing OESP and Rural or Remote Rate Protection (RRRP) program and provide on-reserve First Nations households with a delivery credit. These new measures will cost the government up to $2.5 billion over the next three years.
Notwithstanding that hydro rate relief costs will add significant pressure on the fiscal framework, the province continues to project a balanced budget for 2017-18, and will provide a full update on its fiscal plan in the spring budget.

Reducing electricity costs in Sault Ste. Marie is part of Ontario's plan to create jobs, grow our economy and help people in their everyday lives.
"Electricity costs rose sharply and residents and business owners in northern Ontario spoke out. They told us the government needed to do more to reduce the costs and make hydro more affordable. By fixing problems in the system, Ontario is lowering electricity bills by 25 per cent on average for all residential customers and ensuring rates are fairer in the future.", Glenn Thibeault, Minister of Energy.
Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan would improve sector efficiency and modernize the province's electricity market, working in collaboration with the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) and the Ontario Energy Board (OEB).

The Province will expand the RRRP to provide distribution charge relief to additional customers served by LDCs with the highest rates. About 800,000 customers would benefit from the enhanced RRRP program.

The Affordability Fund would be accessible to Local Distribution Companies (LDCs) for customers who do not qualify for low-income conservation programs and who are unable to undertake energy efficiency improvements without financial assistance.
On-reserve First Nations customers will receive a 100 per cent credit of the delivery line on their monthly electricity bills.
The expanded OESP will provide an additional $180 to $276 per year for households of eligible size and combined income.
Ontario is expanding the Industrial Conservation Initiative (ICI) program by reducing the threshold from 1 MW to 500 kW and targeting more small manufacturing and industrial consumers.
In 2016, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC), in partnership with the Ontario Chamber Network launched a campaign titled, Small Business Too Big To Ignore. The campaign highlighted the important contributions of small businesses and investigated the top barriers to small business growth, one example being the cost of electricity.
[N American duo eye green grid]
By: Staff Post
For: Re News
On: March 10, 2017

Transmission and microgrid developer Anbaric is partnering with the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan to build clean

energy infrastructure projects in North America.
The duo have formed Anbaric Development Partners, which will be led by Anbaric's management team.
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The Ontario Teachers' will fund development costs, which are projected to produce $2bn in constructed assets.
Anbaric founder and chief executive Edward Krapels said: "Ontario Teachers' investment in Anbaric creates an attractive launching pad for generating innovative energy jobs and boosting local economies while replacing our deteriorating and outdated fossil fuel-oriented grid with new and sustainable energy alternatives.
"This includes sophisticated high-voltage direct current transmission technology and microgrid projects that will bring renewables online with greater efficiency."
Ontario Teachers' senior managing director for infrastructure and natural resources Andrew Claerhout said: "This investment fits our goal of finding new ways to diversify through opportunities that have significant, long-term revenue stream potential."

[Innisfil residents ready to revolt against InnPower rate increase]
By: Janis Ramsay
For: Simcoe.com
On: March 10, 2017

Plenty of angry Innisfil residents were on hand for two public meetings for InnPower's request to raise distribution rates.

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The energy corporation is requesting an increase which would raise the average monthly bill by about $8.59.

"We don't have a large enough customer base to pay for an increase," Cookstown resident Bruce Currie said at the first meeting, held at Innisfil town hall. "It's time to revolt the volt (business). I'm tired of the increases we're facing."

The crowd of more than 100 people applauded his statement.

"When you hear of the salaries the top echelon is making, there's too much of an imbalance."

Other residents were critical of the new 41,802 square-foot InnPower building, which opened at 7251 Yonge St. in January 2015.

Patrick Morley was one of them.

"In 2016, I was in the home of people who were experiencing a hard time and had fallen behind in their electricity payment," Morley said.

An InnPower employee visited the home to shut off the power, but Morley offered to pay the bill immediately and drove to InnPower's new office.

"I was completely gobsmacked when I saw the building. It looked more like a place that would be suited for a city like New York or even Toronto," Morley said. "Why on earth would a town, even with an expanded population, require a massive building like this?"

InnPower CEO Wally Malcolm said he is in negotiations with a company to rent out the upper two floors, about 3,000 square feet, and it should be occupied by June.

Malcolm said the high cost of providing energy is mainly because of Innisfil's geography, with many rural customers.

"It's why our rates are different than an urban area similar to Vaughan," Malcolm said. "Even though we have the same area, we see a vast difference between the town and Mississauga."

He added InnPower is simply providing service to customers.

