

Afternoon Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - April 4, 2017

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MEDIA SCAN HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

April 4, 2017

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National Post : Kelly McParland: Ontario Liberals get hit by their own hydro blame boomerang
Sault Online : Horwath presses Wynne on massive Hydro One salaries paid for by Ontarians
Barrie Examiner : Wynne's progressive plan makes rural folk shudder

TV Transcripts (Noon)

None

Online Coverage

National Post KELLY MCPARLAND: ONTARIO LIBERALS GET HIT BY THEIR OWN HYDRO BLAME BOOMERANG

By: Kelly McParland | April 4, 2017 1:09 PM ET

<http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/kelly-mcparland-ontario-liberals-get-hit-by-their-own-hydro-blame-boomerang>

If you're the energy minister in a province filled with angry voters seething at exorbitant electricity bills, the last thing you want is to find yourself asserting that the \$4.85 million paid to one of the power companies' chief executives has nothing to do with the outrageous level of monthly charges.

But Glenn Thibeault wanted the job — he even quit the NDP to join Ontario's Liberal government — so there he was before the cameras, piously insisting that the rich pay package of Hydro One boss Mayo Schmidt was really just a pittance in the grand scheme of things.

"The salary of the CEO has nothing to do with the rates that we're seeing on our bills," Thibeault insisted. "The rates are set by the Ontario Energy Board, they're not set by the company."

Notice the clever reference to "our" bills, as in: "Hey, I live here as well. I'm stuck with the same pain for 14 years of Liberal mismanagement as you are."

OK, Mr. Minister, good try. Regrettably, Thibeault's timing was a bit unfortunate. This is the time of year when the annual Sunshine List is released — the tally of Ontario public employees earning \$100,000 and above. And gee, who should top the list? Is that Jeff Lyash's name we see up there? Why, yes it is: the chief executive of Ontario Power Generation, which produces the power that Hydro One delivers to Ontario businesses and households, made \$1.2 million last year, beating out the 123,409 top-earning people on the public payroll for first place.

Together, that means the two utilities paid their bosses over \$6 million last year. And Lyash could do even better next year, since OPG declined a request from Premier Kathleen Wynne to lower the cap it is willing to pay its CEO, which has been set at \$3.8 million.

Why, you ask, is it necessary to pay so much to executives at companies that so antagonize the people they are meant to serve? Stop me if you've heard this before: it's because, says Thibeault, the government needs to ensure that qualified people are in charge.

"I get that it's concerning for people but really, if we were to look at taking all of the salaries away of all the executives, we wouldn't be addressing one cent on any one bill," Thibeault said.

Busy defending others, the minister may not have realized that he was inadvertently condemning his own government in the process. If the people running the power companies can't be blamed for all the waste, boondoggles and faulty decision-making that has pushed bills through the roof, then it follows that the Liberals must get credit for doing it all on their own.

This is not the message Wynne wishes to send as she gears up for next year's election. Hydro bills — everyone in Ontario still refers to the electricity system as if it were entirely based on hydro power — have become the No. 1 concern among voters, outpacing all the usual worries about health care, taxes, education costs, etc. Wynne has scrambled to soothe the temper of frustrated consumers, offering up rebates, tax holidays and trite excuses about how, a decade and a half ago, the Liberals were left with an ageing system by the previous government.

The Liberals maintain the mess they inherited was so bad they had no choice but to spend heavily to repair the damage. Thibeault says it cost \$35 billion in all. No, no, it was \$50 billion, claims Wynne. Both appear to assume Ontarians will be impressed by the figure, failing to appreciate that many voters feel large parts of it has been wasteful and unnecessary. Like the failed "smart meter" program. The gas plants closed for electoral reasons. The billions in solar and wind installations that operate sporadically and produce power the province doesn't need. The egregious contracts with alternative-energy providers that saddle the province with decades of heavily-subsidized, high-price power. The exports sold at a loss to Americans.

How much does the waste add up to? No one can be certain. As much as \$30 billion? That's not far off the \$37 billion Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk calculates Ontarians overpaid between 2006-2014.

Given such astronomical figures, Minister Thibeault is probably correct: even the most ridiculously overpaid power executives couldn't earn enough to put a dent in the total. You'd have to have thousands and thousands of power workers, all earning fat salaries, to make even the slightest impact.

Which, as it happens, we do: the 2016 Sunshine List is home to more than 7,600 OPG employees earning more than \$100,000 a year, far more than any other employer spending public money. How many others could be found at Hydro One isn't known; only its top five earners are required to disclose their pay since Wynne began selling off chunks of the company to raise money for her cash-strapped government.

On Monday Thibeault sought to shift the spotlight, complaining that the opposition Progressive Conservatives refuse to reveal their policy plans. Tory leader Patrick Brown "doesn't want to do anything other than just ride into winning government in 2018. Government takes a lot of hard work. You've got to make tough decisions. He's continuing to take the easy way out on this," he complained.

