

Evening Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 17, 2017

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MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

March 17, 2017

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Online Coverage

Toronto Star: Government ads promoting 25-per-cent hydro-rate cut partisan waste: PCs
By: Rob Ferguson
March 17, 2017

<https://www.thestar.com/news/queenspark/2017/03/17/government-ads-promoting-25-per-cent-hydro-rate-cut-partisan-waste-pcs.html>

New ads promoting Premier Kathleen Wynne's promised 25-per-cent hydro-rate cut are a "partisan" abuse of taxpayer's money and should be scrapped, the Progressive Conservatives say.

The demand came Friday as Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk described the radio spots as a "pat on the back" for the government and said she probably would have rejected them before the government curbed her powers in 2015, Canadian Press reports.

The two ads include the line "we've heard you," a reference to complaints about high electricity prices, and promise hydro rates won't rise by more than the rate of inflation for at least four years.

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault's office defended the commercials airing across the province, saying the government "has a responsibility to raise awareness and communicate information about programs and services that affect Ontarians.

"This includes informing Ontarians of changes to their electricity bills so that they can use this information to plan for the future as they manage their household budgets."

But Conservative Leader Patrick Brown said that "these ads serve a partisan purpose that aims to improve the government's standing among the public using taxpayer dollars."

Given that legislation required to implement the rate cuts has not yet been introduced or passed by MPPs, the government has "no authority" to run the ads, Brown charged.

He has not yet released a plan to tackle high hydro rates, but has promised details in "the near future."

The NDP noted the hydro-rate cut isn't expected to kick in until summer, and demanded the government reveal how much is being spent on the ad campaign, which includes social media.

"Not one dime has come off people's skyrocketing hydro bills and Wynne hasn't tabled legislation . . . , yet she's spending more of people's hard-earned dollars on ads claiming the problem is solved," said New Democrat MPP and energy critic Peter Tabuns, whose party has promised to cut rates up to 30 per cent.

"This looks an awful lot like she's spending people's money to try to buy some support in the next election for herself and her party."

Aside from letting Ontarians know about the pending hydro price break so they can manage their household budgets, the ads steer electricity consumers to a website for more information, Thibeault's office said.

Both opposition parties have complained the Liberal rate cut will put a burden on ratepayers for more than a generation, because it will cost \$25 billion in interest payments to spread the cost of electricity system improvements in recent years over the next 30 years.

Wynne has said it was “unfair” to load those costs on ratepayers now, instead of spreading them out over a longer period given that new generating assets, such as solar, wind and transmission lines will be productive for some time.

The Barrie Examiner ~~687.000~~ *stop wasting taxpayer dollars on ads: Brown*
By: Patrick Brown
March 17, 2017

<http://www.thebarrieexaminer.com/2017/03/17/stop-wasting-taxpayer-dollars-on-ads-brown>

Open letter to Treasury Board president Liz Sandals:

I'm writing to you regarding your government's recent taxpayer-funded advertisements that promote the government's proposed hydro scheme.

These advertisements detail your scheme as finalized, and identify a date when your government anticipates it will take effect.

Your government has no authority to be spending hard-earned taxpayer dollars on partisan radio and social-media ads to promote a plan that has not yet been tabled, debated and voted on in the legislature.

I am concerned that these ads serve a partisan purpose that aim to improve the government's standing among the public using taxpayer dollars.

Moreover, these ads are potentially costing taxpayers millions of dollars while millions of families, as well as businesses, hospitals and other public institutions, suffer every day from unaffordable electricity bills.

I ask that you take several immediate actions.

First, that you immediately stop spending another cent on this advertising campaign, which so far we have seen on radio and social media.

Second, that you publicly release the budget for these taxpayer-funded ads.

Third, we ask that you release the names of firms that hold these lucrative advertising contracts.

Your government has a long track record of misusing taxpayer-funded ads for partisan purposes.

Before the 2015 federal election, you ran \$8.1 million in self-congratulatory ads for a job-killing retirement pension scheme that never came to fruition.

Your government has also previously awarded contracts to members of the Ontario Liberal Party campaign team.

In the past, I would have asked the Auditor General of Ontario, Bonnie Lysyk, to investigate any questionable and partisan advertisements. Unfortunately, your government has stripped the Auditor General's ability to do so.

We respectfully ask that you respond to the requests as noted above by Friday, March 25.