"We are aligning with what you are expecting. You want energy when you turn your light switch on and want to cook meals."

He repeated $677,000 was cut from InnPower's operating, maintenance and administration budget and $3.8 million was cut from the capital budget this year.

But residents are still concerned the rate increase will be too much, making it even more challenging to make ends meet.

However, he said the energy corporation is also seeking an extra $276,045 payout from the ice storm of March 2016.

Other residents questioned why InnPower wasn't part of the PowerStream merger.

"There was a balance between wanting a local distribution company where you have a say, or passing those decisions on elsewhere," Malcolm said.

Ontario Energy Board (OEB) spokesperson Ted Antonopoulos his goal is to protect customers while keeping a reliable energy system going.

He said power utilities could apply to the OEB for an increase every five years, but it might not be approved retroactive to Jan. 1, 2017 as requested. Antonopoulos added a Rural or Remote Electricity Rate Plan is in the works by the province, which could relieve some InnPower customers.

[Despite gains, Toronto's air pollution still causing serious health problems]
By: Peter Goffin
For: The Star
On: March 10, 2017

The summer of 2016 was the first in Matthew Beaudry's young life when fears of air pollution triggering his severe asthma didn't stop him from playing outside.

Finally, he could ride his bike or play street hockey any time he liked.

Nine-year-old Matthew and his family had moved to Barrie, leaving a home in eastern Mississauga roughly five kilometres from thousands of spewing tailpipes on nearby highways.

Each year, on hot smoggy days, his mother, Tracey Beaudry, would pull him inside to keep his lungs safe from the acrid outdoor air.

"Someone told me 'You've got to let him be a kid,' " she said. "I said 'Sure I do, but you come with us to the hospital at 2 a.m. when he can't breathe and is purple.' "

Major strides have been made in reducing pollution in the Greater Toronto Area, thanks in large part to changes in Ontario's energy policies.

But Toronto Public Health says that levels of major pollutants in the air have become stagnant after years of decline, and air pollution is still a serious cause of illness in the city.

In 2004, the city determined that air pollution contributed to 1,700 premature deaths and 6,000 hospitalizations annually. By 2014, the number of pollution-related deaths had fallen by more than 23 per cent, to 1, 300 per year. And the number of hospitalizations had declined by 40 per cent, to 3,550.

But Monica Campbell, director of healthy public policy at Toronto Public Health, estimates that, since 2014, the number of pollution-related deaths and hospitalizations have remained roughly the same.

"We're not seeing any improvements," said Campbell. "Things have gotten better but we still have a ways to go. It's concerning, and more needs to be done."

Ontario shuttered the last of its coal-fired power plants in 2014, a development that Campbell called "a big positive contributor to cleaning up the air."

Traffic emissions, the greatest local source of air pollution in Toronto, are the next domino that must fall, Campbell said.

Toronto's three biggest polluting substances are nitrogen dioxide, ozone and "particulate matter," a term for any number of solid or liquid chemicals in the air. All three are related to burning fossil fuels.

"These are the common air pollutants because they're associated with heating our homes and driving our cars and running our industries," said Kim Perrotta, executive director of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment.

“Where once upon a time we thought of air pollution as an industrial issue, now it’s becoming a very traffic-related issue.”

The closer you live to a major roadway, the worse the air quality in your community is likely to be.

“We’ve done work where you can see nitrogen dioxide levels are really, really high along major highways and less so in other parts of the city,” said Campbell.

Exposure to these pollutants can lead to hospital visits and even be fatal for elderly people with underlying lung or heart issues, said Campbell.

In children, pollution exposure comes with the risk of long-lasting respiratory illness.

In 2016, Public Health Ontario reported that traffic-related air pollution can exacerbate, and even cause the onset of, asthma in kids.

The road to reducing air pollution requires rethinking our use of fossil fuels, said Perrotta.

“Things like trying to shift us to electric vehicles, trying to do anything we can do to shift people toward public transit, to active transportations like walking and cycling, even reducing energy use in the home,” she said.

But Canada’s air quality is not entirely within in its own control.

Toronto Public Health estimates that pollution from the U.S. causes roughly 30 per cent of this city’s air quality-related deaths and 25 per cent of air quality-related hospitalizations.

“People are often surprised because they can’t imagine that pollutants can travel such huge distances, but they can,” said Campbell.

Reduction in coal-fired energy production the U.S. has contributed to improvements in Ontario air quality over the past 10 to 15 years, said Perotta.

“But if they backtrack, that could have a real negative impact on us.”

