

Evening Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - March 24, 2017

From: Electronic Media <cab.amedia@ontario.ca>
To: "@OPO-Media Relations and Issues Management" <opo-mediarelationsandissuesmgmt@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "Bevan, Andrew (OPO)" <andrew.bevan@ontario.ca>, "McEachern, Gillian (OPO)" <gillian.mceachern@ontario.ca>, "Donelson, Philip (OPO)" <philip.donelson@ontario.ca>, "Bossin, Bryan (OPO)" <bryan.bossin@ontario.ca>, "Tomney, Genevieve (OPO)" <genevieve.tomney@ontario.ca>, "@CAB-Trans CO" <cab-transco@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "Baker, Carys (ENERGY)" <carys.baker@ontario.ca>, "Berry, James (ENERGY)" <james.berry5@ontario.ca>, "Bodrug, Andrew (ENERGY)" <andrew.bodrug@ontario.ca>, "Campbell, David (ENERGY)" <david.campbell2@ontario.ca>, "Coker, Meaghan (ENERGY)" <meaghan.coker@ontario.ca>, "Den Heijer, Kevin (ENERGY)" <kevin.denheijer@ontario.ca>, "DeWolfe, Julie (ENERGY)" <julie.dewolfe@ontario.ca>, "Esdaile, Trevor (ENERGY)" <trevor.esdaile@ontario.ca>, "Festeryga, Katherine (ENERGY)" <katherine.festeryga@ontario.ca>, "Foster, David (ENERGY)" <david.foster@ontario.ca>, "Iqbal, Muhammad (ENERGY)" <muhammad.iqbal2@ontario.ca>, "McGrath, Jessica (ENERGY)" <jessica.mcgrath@ontario.ca>, "Moseley-Williams, Kate (ENERGY)" <kate.moseley-williams@ontario.ca>, "Nekolaichuk, Colin (ENERGY)" <colin.nekolaichuk@ontario.ca>, "Olsheski, Mark (ENERGY)" <mark.olsheski@ontario.ca>, "Ramasra, Raynier (ENERGY)" <raynier.ramasra@ontario.ca>, "Ruttan, Craig (ENERGY)" <craig.ruttan@ontario.ca>, "Singh, Alysha (ENERGY)" <alysha.singh@ontario.ca>, "Teliszewsky, Andrew (ENERGY)" <andrew.teliszewsky@ontario.ca>, "Thompson, Rachel (ENERGY)" <rachel.thompson@ontario.ca>, "Tresise, Landon (ENERGY)" <landon.tresise@ontario.ca>, "Tretiakov, Ilia (ENERGY)" <ilia.tretiakov@ontario.ca>, "Walman, Evan (ENERGY)" <evan.walman@ontario.ca>
Cc: "Sumi, Craig (CAB)" <craig.sumi@ontario.ca>, "Di Giovanni, Robert (CAB)" <robert.digiovanni@ontario.ca>, "Law, Sally (CAB)" <sally.law@ontario.ca>, "Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)" <jeffrey.stinson@ontario.ca>, "Nutter, George (ENERGY)" <george.nutter@ontario.ca>, "Halford, Gavin (ENERGY)" <gavin.halford@ontario.ca>, Electronic Media <cab.amedia@ontario.ca>
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MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

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Online Coverage

Sudbury.com: Thibeault uses electronic town hall to take pulse of voters
By: Darren MacDonald

<https://www.sudbury.com/local-news/thibeault-uses-electronic-town-hall-to-take-pulse-of-voters-571077>

Glenn Thibeault says he's a little less popular at Queen's Park these days, and that's just fine with him.

Nine months into his tenure as energy minister, the Sudbury MPP says his announcement of a summer cut to hydro rates has meant the media and the Opposition parties are less interested in him.

"Every since we did the Fair Hydro plan, I'm not getting as many questions in Question Period," Thibeault said this week, as he drank his morning coffee at a New Sudbury Tim Hortons.