Patrick Brown, Simcoe North MPP

Leader of the Official Opposition

The Sudbury Star ~~NDP~~ *demands details of hydro plan*
By: Sudbury Star Staff
Friday, March 17, 2017

<http://www.thesudburystar.com/2017/03/17/ndp-demands-details-of-hydro-plan>

The NDP is filing freedom-of-information requests to find out how much public money Premier Kathleen Wynne is spending on advertisements in defence of hydro bills and the multi-billion-dollar borrowing scheme the Liberal government will use to finance its hydro relief plan.

"Not one dime has come off people's skyrocketing hydro bills and Wynne hasn't tabled legislation or even a credible plan to save us money, yet she's spending more of people's hard-earned dollars on ads claiming the problem is solved," Peter Tabuns, Ontario NDP energy critic, said in a release.

"Yet again, it's all about Kathleen Wynne and her party and not at all about making life more affordable for real people. This looks an awful lot like she's spending people's money to try to buy some support in the next election for herself and her party."

The ads include the tag line "paid for by the Government of Ontario."

NDP leader Andrea Horwath has released her party's plan to cut hydro bills by as much as 30 per cent. It includes reversing the sell-off of Hydro One, as well the elimination of time-of-use billing.

Following that, the Liberals announced that they'll charge Ontario people as much as \$40 billion in interest payments as their bid to buy some relief on the hydro file. The NDP has been calling for details of the plan and demanding to see legislation immediately.

TV Transcripts (6 PM)

CFTO The Auditor General Is Criticizing The Government's New
Source: CFTO
Mar 17, 2017 6:15 PM (10)

Anchor: Well, you probably thought it was good news when the Premier announced 25 per cent is coming off your hydro bill.

Anchor: Yes. But what do you think about Queen's Park spending big bucks to buy ads boasting about the government plan? CTV's Paul Bliss joins us now at Queen's Park where he's finding mounting chorus of complaints about this: the use of our tax dollars to boast about the plan. Paul.

Reporter: That's right, Ken. From the opposition to the Auditor General, unhappiness about these expensive ads that are essentially telling us something we already know. As you're driving in your car or listening to the radio at home you hear them.

Unidentified: [Audio clip of Hydro advertisement] We've heard you. And we're taking action with the Fair Hydro Plan.

Reporter: The Wynne government is using taxpayers' money to pay for radio and social media ads that promote their plan to slash Hydro bills by 25 per cent this year. Ontario's Auditor General is already saying the ads don't pass the smell test and would likely have been rejected by her office as being partisan Liberal advertising.

Vic Fedeli, PC Finance Critic: Buying ads, are they trying to influence the vote? I mean, what is the purpose of them other than partisan advertising today?

Reporter: PC Finance Critic Vic Fedeli is furious. He says the ads are heinous and insulting to taxpayers.

MPP Fedeli: First of all, they used taxpayers' money to bail themselves out of a Hydro crisis they got themselves into, and now they are using taxpayer money to pat themselves on the back.

Reporter: Just two years ago, the Auditor General could have rejected these ads and they never would have made air, but the Liberals took that power away from her, leaving the Auditor General saying her office has become nothing more than a rubber-stamp for government partisan ads. The Liberals disagree with the Auditor's assessment, saying the government has a responsibility to raise awareness and communicate information about programs and services that affect Ontarians.

Unidentified: [Audio clip of Hydro advertisement] Paid for by the Government of Ontario.

Reporter: The PCs are demanding the government pull the ads now, and reveal the budgets for the campaign. They also want to know if the agencies producing the ads are friends of the Liberals. The Conservatives are also accusing the government of acting outside of the powers that they have because the government has yet to table the enabling legislation that will allow these cuts to our Hydro bills. Technically, the PCs say the government doesn't have the authority to launch these ads. The government, in its defence, is saying Ontario families need to know what their bills are going to be so they can plan their budgets. Live at Queen's Park, I'm Paul Bliss. We'll send it back to you.

Anchor: Thank you, Paul.

GlobalWynne Government Criticized Over Taxpayer Funded Hydro
Source: Global
Mar 17, 2017 6:04 PM (16)

Anchor: After announcing a Hydro rate cut recently, it was starting to look like the Wynne government might be able to ditch their Hydro debacle until today. Some new radio ads have the opposition crying foul, and the controversy might seem vaguely familiar to them. Mark Carcasole reports.

[Radio Ad Clip]: Starting this summer, households in Ontario will receive an average of 25 per cent off their Hydro.

Reporter: After immense scrutiny and public pressure, the Wynne Liberals took action to lower your hydro bills. And now they're celebrating about it in a series of radio ads, on your dime.