During his election campaign, U.S. President Donald Trump promised to revive the American coal industry.

And budget proposal documents released this month show Trump wants to eliminate thousands of jobs from the Environmental Protection Agency — a move that the National Association of Clean Air Agencies said would “rip the heart and soul” out of air pollution controls.

“You really wonder what’s going to happen with the U.S.,” said Campbell. “Depending on how all that unfolds, that could be a new and significant source of pollution for Toronto.”

For Tracey Beaudry, there is no price that can be put on clean air.

“I don’t like high energy bills any more than the next person,” she said. “But I do like that people who have trouble breathing can go outside.”

[Will Kathleen Wynne lead, follow or get out of the way?]
By: Robert Fisher
For: CBC Hamilton
On: March 10, 2017

If Kathleen Wynne steps down as leader of the Ontario Liberal party before the next election at whom will voters vent their anger over high hydro costs? Will voters forgive and forget?

The Premier promises that she will lead the party into the 2018 election but no one wants to follow an unpopular leader to the polls. Now there are reports people in her own party are talking already about who should take over.

The CBC's Ontario Political analyst, Robert Fisher, says he has been speaking about the future of the Liberals with his sources to try to separate the rumours from truth.

Fisher spoke with the CBC's Conrad Collaco about if the Liberals need a new leader before the next provincial election. Listen to the full interview by clicking the image at the top of the page or read an edited and abridged transcript below.

Robert Fisher, Ontario politics analyst

Robert Fisher
Veteran political analyst Robert Fisher delivers his insights into Ontario politics every two weeks. (CBC)

Premier Wynne says she'll lead her party into the next provincial election. What have you heard about party support for her to continue as leader?

A lot of it is private conversations. People don't want to go public with their concerns. Most of the worry is the hydro rate cut for the summer won't be able to stop the political bleeding for the Liberals. One senior strategist put it to me this way, he thought the whole reporting of the movement to push Kathleen Wynne out was nothing short of B.S.

I believe Kathleen Wynne will lead the Liberal party into the 2018 election but it won't stop cabinet ministers from doing their due diligence in case things got so bad by this coming summer that the party had to make a change. I don't think it's going to happen but you have to be prepared just like Kathleen Wynne was prepared when Dalton McGuinty was waning in public support then eventually left. You can't leave these things to the last minute.

At the end McGuinty, an unpopular Premier, hurting from the gas plant scandal, steps down to save the party before an election. Is Wynne in the same tough spot?

I think she is determined to stick this one out. She has been travelling the province again this week, spent some time in Guelph talking to people directly about hydro. When you talk to Liberals privately they are absolutely convinced the hydro rate cut will lessen the anger that voters have. When you look at polling, there's one by Nanos Research on Feb.15th/16th before the big cut was announced, the Liberals also have a problem with the public's trust in their government. If you look at polls over the last year you would be hard pressed to say the Premier has earned the trust of Ontarians 'every single day' as she promised when she became Premier.

Why Kathleen Wynne is so unpopular, and what she can do about it
By the time of the next election the Liberal government will have been around for 15 years. For many people, the polling would indicate, their best before date is just about up.

How is Wynne's popularity here in Hamilton and around the province?

The Liberals continue to lag in the polls. The most recent poll comes from Nanos. Support for the Tories is about 44 percent. The NDP at 25, the Liberals at 24. Nanos took that and extrapolated what that would look like in the new 122 seat legislature. By 2018 there will be 122 seats in the legislature not the current 107. From them you hear 84 Tories, 27 New Democrats and 11 Liberals. 11 percent happens to mirror the personal popularity the Premier currently has.

Hydro cuts to make 'real difference' to small businesses, premier says
Across the province you see the Tories in the lead even though 41 percent of people in the poll say they didn't know if the Tory leader Patrick Brown was doing a good job. It's amazing that he has been around for so long and people still don't know who the Tory leader is.

The concern for the Tories is about a misstep. A big mistake. Like what happened to the late, lamented Tim Hudak. The Liberals are counting on a mistake. So far, nothing major. The Liberals will have to find other ways to attack Patrick Brown.

Are the Liberals also in trouble over school closures?

It took the Liberals most of this week to even admit that upwards of 300 schools are on the chopping block. There was a point earlier in the week when Mitzi Hunter, the education minister actually ran away from reporters who had asked her for the numbers about school closings. The problem is that in small town Ontario schools are the hubs in the community. To lose them means more kids on longer rides to and from school. This is a big issue.