"Yesterday, I walked out of Question Period, and the media looked at me and said, 'Hey Glenn! We don't need to talk with you today.'

"It was like that IKEA commercial. I was like, 'Start the car!'"

These are tough days for Ontario's governing Liberals. Premier Kathleen Wynne has a shocking approval rate of just 12 per cent, and Thibeault himself has been in the cross hairs for critics since he left the federal NDP to run in the February 2015 Sudbury byelection.

Switching parties is controversial enough, but the well-documented – and ongoing – scandal surrounding the byelection has dogged a party already associated with other scandals.

With an election just more than two years away, Conservative Leader Patrick Brown is sending a more centrist conservative message and is pummeling the Grits in opinion polls.

Voters are angry, and any online news story about the Liberals inevitably attracts harsh comments from bloggers, who don't hold anything back. What does he hear from the public in coffee shops and when he's out and about?

"I'd say 95 per cent of the people I talk to, even if they disagree with me, are respectful," Thibeault said.

"For me, it comes down to this. If you want to disagree over politics, or my stance on an issue, tear it to shreds. That's totally fine with me. We should be able to have that debate and that conversation.

"I've made choices in my political career that have caused a little bit of controversy. And fair enough. There are people who are respectful of that and there are people who disagree with that. That's fine if you want to have a conversation about it."

But those five per cent, he said, they can get a little scary. They don't want to talk or debate. They want to attack.

"In my nine years in politics, I've had two death threats, I've been spit on numerous, numerous times, and I've been called every name in the book," he said.

"There are times when I'm just walking by, and you get the catcalls. There are days when you're like, why do I want to continue to do this? I could find another job where I'm at home with my kids, not missing basketball practice and all those other things."

To keep himself "grounded," as he puts it, Thibeault said he looks for other ways to engage residents to

find out what people not commenting online have to say. Canvassing is still his favourite, but that can be hard to do on a weekend when he's home.

"We canvassed a few weeks ago, but it's hard to do that in Sudbury on a Saturday when everyone is out at the Kivi Park festival," he said. "When the sun is out, Sudbury disappears."

So on March 15, he held an electronic town hall, where he says about 3,000 people took part over an hour, asking any questions they wanted. A company he hired uses the old-fashioned phone book, calling a random sample of people who still have land lines or have their cell phones listed in the book. The company doesn't know the political affiliation of the people who took part.

"We inform them that we're doing this with a call to everyone a few days before," Thibeault said. "This one was done on a Wednesday night at 7 o'clock. We take calls and talk about issues. None of it is scripted, it's wide open."

The results weren't overly flattering, he said, but were informative. For example, only 40 per cent said they were satisfied with the job he was doing, with the rest unsure or unimpressed. See the full report here.

What surprised him was there wasn't more concern expressed over hydro prices.

"I was expecting a load of questions on electricity prices, as the minister of energy and that being such a popular subject," he said. "But I got a lot of questions about health care, poverty, education, ODSP, those types of things. So this allows me to say, OK, people are really concerned about poverty in Sudbury. So what are we doing as a government to address poverty."

"It really helps me focus on what the issues are in the riding, rather than just basing it on what I think it is. It's good to connect. In a way, it's how I get my job evaluation. It keeps me grounded."

While being a politician in the social media age has its challenges, Thibeault said he still enjoys the job.

"Politics is a great profession, one where you can really make a difference and help thousands and thousands of people," he said.

"That's the way I look at it. I've got lots of people yelling and screaming all the time, telling you you're doing a horrible job. But then you have people who come into your office looking for help and you can get them their money faster, or their certificate or whatever it is. Doing that, that's what keeps me going."

Orillia packet Minister visits Orillia to outline hydro plan

By: Andrew Philips

<http://www.orilliapacket.com/2017/03/24/minister-visits-orillia-to-outline-hydro-plan>

It definitely had a pre-election feel, but Ontario Energy Minister Glenn Thibault said he had been planning to visit Orillia for weeks to discuss his government's plan to tackle escalating electricity prices.