And why not? If hard work and tough decisions are responsible for the calamity the Liberals have created, Brown is wise to stay well clear of it.

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Sault Online HORWATH PRESSES WYNNE ON MASSIVE HYDRO ONE SALARIES PAID FOR BY ONT

By: Content Team - April 4, 2017

<http://saultonline.com/2017/04/horwath-presses-wynne-on-massive-hydro-one-salaries-paid-for-by-ontarians/>

Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath didn't let Premier Kathleen Wynne off the hook during the first question period following the release of the sunshine list, pressing Wynne for allowing an untold number of million-dollar salaries to be paid out to Hydro One executives while forcing Ontarians, buckling under skyrocketing hydro bills, to foot the bill.

The Hydro One CEO raked in \$4.5 million in 2016, a 500 per cent increase from the last time the CEO's salary appeared on the Sunshine list. But the list of highly-paid Hydro One employees wasn't included on the sunshine list, since Wynne moved to exclude it from transparency.

"Can the premier tell Ontarians why her priority seems to be protecting the salary and anonymity of the people at the top instead of regular Ontario families and businesses that are struggling just to get by?" Horwath asked. "By privatizing Hydro One, Premier Wynne ensured three things: that those at the top can take massive salaries; that the rest of us will pay massive electricity bills; and that she could throw a blanket of secrecy over the whole mess.

"What does the premier have to say to Ontarians who are struggling just to keep up with their hydro bills and are outraged by her continued insistence on selling-off Hydro One while hiding how much its employees are paid?"

Horwath urged Wynne to look to Bombardier – which listened to the public in Montreal and is now holding off on pay increases for the company's top executives.

"Here in Ontario, people are equally outraged at the planned pay hike for Hydro One's CEO, especially amid soaring hydro bills," Horwath said. "Why won't the premier do the right thing and rein in the salaries of executives at Hydro One?"

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Barrie Examiner WYNNE'S PROGRESSIVE PLAN MAKES RURAL FOLK SHUDDER

By: Jim Merriam
Tuesday, April 4, 2017 9:34:14 EDT AM

<http://www.thebarrieexaminer.com/2017/04/03/wynnes-progressive-plan-makes-rural-folk-shudder>

Premier Kathleen Wynne is said to have developed a "bold" strategy for getting re-elected in next June's provincial vote.

Essentially the new strategy involves overwhelming Ontario residents with "progressive" initiatives designed to appeal to traditional Liberals who are fed up with the endless debacles of the Wynne government, NDPers and others with a progressive bent.

Presumably the folks who would change allegiance or jump back on the Wynne train to nowhere reside mostly in the big cities and their suburbs.

It's a certainty that things will be different in rural Ontario, which is not overrun with progressives at the best of times.

Rural Ontario did not support Wynne's Liberals last election and she has done nothing to change any minds since taking office.

Also, rural folk are tired of the way this government plays smoke and mirrors with our money, trying to buy votes. The recently-announced reductions in electricity rates are the latest examples.

Among the progressive ideas we might see popping up at Queen's Park are a guaranteed annual income. Presumably, that would replace welfare and other support programs. Such an income, of course, would have to be high enough to cover the costs of heat and electricity.

Also expected is an increase in the minimum wage from the \$11.60 that is to become effective in October, to \$15 an hour.

Also on the horizon, according to Bob Hepburn of The Toronto Star, are sweeping changes to labour and employment laws. It's anybody's guess what these changes might entail, but it's a cinch they won't be pretty for some business owners.

Here's the problem with such a plan. The Wynne government and the government of Dalton McGuinty before her, have never suffered from lack of a progressive agenda. The problem always has been poor implementation and a critical lack of management.

The Green Energy Act was a progressive idea. But instead of coming up with some creative ideas whereby Ontario residents could benefit, perhaps by establishing co-operatives to build and own wind and solar installations, the Liberals set it up so the people pay in perpetuity with offshore conglomerates making off with most of the profits.

Likewise, the new sex ed curriculum in schools was nothing if not progressive. But it was implemented in the most ham-fisted way possible.

A little delay in the start date to provide time for more conversations with parents -- two way conversations where government representatives actually listen -- might have avoided a generation of hard feelings and alienated voters.

Establishing a new trails policy over private lands without consulting land owners was anything but a well-managed idea.

The best of intentions can become a nightmare when nobody understands implementation, managing expectations or caring about how changes will impact the people the government was elected to serve.

Now rural folks will fear that progressive initiatives might be enough to move city voters back to the Liberals.

The anti-Wynne pendulum seems to have swung too far for that to happen. However, if it begins to swing back, we can only hope it bumps Wynne out of the way on its journey.

TV Transcripts (Noon)

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