

Evening Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reducation Plan - April 11, 2017

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MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

April 11, 2017

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Online Coverage

Hamilton Spectator: Ontario manufacturers' group says hydro bill cuts won't help them
By: Allison Jones

<http://www.thespec.com/news-story/7238394-ontario-manufacturers-group-says-hydro-bill-cuts-won-t-help-them/>

TORONTO — Thousands of businesses in Ontario that don't qualify for a 17-per-cent cut to their electricity bills are like the forgotten middle child, says a manufacturing group.

The Liberal government's announcement last month applies to residential electricity customers and about half a million small businesses and farms on time-of-use pricing. The Industrial Conservation Initiative program for large manufacturers and businesses was also expanded so that more industrial customers would qualify.

But there are thousands of Ontario businesses that are too big for one program and too small for the other, and the government estimates they will only see about two to four per cent off their bills.

Jocelyn Bamford, with the Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers, said the 70 manufacturers the coalition represents don't feel valued.

"We feel that a lot of manufacturers are the middle child that are completely left out," she said. "They saw almost nothing in the recent announcements."

There are currently about 50,000 consumers in that middle group — including industrial, commercial and municipal facilities. The government doesn't yet know how many of those consumers will qualify for the expanded industrial program, but Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said it would be "thousands."

Mark Josephs, the president and CEO of Kisko Freezies, said his company doesn't qualify for the expanded industrial program — the government disagrees — and that two to four per cent off their hydro bill will not be of much assistance.

"As a business I feel like we are fighting a battle not only against all our competitors, but really against the government itself and, obviously, it's a battle that we can't win as a business," he said.

The two to four per cent comes from the government shifting some programs to support low-income and rural residents off of ratepayers' bills and onto the tax base.

Kisko paid about \$277,000 last year for hydro, Josephs said, about \$100,000 more than two years earlier, even though he said consumption didn't change that much. In 2015 the actual electricity usage made up 20 per cent of what the company was paying, and last year that was down to 12.5 per cent, he said. Most of the rest went to the global adjustment.

The 17 per cent that is set to come off residential and small business bills this summer comes from part of the global adjustment. Part of it will come off bills for the next 10 years, but will also be deferred to future ratepayers, racking up an estimated \$25 billion in interest on that debt.

But the global adjustment on medium and larger businesses' bills stays the same.

Thibeault said he's well aware of the concerns of the "stuck-in-the-middle" companies.

"The two to four per cent, while I know that's modest, there are the Save on Energy (conservation) programs that they can use as well and we're encouraging that," Thibeault said. "But we're going to continue to meet with them and talk with them to make sure that if there are other things we can do we'll

look at that."

Progressive Conservative Todd Smith said the Liberals' hydro plan is hurting job creators.

"The patchwork quilt of programs that we now have in Ontario that the government has set up has too many hydro users falling through the cracks," he said.

New Democrat Peter Tabuns said ignoring manufacturers in the hydro plan is a big hole.

"We need jobs in Ontario," he said. "Having a healthy manufacturing sector is critical to the economic health of Ontario."

The Canadian Press

TV Transcripts (6 PM)

CKWS: Two Kingston Residents Arrested for Stealing Hydro from
Source: CKWS

Apr 11, 2017 6:00 PM (1)

Anchor 1: Two Kingston residents are likely wishing they had simply kept the lights off. Police have charged the couple with stealing hydro from their neighbour using an extension cord.

Anchor 2: It's not known how long they were allegedly drawing power from next door as Paul Soucy reports, there is help available if you find your electricity bill is too high.

Reporter: At this point, it's no secret. The price of electricity in Ontario is on the rise. In recent years, residents across the province have voiced their concerns over high electricity bills with the provincial government and in some cases even the federal government.

Unidentified [Clip]: When I only have \$65 left of my pay cheque every two weeks to feed my family I'm asking you to fix our hydro system.

Reporter: This may be a first. They were stealing hydro from their neighbour.

Reporter: On the seventh of April, a 21-year-old man and 24-year-old woman were arrested and charged for stealing hydro from their neighbour. But how did they do it? The landlord responsible for the building behind me says it was one of his tenants who was charged for stealing hydro. During one of his nightly checks of the building last week, he noticed an extension cord running out of a window all the way to a neighbouring home. That's when the police were called. More often than not, those who can't afford the cost of electricity likely won't go to this length to turn the lights back on. In Kingston, there are supports in place for those struggling to pay the bills.

Helen Maberly, Kingston Community Health Centre: We have some emergency funds here at Kingston Community Health Centres with the support of Utilities Kingston and the Low Income Energy Assistance program to be able help people with those bills.

Reporter: Kingston Community Health Centre is just one of many places residents can go to for help paying electricity bills. In fact, they say they have multiple requests for it every day. As for the hydro bandits, they have since been released from police custody and are facing charges of theft under \$5,000. Now they'll have to find another way to turn the lights back on.