"(Orillia) wasn't singled out because it's Patrick Brown's riding," Thibault said, referring to the Simcoe North MPP, who leads the provincial Progressive Conservatives.

Thibault and Barrie MPP Ann Hoggarth joined local politicians and social services leaders Friday at Orillia's Housing Resource Centre to outline Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan that he pledged will lower electricity bills by 25% on average for all residential consumers in the province.

"I know affordable access to electricity is a critical issue here in Simcoe County," said Thibault, adding he was charged by Premier Kathleen Wynne with working to lower electricity costs nine months ago.

"By moving ahead with this significant reform we will be providing significant relief by this summer."

Mayor Steve Clarke said electricity prices are always front and centre when it comes to assessing costs.

"I was hearing about energy prices when we were going through the negotiations with Hydro One," Clarke said, referring to last year's sale of Orillia Power Distribution Corporation to Hydro One for \$26.35 million.

"Our municipal partners in rural areas certainly have concerns about pricing."

Hoggarth, who is also parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services agreed: "We weren't hearing quite the same concerns in our urban area, but it has been a big issue in rural areas."

But the plan should help them as well, according to Thibault, who noted many small businesses and farms will also benefit from the initiative, with additional relief for people with low incomes and those living in eligible rural communities.

Thibault, who also noted that rate increases over the next four years would be held to the rate of inflation for everyone, said bills have been escalating over the years because the province was working to improve the system.

That became paramount following blackouts experienced across the province in 2003, he said, adding that eliminating the use of coal provincially that has seen the number of "smog days" drop from 53 in 2005 to none reported last year.

Clarke said the province's plan should also help those struggling to make ends meet.

"I see merit to this," he said. "It will really help our most vulnerable citizens."

But Clarke said he was surprised by some of the information Thibault shared, including the reasons behind the higher prices such as eliminating coal use and moving towards cleaner, renewable energy.

"I think the province has done a poor job of letting people know why the costs have gone up," he said.

Thibault said the billing issue centred around the fact funding towards the system improvements and key financial assistance programs were unfairly falling almost entirely on the shoulders of today's ratepayers. Now, the province plans to refinance those capital investments "to ensure that system costs are more equitably distributed over time."

United Way of Grey Bruce executive director Francesca Dobbyn also attended Friday's announcement and said she was enthused by the various funding initiatives available to help those in need.

"Our organization is very pleased that the province has listened to our concerns and made these concrete changes," said Dobbyn, who noted her organization has operated a utility/poverty program for the past decade.

"We've made this a provincial issue."

Bayshore Broadcasting's Thibault Boasts Hydro Rate Cut

By: Ken Hashizume

http://www.bayshorebroadcasting.ca/news_item.php?NewsID=92030

Ontario's Energy Minister is out promoting the government's plan to reduce hydro costs.

Glenn Thibeault was in Orillia on Friday speaking to staff at the Common Roof and municipal officials including Mayor Steve Clarke.

The Wynne government announced the "Fair Hydro Plan" last week that would see rates cut by an average of 25 percent starting in June.

That is on top of the 8 percent -- the equivalent of the provincial portion of the HST -- that was removed from hydro bills in January.

Thibeault says the government has been reducing hydro rates.

But he says the reduction was not broad in scope and did not provide the long-term relief that people were looking for.

Thibeault says the reductions are set for June because residents are using more electricity in the summer and the costs are higher in the summer.

He says they are working as hard as they can to get these measures in place before the start of the summer season.

The announcement comes as Premier Kathleen Wynne is facing disappointing approval numbers and it is being made in the riding of Simcoe North represented by P-C Leader Patrick Brown.

Thibeault says there have been a number of concerns coming out of Orillia about electricity rates so it was important to have the announcement in the city.