Liberals face heat over school closures across Ontario
The bragging they have done this week about how much money they have put in the system, how many schools they have renovated and how many new ones they have opened — in Hamilton Paul Miller, one of your local MPP's, has talked openly about the number of school closings that have happened in his community. It's an issue the opposition will try to exploit.

19-year-old Sam Oosterhoff has won another election, this time beating a Conservative rival for the nomination in the new riding of Niagara West. What do you make of his continued success at the polls?

For someone who hasn't completed his first year of political science at McMaster University he seems to know how to win elections. He wins the nomination against well known conservatives. He wins the byelection handily, then earlier this week he obliterates his only opposition in the nomination for the new riding. Whatever he is learning at Mac seems to be paying off.

Liberals thank Kathleen Wynne at Queen's Park but will voters? - Robert Fisher
For many people in the social conservative movement he is the boy wonder. He represents everything the Conservative Party should be about, that Patrick Brown isn't. He's kept his own opinions about issues hidden, perhaps ordered to. He is still a force to be reckoned with. The morning after his win he was sitting in Patrick Brown's seat in the front row of Conservative benches.

[In the shadow of the greenbelt it’s all about sprawl: Micallef]
By: Shawn Micallef
For: The Star
On: March 10, 2017

At a discussion panel on GTA sprawl last year, Ontario’s Environmental Commissioner Dianne Saxe said “land use planning is Ontario’s oil sands.” It was a provocative statement, equating a controversial environmental issue with one that lurks all around us in plain sight.

It’s not an issue that ignites province-wide political wildfires the way hydro rates or gas plants do, but it’s a scandal that should. Land is our most valuable non-renewable resource. Provincial Greenbelt legislation, preserving a ring of land around the Golden Horseshoe, has been a global leader in how to contain sprawl, encourage smart growth, and preserve both farmland and wild spaces next to a massive metropolis.

Yet inside the greenbelt and across the province, school, hospital and LCBO planning undermine its noble efforts, a trifecta of bad land-use planning.

As the population of children drops in many areas, more than 600 schools could close across the province. A sign of the heightening tension, or perhaps sensing political opportunity, this past week Progressive Conservative leader Patrick Brown called for a moratorium on school closures. Whatever Brown’s motivation, what happens to these buildings we’ve invested considerable public resources in, is important.

Take 19 Glen Agar Dr., the site of a former Etobicoke school near Martin Grove and Rathburn Rds. that the Toronto District School Board declared surplus in 2013. The school site, backing onto a grassy hydro corridor, was partially sold off to a developer who will build 53 single-detached houses there. The public nature of the site is partially preserved with a new park, but building more single-family homes inside Toronto is a failure of this neighbourhood to carry some of the city’s growth burden.

Initially, 104 townhouses were proposed, along with 12 detached houses, however that plan was nixed, in part, by residents’ objections that they didn’t fit the neighbourhood. This is the kind of “gentle density” often lauded by urbanists but that is off limits in large areas of Toronto, sometimes called the “Yellow Belt,” as it’s the colour of detached-only areas on planning maps.

All homeowners in Toronto are reaping the windfall of owning property in a prosperous, growing city like Toronto, but only some absorb it, like the Liberty Village and Yonge and Eglinton areas, hero neighbourhoods that accommodate growth while cowardly Yellow Belt neighbourhoods object to even expensive townhouses, hiding behind “stable neighbourhood” rhetoric.

A school closing suggests neighbourhoods are stable in appearance only, but that a publicly owned parcel of land was developed with the lowest possible density in a city with a housing crisis is especially regrettable. There are other options available too.

Near Queen St. W. and Ossington Ave., the Senhor Santo Cristo Catholic School is being turned into a community hub, part of a “core hold” policy that keeps schools intact and in community use should they need to reopen if demographics change in the coming decades.

Though there are lost opportunities to add denser housing inside the Greenbelt, other parts of the province don’t even have this kind of legislation, like Windsor, a city surrounded by some of the best farmland in North America that is slowly being gobbled up by sprawl, some of it government led.

How’s your old high school doing? Mine, a publicly funded Ontario Catholic school, used to be in the middle of the town of Tecumseh (which I like to call the Pickering of Windsor), an easy walk or bike commute for a large portion of the student body. It was closed and part of the site has been redeveloped as single family homes, with the other half of the school currently abandoned, and a new school was built far out of town in what was until recently a field where corn and soybeans grew. Now, most everyone has to drive or be bused to this “exurban” school.

Also in Windsor, a city with an abundance of large “brownfield” sites — that is to say, former industrial areas waiting for their next life — the province has plans to build a new “mega-hospital” outside of town, gobbling up more farmland and squandering all the much needed economic and civic revitalization benefits an urban site would bring to Windsor.