[Radio Ad Clip]: We've heard you. Hydro needs to be fair for everyone across the province, and we've made fundamental changes to ensure this in the long term.

Peter Tabuns, NDP MPP: Their whole concern is making sure that Kathleen Wynne and the Liberal party look good.

Lisa McLeod, PC MPP: This is a self-congratulatory ad aimed at helping the Liberal party.

Reporter: In a letter to the Liberals, PC Leader Patrick Brown demands that the province stop spending on the ads, and release the budget for them. In a statement the Ministry of Energy tells Global News: "The Ontario government has a responsibility to raise awareness and communicate information about programs and services that affect Ontarians."

[Radio Ad Clip]: Paid for by the Government of Ontario.

Reporter: There's no mention of the Liberal party or any of its members, so the government says, it follows the rules. Well... the new rules implemented in 2015. Rules Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk fought from the outset, worried they'd strip her ability to veto ads she deemed too partisan.

Bonnie Lysyk, Auditor General of Ontario: And we think that the ads that are being put out now are self-congratulatory ads that don't add value.

Reporter: Hearing that, her response to these ads on comes as no surprise. "Our Office approved the Hydro-related ads under the current version of the Government Advertising Act. However, they would not have passed under the previous legislation."

Reporter: It's not the first time the Liberals' advertising practices have attracted negative feedback from Lysyk and the Opposition. They also spent public dollars last August in a series of radio ads promoting the federal Liberals' changes to the Canada Pension Plan. According to Lysyk, that also would've fallen outside of the old rules.

MPP McLeod: I think it's a bit disingenuous of the Liberals not only to run these ads, but to spend money on these ads from people who right now are struggling to pay the bills.

Reporter: Ontario's Conservatives may be upset, but their federal counterparts were once guilty of the same.

[Clip] Pierre Poilievre: Hey, I'm Pierre Poilievre.

Reporter: During the election campaign in May, 2015, former federal Employment Minister Pierre Poilievre spent tax dollars and used government staff on a series of videos promoting his Conservative government's child care benefit and he gave a similar excuse.

Pierre Poilievre, Conservative MP: I make no apologies for informing parents of the expanded Universal Child Care Benefit.

Reporter: Some would say that's our job. Mark Carcasole, Global News.

CKVR Auditor General Criticized Province's New Ads On Hydro

Source: CKVR

Mar 17, 2017 6: 10 PM (8)

Anchor: On the heels of a promise to cut electricity rates by 17 per cent by this summer, the Wynne government is now spending some big money boasting about the plan. CTV's Paul Bliss tells us why that is generating complaints about the use of our tax dollars.

Reporter: As you are driving in your car or listening to the radio at home, you hear them.

Provincial Radio Ad: We've heard you. And we are taking action with the Fair Hydro Plan.

Reporter: The Wynne government is using taxpayers' money to pay for radio and social media ads that promote their plan to slash Hydro bills by 25 per cent this year. Ontario's Auditor General is already saying the ads don't pass the smell test and would likely have been rejected by her office as being partisan Liberal advertising.

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Provincial Radio Ad: Paid for by the Government of Ontario.

Reporter: The PCs are demanding the government pull the ads now and reveal the budgets for the campaign. They also want to know if the agencies producing the ads are friends of the Liberals. Paul Bliss, CTV News, Queen's Park.

CFPL Auditor General Says Province's New Ad On Hydro Rate C

Source: CFPL

Mar 17, 2017 6: 40 PM (21)

Anchor: Ontario Conservative Leader Patrick Brown is calling on the government to release the cost of new taxpayer-funded radio ads about the Liberals' plan to cut Hydro bills. The two ads say people will receive an average of 25 per cent off their hydro bills this summer. Here is Paul Bliss.

Reporter: As you are driving in your car or listening to the radio at home, you hear them.

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Reporter: The PCs are demanding the government pull the ads now and reveal the budgets for the campaign. They also want to know if the agencies producing the ads are friends of the Liberals. Paul Bliss, CTV News, Queen's Park.

MCTVMPP Vic Fedeli Criticizes The Government For Hydro Ads

Source: MCTV

Mar 17, 2017 6:18 PM (16)

Anchor: More controversy tonight for the Wynne government, there's outrage from the opposition over the Liberal spending taxpayers' dollars for promoting their recent Hydro rate cut. CTV's Paul Bliss reports.

Reporter: As you are driving in your car or listening to the radio at home, you hear them.

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