He says Barrie MPP Ann Hoggarth has heard similar concerns across Simcoe County.

Client Services Coordinator at Orillia Housing Resource Centre Nadine Ritchie says there are low income families coming into their offices saying they are facing decisions of whether to feed their families or pay their hydro bills.

She says anything that would help them relive that burden is welcome news.

TV Transcripts (6 PM)

Global Premier's Approval Rating Falls to All Time Low

Source: Global

Mar 24, 2017 5:34 PM (2)

Anchor: Premier Wynne's approval rating has fallen to an all-time low. According to new polling by Angus Reid, Wynne's approval rating is now at 12 per cent. That compares to the rest of the Premiers. As you can see, it's her sixth straight decline and she's at the bottom of the barrel. It also found three-quarters of Ontarians say hydro-related issues will be top of mind in the coming provincial election. Interestingly enough, the poll was done after the government announced that it will cut hydro rates. But, the Premier says the savings just simply haven't shown up on the bill yet.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: People haven't seen the impact on their bills yet, but you know what, with all of that, I have a job to do. I made a commitment to the people of Ontario in 2014. I'm doing that job and I'm going to continue to do that job.

Anchor: The only provincial leader to hit a lower number was BC Premier Gordon Campbell. He dropped below 10 per cent and then resigned in 2010. Should Wynne stay or should she go? We're going to look into that coming up at 6:00.

CHCH Premier Wynne's Approval Rating Drops to 12 Per Cent

Source: CHCH

Mar 24, 2017 6:03 PM (2)

Anchor: Premier Kathleen Wynne vows to carry on despite a record-low approval rating.

Anchor 2: And a poll released by the Angus Reid Institute, Wynne received a 12 percent approval, which is the lowest of any premier ever in all of Canada.

Reporter: Wynne's approval rating is much worse than Donald Trump's. Trump's ratings are very poor - it's 37 per cent. A political science expert says 12 per cent is shockingly low. At a news conference today Premier Kathleen Wynne links her poor approval rating to hydro prices.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: I did see the poll and I know the issue around electricity prices has been very, very hard for people in the province.

Reporter: The provincial government has announced that an additional 25 per cent will be slashed from hydro bills.

Unidentified: That didn't change her popularity.

Premier Wynne: I understand that, and I understand that, people haven't seen, the impact on their bills yet,

but you know, with all of that, I have a job to do, I made a commitment to the people of Ontario in 2014 and I'm doing that job and I'm going to continue to do that job.

Reporter: George Breckenridge says no other premier in all of Canada has ever had such a low approval rating. And he says the chance of Wynne being reelected in June of 2018 will be unlikely.

George Breckenridge, Political Science Expert: When you're pooling is as low as it is now, that's awfully hard to come back from.

Reporter: Breckenridge says Wynne is up against two very big problems, the first being hydro rates and the second is that the Liberals have been in power for many years, since 2003.

Breckenridge: Governments get a bit worn around the edges if they've been in power for a long time.

Reporter: Breckenridge says that if Wynne does not step down by the end of the summer she will most likely see the whole campaign through. Here in downtown Hamilton, the assessment of her performance is blunt.

Unidentified: Can't wait to see her leave?

Reporter: You don't think she'll win the next election?

Unidentified: Without a doubt, she's out.

Unidentified: Just a nightmare. The whole Liberal party is just a nightmare.

Unidentified: I think she's terrible.

Reporter: Why?

Unidentified: Well she's pretty much ruining everything.

Reporter: In an interview with CHCH last week, Wynne says there's time to boost her approval rating as the election is still over one year away. George Breckenridge says it's too early to tell but if Wynne steps down he believes some of the strongest candidates who may take her place are Health Minister Eric Hoskins or Finance Minister Charles Sousa.