Then there are the LCBOs. Even in the older, dense parts of Toronto these big-box boozy blights are foisted on the landscape, like the one-storey, half-block long shop on The Danforth between Broadview and Chester subway stations. That such a thing was built atop a subway line, without any additional residential units on top of it, undermines the efforts of so many planners and housing advocates trying to make this city more affordable.

The old Ontario motto was "Keep It Beautiful," but in the shadow of the Greenbelt, we're doing our best to keep it sprawling.

[New long-term energy plan on the horizon]
By: Elaine Della-Mattia
For: The Sault Star
On: March 10, 2017

A new long-term energy plan that will be released later this year will serve as a blueprint for Ontario's energy needs for the next decade and beyond, Minister Glenn Thibeault said.

Thibeault said the plan, to be released by early summer, has included extensive consultations of stakeholders and is designed to determine the province's energy needs and future energy direction.

That direction is also set to examine whether or not Ontario should grow its energy export market, he told The Sault Star in an interview.

The plan, reviewed every three years, will look firstly at the provincial needs for power but then determine whether Ontario should just generate electricity for itself or become more of an exporter of power.

"We're currently an exporter of power but do we want to make that one of our priorities. It's a discussion that the long term energy plan with have with our stakeholders to have those sorts of conversations," he said.

Thibeault, now in his post as Energy Minister for about nine months, spoke at a Chamber of Commerce breakfast Friday touting the Liberal government's recent announcement that Ontario customers will see energy bills cut by an average of 25 per cent as a result of restructuring its programs and extending the burden of fixing an underfunded system over a greater length of time.

Thibeault said Ontario already produces extra energy that when unused in the province, is sold elsewhere, including Michigan.

The Michigan Agency for Energy has appointed Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) to conduct a study on the long-term benefits of electric transmission between the Upper Peninsula and Ontario.

The Upper Peninsula of Michigan is deficient in meeting its energy needs and is in need of a boost.

The study, supported by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, is also supported by Thibeault.

The study, paid for in its entirety by Michigan, will proceed on its own and Ontario doesn't need to insert itself or advocate for the project separately.

"I don't think we need to insert ourselves (in the study). We are already there," he said.

He said it's important to ensure that any sale of Ontario's abundance of energy has a benefit to Ontario's ratepayers, to the province and provide a service to Michigan.

"They're going to be getting clean, green energy," he said.

In the meantime, the ministry will continue to work with Ontario Power Generation and Hydro One about ways to explore opportunities and use their expertise in the process.

"We currently sell power to Michigan and we do make money at the end of the year when we look at our bottom line of where we've spent and sold some of our power although our opposition friends don't often tell that full side of the story," he said.

Thibeault said his ministry will also continue to work through the Ontario ambassador and keeping communication open with the Governor's office to continue to help and promote Ontario energy to the rest of the world.

"It's also something we have to take a deeper look into if that's something we want to start doing, similar to what Hydro Quebec does," he said.

Hydro Quebec has been selling its electricity for about 15 years to markets that have included Ontario, New York State and New Brunswick.

“Many things are being looked at,” he said of that process.

Thibeault said Sault Ste. Marie can continue to grow its green energy sector.

The Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre ideas and technology to create storage will be a key to growth, he said.

“It's not just about creating energy, it's also about conservation, demand response and storage,” he said. “That's where I think Sault Ste. Marie will continue to be such a leader into the province.”

The time of use program implemented by the province – which sets rates according to how much energy is needed or used at different parts of the day and night – is working, he said, saving about five per cent of overall peak demand.

Thibeault said it is recognized that there are some unique situations in the province that makes time of use difficult for some. A single individual in a downtown condo and a senior couple in Northern Ontario living in their own home are on the same price plan and perhaps shouldn't be.

As such, independent system operators have been tasked with working on a plan that will offer people a choice – time of use plan or a fixed rate plan – to decide which one is right for them.

To Chamber members, Thibeault reiterated Premier Kathleen Wynne's announcement of last week also reminding Chamber of Commerce members that there are a number of programs out there to help businesses reduce their energy costs and urged them to contact local utility providers to determine what programs they would qualify for.

He said that too often, smaller businesses don't realize that they would qualify for some of the programs that exist.

Thibeault said businesses will also receive lower electricity bills as part of the new plan unveiled by Wynne last week.

Thibeault was to also meet Friday with Sault Mayor Christian Provenzano and the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre.

Visuals

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