

Afternoon Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 13, 2017

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Afternoon Media Scan: March 13, 2017

MEDIA SCAN HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

March 13, 2017

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Online Coverage

Sault Star HORWATH BLAMES HYDRO COSTS FORCING HOSPITAL LAYOFFS

By: Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star

Monday, March 13, 2017 2:38:54 EDT PM

<http://www.saultstar.com/2017/03/13/horwath-blames-hydro-costs-forcing-hospital-layoffs>

Hydro bills have jumped nearly \$1 million at the Sault Area Hospitals at the same time funding has been frozen, leading to increased pressures on front-line health care cuts, says Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath.

Horwath was in Sault Ste. Marie Monday again claiming the Liberal government has not done enough to stop rising electricity costs.

This time, Horwath claims that the soaring bills are negatively impacting the province's health care system.

"The pressure from skyrocketing hydro bills and frozen hospital budgets has already led to frontline workers being laid off, and longer wait times for diagnostic tests like MRI's or CT scans," Horwath said, while stumping for NDP byelection candidate Joe Krmpotich.

PC byelection candidate Ross Romano observed the press conference.

In a document obtained through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Horwath shows that between October 2010 and October 2016 the cost of electricity went from \$0.06 per kW to \$0.16 per kW. Similarly, the SAH's annual bill in 2011 was \$1.8 million and in 2016 (from Jan to Oct) was \$2.5 million. Consumption during the compared timeframes is relatively stable.

The increased costs mark about a \$1 million or 45 per cent increase in hydro costs.

Glenda Hubble, a registered nurse at the hospital and president of the Ontario Nurses Association local in Sault Ste. Marie said nursing hours in the imaging diagnostics unit have been lost.

"We just want to provide the best possible care, but it's getting harder and harder to do that," she said in a press release.

"The reality is Premier Wynne has let us all down. She's hurting families by looking out for herself and her party instead of looking out for the rest of us," Horwath said.

She advocated the recently released NDP plan which would result in a 30 per cent reduction of hydro bills and would see the cancellation of the sell off of Hydro One, returning it to the public sector.

Just more than a week Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne announced a plan that would slash rates by about 25 per cent for all users, the largest cut ever in hydro rates in the province. In addition, increases would be limited to the cost of inflation for the next four years. That plan was achieved by refinancing the cost of upgrades to the generation system.

She also chided Progressive Conservative leader Patrick Brown calling his agenda one of privatizing Ontario services. "He has no plans to do anything about hydro bills. That's not good enough," Horwath said.

She said while the Liberal plan will cost taxpayers \$40 billion over 30 years, her plan will make \$7 billion for the province to redirect into other services.

Romano says his party blames the NDP for standing with the Liberals on the decisions that have been made to date.

Romano said the Conservatives are demanding the Lynne not proceed with hiring new executive vice-presidents to oversee a growing health care administration at the LHIN and instead focus those funds on frontline care.

Horwath said similar hydro increases have been felt in other hospitals across the province.

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S o o T o d a y HOSPITAL ELECTRICITY COSTS JUMPED MORE THAN \$800,000 IN FIVE YEARS, DC
(UPDATED)

NDP leader Andrea Horwath says the rising electricity costs have resulted in hospital cuts to staff

By: Kenneth Armstrong

<https://www.sootoday.com/local-news/hospital-electricity-costs-jumped-more-than-800000-in-five-years-docs-show-559846>

An increase of more than \$800,000 in Sault Area Hospital's electricity bill at the same time the province has frozen hospital funding is putting patient care in jeopardy, says NDP leader Andrea Horwath.

Documents obtained by the NDP through the Freedom of Information Act show SAH's electricity consumption has remained the same between 2011 and 2015, while the cost of that electricity has gone up 45 per cent — from \$1.8 million annually to almost \$2.7 million.

Horwath is in the Sault today to address SAH cuts as part of a campaign stop with Joe Krmpotich, NDP candidate in the yet-to-be-called by-election for the Sault Ste. Marie riding.

The increase in electricity costs have had an effect of the level of care offered at the hospital, said Horwath.

"Here we have a situation where there's almost a million dollar increase in costs at the same time as a freeze in funding. There's only one thing a hospital can do is cut — and that is what they have been doing," said Horwath.

"The pressure from skyrocketing hydro bills and frozen hospital budgets has already led to frontline workers being laid off, and longer wait times for diagnostic tests like MRIs or CT scans," she said.

Horwath said she has heard estimates that as many as 300 SAH workers have been laid off.

In an emailed response to SooToday questions, a spokesperson for SAH acknowledged the increase.

"SAH has not made decisions directly tied to the increase in electricity rates. There are no planned layoffs of frontline staff at Sault Area Hospital," said Brandy Sharp Young, Sault Area Hospital's communications and volunteer resources manager.

The issue of electricity costs affects all Ontario hospitals, said Sharp Young.

"SAH is challenged annually to find efficiency improvements in our operations due to many factors such as the impacts of health system funding reform, zero to minimal increases in hospital funding over the last several years, compensation increases and increasing electrical rates," she said.

SAH is working advocating with other hospitals in the province and the Ontario Hospital Association for the province to address cost pressures, said Sharp Young.

"Sault Area Hospital is working collaboratively with other Ontario Hospitals and the Ontario Hospital Association to advocate for a provincial approach to address the cost pressures facing health care in Ontario," she said.

The effects of rising electricity costs are being felt by hospital staff, said Krmpotich.

"They are health care. It's very important they are staffed to the appropriate levels and that the funding is there for them," said Krmpotich.

He added, "we certainly don't want to see cutbacks in staff that are going to impact the health and well-being of our families."