City TV Premier Wynne's Approval Rating Hits Record Low

Source: City TV

Mar 24, 2017 6:16 PM (11)

Anchor: Recent poll numbers show a grim reality for Premier Kathleen Wynne. Her approval rating has dropped to a mere 12 per cent over the past couple of months. That's according to the Angus Reid Institute, which says approval for the Premier slipped another four points since December. The result comes just weeks after Wynne announced a 17 per cent cut in hydro rates this summer. Senior Liberal and former party president, Greg Sorbara is calling for her to step down. She says no way.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: I did reach out to Greg. You know I'll have an opportunity to talk with him. Greg is a part of a very large party, and I can't -- you know, I can't control all those perspectives. People are going to see what they see and they're going to say what they need to say. I am really focused on doing the job that I was given by the people of Ontario.

Anchor: The sale of Hydro One continues to be a huge setback among voters, with more than 8 in 10 saying they disagree with the decision. Despite mounting pressure to step down, Wynne has repeatedly said she intends to represent the party in the next election.

CFTO Premier Wynne's Ratings Have Dropped To 12 Per Cent

Source: CFTO

Mar 24, 2017 6:17 PM (12)

Anchor: We are live over Queen's Park where serious questions are being raised about the political future of Kathleen Wynne. It all stems from a new poll that shows her popularity has slipped to staggeringly low levels. The big question today, does she step aside as Liberal party leader and let someone else fight in election 2018? CTV's Paul Bliss put that very question to the Premier today. Paul, how did she respond?

Reporter: With conviction, Michelle. She's staying put in spite of the mounting chorus of voices that are asking whether or not she's the right person to lead the Liberals through the next election. This new poll reflects a big problem the Premier has, one that she's got 15 months to solve. The Premier woke up to historic lows in her personal popularity. An Angus Reid poll gives her support of just 12 per cent of voters.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: A lot of unpredictability.

Reporter: Just as important, the poll was done after she announced a 25 per cent cut to hydro bills, so will she resign as party leader?

Premier Wynne: I have a job to do. I made a commitment to the people of Ontario in 2014. I'm doing that job. And I'm going to continue to do that job.

Reporter: Kathleen Wynne still has a lot of fight, and she still has fierce loyalties behind her. Watch this.

[Clip]

Brad Duguid, Minister of Economic Development and Growth: Let me – do you mind, Premier?

Reporter: One of her veteran Cabinet Ministers intervenes with an impassioned defence of his embattled leader.

Minister Duguid: I think Ontarians know that they have a Premier here in this province that's one of the most intelligent people to ever hold this office. That cares about them more than almost anybody that's held this office in the past.

Reporter: But there are some members of Wynne's caucus who privately question her leadership. They're worried about keeping their jobs, which are directly tied to her ability to win the next election.

Premier Wynne: There's no secret that there have always been people in the Liberal party who weren't keen on me.

Jim Warren, Former McGuinty Advisor: It's the bottom of the barrel.

Reporter: Jim Warren is political strategist and former top advisor to Dalton McGuinty.

Warren: I don't think you'll see Kathleen Wynne step away from this at all. She will be more dogged than ever.

Reporter: Mississauga's former mayor is a veteran political scrapper. She advises the Premier to stay and return to her ideals.

Hazel McCallion, Former Mississauga Mayor: I think that the Premier has done some good things, and there are some decisions that have not been well thought out, but in my opinion she should continue.

Reporter: Wynne has been the underdog most of her political career, defeating John Tory, Tim Hudak, and fellow Liberal, Sandra Pupatello, but some argue even she can't fight the tides of political change. Adding to the Premier's pains today, a senior Liberal has spoken out and suggested the Premier should step aside in the interest of the party. Greg Sorbara, the former Finance Minister, went on TV and said her popularity numbers are too low for her to rebound, suggesting that she should step aside and let somebody else lead the party through the election in 2018. Live at Queen's Park, I'm Paul Bliss we'll send it back to you.

Anchor: Thank you, Paul.