

MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

March 10, 2017

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ONLINE COVERAGE

CBC NEWS: HYDRO BILLS PREDICTED TO DROP 25% BY SUMMER FOR ALECTRA UTILITIES' CUSTOMERS

CBC.CA News

Fri Mar 10 2017, 5:46am ET

Section: Hamilton

Byline: CBC News

Residential and small business hydro bills in Hamilton and surrounding areas will drop by 25 per cent on average this summer under the Liberal government's new plan to slash soaring hydro rates, says the province's energy minister.

For Alectra Utilities' customers that means they could receive a slightly higher reduction than other cities across Ontario.

The provincial plan will lift billions of dollars in costs off Alectra Utilities' customers, the second largest utility corporation in North America, this year.

This initiative targets low income and rural users who could see up to 40 per cent savings on electricity, said Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault during a news conference on Wednesday.

Earlier this month, Wynne's Liberal government touted hydro bills will be cut by 17 per cent, but that figure includes an eight per cent cut that has already happened, a rebate on the provincial portion of the HST that kicked in Jan. 1.

- Hydro bills to drop 8 per cent in Ontario on Jan. 1

And Alectra Utilities' president Max Cananzi predicts the provincial hydro plan will lead to slightly lower rates in Hamilton than elsewhere, with residential fees expected to drop by 2 per cent more than other cities across Ontario.

Small businesses and rural users could see the biggest shift in their hydro bills, Cananzi added, with a reduction as high as 20 per cent for businesses and a 32 per cent cut for rural customers.

"The fact that we are equalizing that so the average delivery charge will equal to the average delivery charge in the city of Toronto is going to have a big impact in parts of my rural riding," said Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale MPP Ted McMeekin.

- Rural electricity customers wary of Ontario's rate cuts

- Rising hydro rates spark outrage around Ontario

Delivery charges have been under fire by electricity users for the past year, frustrated by how unaffordable their hydro bills have become even when reducing consumption.

On average, the delivery charge makes up nearly 30 per cent of a typical residential hydro bill, but the amount varies widely from place to place. Different local hydro distribution companies

charge different rates, unlike the cost of electricity generation, which is standard for all residential hydro customers in the province.

"Folks can have a \$60 hydro bill and an \$800 delivery charge," McMeekin said. "That doesn't make any sense."

Thibeault acknowledged the provincial government's failure, admitting Ontario paid too much for renewable energy while overlooking affordability.

"Our system wasn't looked after the way it should," he said.

Thibeault says this initiative will cost the province \$2.5 billion over the next three years, once it is passed in the legislature.

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CBC NEWS: WILL KATHLEEN WYNNE LEAD, FOLLOW OR GET OUT OF THE WAY? - ROBERT FISHER

By: Conrad Collaco

Mar 10, 2017 12:16 PM ET

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/will-kathleen-wynne-lead-follow-or-get-out-of-the-way-robert-fisher-1.4017481>

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

Q: 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.

Q: 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.

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.

Q: 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.

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.

Q: 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.

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.

Q: 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.

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.

SAULTSTAR.COM: NEW LONG-TERM ENERGY PLAN ON THE HORIZON

By Elaine Della-Mattia

Friday, March 10, 2017

<http://www.saultstar.com/2017/03/10/new-long-term-energy-plan-on-the-horizon>

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 will 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.

**CAMBRIDGETIMES.CA: ELECTRICITY SYSTEM OVERHAUL NEEDED, NOT ELECTION
PLOYS**
Mar 10, 2017

<https://www.cambridgetimes.ca/opinion-story/7183268-electricity-system-overhaul-needed-not-election-ploys/>

Our electricity bills may be going down this summer, but don't pop the bubbly just yet.

Though Ontario residents will see an average 25 per cent reduction on the bottom line, what they won't see is what it's going to cost future generations and the current structural inefficiencies and ongoing bad planning that make electricity expensive for us in the first place.

Premier Kathleen Wynne's Liberals are waving a shiny 25 per cent price cut over here, while over there, our expensive electricity system continues to plod along.

The lower bills come from refinancing the term of payment the province owes to private power providers — from 20 years to 30. So we're deferring costs to future generations in order to get some immediate relief. And we're incurring about \$25 billion in extra interest charges during that time.

Additional relief will be coming through low-income and rural subsidy programs, but that too comes at a cost of \$2.5 billion over the next three years charged to Ontario's treasury and taxpayers.

As tempting as it is to celebrate lower bills, with an election year in 2018, we need to hold all parties to account to do more than float distractions.

We need a comprehensive plan and a system overhaul, not election ploys.

TV TRANSCRIPTS (NOON)

NONE