Glenda Hubble, a Registered Nurse at the hospital and president of the Ontario Nurses Association local in Sault Ste. Marie, said nursing hours have been lost in the imaging diagnostics unit.

"We just want to provide the best care possible, but it's getting harder and harder to do that," said Hubble in an NDP press release.

The province's plan to reduce electricity rates by 25 per cent applies to residents, some businesses and farms — but Horwath said it is unclear how institutions like hospitals or schools will be affected.

Last month, the NDP released their plan to reduce electricity costs in the province by 30 per cent.

"Our plan is pretty clear, the Liberals though — we don't have any paper yet, not a scrap of paper that says what their plan actually is," said Horwath.

The plan also includes stopping the privatization of assets, like Hydro One.

"All of this privatization of our electricity system over the last 20 years is what is creating the lack of competitiveness we now have," said Horwath.

Deregulation of the province's electricity system began under the Ontario PC Mike Harris government.

"Quebec and Manitoba didn't privatize any of their systems and they are charging less than half of what we are," said Horwath.

PC candidate Ross Romano observed today's press conference and noted the NDP supported the Green Energy Act, which he dubbed the Bad Contracts Act.

"They are just as responsible as the Liberals are for this hydro mess we're in now," said Romano.

Horwath said green energy was not the problem, it was the contracts negotiated by the Liberal government.

"We certainly support the act because we believe it's important to bring renewables put on to the grid and get rid of the complete dependence on fossil fuels," said Horwath.

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Sault Online SAULT AREA HOSPITAL HYDRO BILL UP NEARLY \$1 M, FORCING LAYOFFS

By: Content Team | March 13, 2017

<http://saultonline.com/2017/03/sault-area-hospital-hydro-bill-up-nearly-1m-forcing-layoffs/>

The hydro bill at the Sault Area Hospital has jumped nearly \$1 million at the same time as the Wynne government has frozen hospital funding – and that pressure is leading to front-line health care cuts.

Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath and NDP candidate in the upcoming by-election City Councillor Joe Krmpotich were in Sault Ste. Marie Monday to address the concern, which was revealed in documents the NDP obtained via access to information laws.

"The pressure from skyrocketing hydro bills and frozen hospital budgets has already led to frontline workers being laid off, and longer wait times for diagnostic tests like MRIs or CT scans," said Horwath. "It's clear that hydro costs are hurting families in more ways than one – it's hurting people every month when the bill comes, but it's also hurting the services we count on, like hospitals, schools and city services like community centres."

Over four years, from 2011 to 2015, the hospital's total annual electricity consumption has stayed the same, yet the total billed amount for hydro has risen to \$2.7 million from \$1.8 million – an increase of 45 per cent.

"The hospital staff and administrators are doing the best they can, but what they are being forced to deal with is just mind boggling," said Krmpotich. "How can the hospital be expected to provide the best quality of care when Premier Wynne is squeezing them like this?"

Horwath and Krmpotich were joined by frontline health care workers from the hospital who say they are very concerned about patient care being put in jeopardy.

"We have already lost nursing hours in the imaging diagnostics unit," said Glenda Hubble, a Registered Nurse at the hospital and president of the Ontario Nurses Association local in Sault Ste. Marie. "We just want to provide the best care possible, but it's getting harder and harder to do that."

Horwath recently released an NDP plan to cut hydro bills by as much as 30 per cent, which includes returning Hydro One to public hands – a move that will provide Ontario with an additional \$7 billion that can be invested in Ontario services like hospitals. The NDP plan is in stark contrast to the Wynne government's band-aid fix – a borrowing scheme that will force people to pay \$40 billion more in interest to bankers.

Horwath has also said an NDP government would stop the Wynne hospital cuts – she's committed to meeting the unique needs and pressures that northern hospitals like the facility in the Sault face.

"By focusing on herself and her party, Premier Wynne has driven the Sault to its breaking point,"

said Horwath. "That's why it's time for a strong voice at Queen's Park, fighting for the Sault. That's why Joe Krmpotich is our choice in the by-election."

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Farms.com OFA COMMENTS ON PREMIER WYNNE'S HYDRO PLAN

Organization says electricity is a key issue

By: Diego Flammini

<http://www.farms.com/ag-industry-news/ofa-comments-on-premier-wynne-s-hydro-plan-111.aspx>

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) has weighed in on Premier Kathleen Wynne's recent announcement to reduce hydro bills across the province by as much as 25 per cent.

Electricity is an important issue for the OFA and the organization's continued pressure on the provincial government helped lead to the Premier's announcement.

"OFA has pressed for lower distribution costs for several years, reminding the government that farmers and rural residents have been unfairly paying higher distribution costs than urban Ontarians," OFA president Keith Currie said in a post on OFA's website. "It creates energy poverty across our rural communities and disadvantages our farming businesses in a highly competitive domestic and global market."

Under Wynne's Ontario Fair Hydro Plan, all residents could see the cost of electricity reduced by about 25 per cent. Farmers and other residents of rural Ontario could see their bills reduced by nearly 30 per cent.

"This is good news for Ontario farmers and rural residents....," Currie said. "The cost of electricity has dampened our provincial agriculture and agri-food sector's growth. Energy is one of the largest inputs on the farm – with few fuel options – and it represents a significant cost to rural residents and local business owners."

Ontario producers welcomed the cut but appeared skeptical about its motive.

"A price cut is nice, (but) it sounds like a padded response to dodge real issues," Emma Butler, a beef producer from Chatham-Kent, told Farms.com.

"If you can drop the hydro rate by 25 per cent overnight, how long have we been overcharged on this necessary business utility?" asked Maaik Campbell, a producer from Lambton County.

TV Transcripts (Noon)

None