

Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction - May 17, 2017

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Morning Media Scan: May 17, 2017

MEDIA SCAN HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

May 17, 2017

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Print Coverage

Orillia Packet & Times: Liberals like an octopus trying to roller skate; A4; 2017.05.17

PUBLICATION: Orillia Packet & Times
PAGE: A4
DATE: 2017.05.17
SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Jim Merriam
SOURCE: Orillia Packet & Times
KEYWORDS: experts,described,observing,white,house,fumbling
WORD COUNT: 585

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Next, we hear about the new labour legislation to be introduced any day easing the path to unionization, setting rules on excessive use of parttime workers, etc.

Some of this, particularly the parttime worker rules, might be needed. But bear in mind this is coming from a government that is already seen as unfriendly to business, in part because of high electricity rates.

If businesses flee to other jurisdictions, there will be no work, part-time or otherwise. So this is ground that must be trod very carefully. In other words, it's beyond the capabilities of this bunch.

This week, we also got confirmation of what we all knew, that the 25 per cent savings on our power bills promised by this government won't last long.

The money is still owed and must be paid back sometime after the next election and guess who is going to do the paying with higher rates? A leaked government paper proves what we all knew. The Wynne government has done nothing to fix the power system in the province. They've just played fast and loose with the numbers once again.

Queen's Park also is experimenting with a guaranteed-income plan to take the place of welfare. It's difficult to see how such a plan will work with the dark cloud of debt that hangs over the province.

In addition, the province is selling off more of Hydro One - a major move for which the Grits have no mandate from the people - for a reported \$2.8 billion.

Sounds like a lot of money, right? It's enough to pay debt-service charges until about the time schools re-open this fall.

Those are, of course, schools that survived closure due to Queen's Park anti-student and anti-rural rules. With debt heading toward \$320 billion and a government that cares only about its own survival, our octopus is clinging precariously to the bottom edge of the ski jump.

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SECTION: Opinion
EDITION: Final
SOURCE: -Postmedia Network
KEYWORDS: premier,kathleen,government,believe,horrid,treatment
WORD COUNT: 384

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It wasn't until Maureen tried to sell the van that she learned of the lien. Thanks to Progressive Conservative MPP Randy Hillier, we know it took nine months for the government to acknowledge the lien was the result of a government worker erroneously putting the lien on her van - and possibly other vehicles - while testing Ontario's vehicle registration system.

Given the clearly fictitious names and address on the lien, this should have been resolved in a matter of hours, if not minutes, when the mistake was first brought to the government's attention.

The larger problem is, this wasn't an isolated incident.

Former Ontario ombudsman Andre Marin, for example, reported after an investigation into Hydro One that after the utility took too much money out of the bank accounts of its customers to pay their hydro bills, it refused to give it back, agreeing only to credit it against future charges.

Former auditor general Jim McCarter revealed the government's own energy experts told the Liberals they didn't need to make the feed-in-tariff (FIT) program for wind and solar power developers as financially generous as it was, to meet their environmental goals.

The Liberals did it anyway, costing electricity ratepayers an extra \$4.4 billion over 20 years, according to McCarter. A CBC news investigation found the Liberals' environment ministry misled people who contacted it to complain about ill health effects from wind turbines - telling them they were the only ones complaining, when in fact hundreds of people were.

This happened even as the same ministry was internally warning the government its noise limits and setbacks were inadequate, hard to monitor and difficult to enforce.
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This is about a Liberal government that, demonstrably, no longer deserves the public's trust.

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The Belleville Intelligencer: Hydro issue perfect as a political fiasco; B2; 2017.05.17

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KEYWORDS: proverbial,thorn,ontario,liberals,electricity,bills
WORD COUNT: 443

Hydro issue perfect as a political fiasco

If there's a proverbial thorn in the side of the Ontario Liberals, it has to be electricity bills. That thorn is likely causing less pain for party members as the price of hydro has caused for many Ontario residents - including some here in the Quinte region- but there's a good chance it will cost the party its position when residents head to the polls next year.

The opposition parties, to no surprise, have sank their teeth into the issue and are showing no sign of letting go anytime soon. It's perfect political ammunition and Premier Kathleen Wynne and her party can't seem to get out of the crosshairs.

Locally, MPP Todd Smith has taken on the role of energy critic and, from day one, has been lambasting the Liberals over their mishandling of the Hydro One sale. It's an issue that seems created specifically to boost the popularity of the Conservatives. And it's working.

A new Forum Research survey shows, provincially, the Liberals are holding a measly 28 per cent while the PCs lead in popular support with 41 per cent. The NDP trail behind with 23 per cent.

Those numbers can, and likely will, change before the province elects a new government, but there's no doubt the Wynne-led Liberals have been losing momentum as citizens examine those hydro bills and decide what they'd rather do: have heat and lights or food on their table.

When you're hitting people directly where it hurts - the wallet - one should only expect there's going to be a backlash. Even members of Wynne's own party, if Smith is to be believed, are struggling with what's happening.

Smith said he leaked cabinet documents an insider provided him because the whistleblower "was upset the government was talking about providing instant relief when really what they're doing is making the problem worse. What the document shows is, after the next election, electricity bills will start to skyrocket again."

The Liberals are saying the Conservatives, naturally, are wrong and the Conservatives are saying the Liberals are lying. None of this is new in politics, but the electricity scandal doesn't seem to be going away anytime soon.

Any party knows one wrong turn can end a government or a party's hopes of creating one - remember John Tory? This has all the signs of such an issue and rightfully so. The Liberals seem to be shrugging off the debate and have made a half-hearted attempt to gain support with its Fair Hydro Plan, but it's a case of too little, too late.

At this point, Wynne would need a miracle to keep the Liberals in power after next June.

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The Belleville Intelligencer: Liberal plan questioned; Conservatives, NDP say electricity bills will increase following temporary relief; A3; 2017.05.17

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PAGE: A3

DATE: 2017.05.17

SECTION: News

EDITION: Final

BYLINE: Jason Miller

SOURCE: The Belleville Intelligencer

KEYWORDS: hydro,rates,electrified,another,surge,partisan

ILLUSTRATION:Intelligencer File Photo / Prince Edward-Hastings MPP Todd Smith says the Liberal government's Fair Hydro Plan will only bring temporary relief while residents will, in the future, be paying expensive rates for electricity.;

WORD COUNT: 582

Liberal plan questioned; Conservatives, NDP say electricity bills will increase following temporary relief

Ontario's hydro rates have electrified another surge of partisan rhetoric a year ahead of the next election. Mere days after the Progressive Conservatives leaked cabinet documents in an effort to bore holes in the Liberals' plan to reduce hydro rates by 25 per cent, the New Democrats, too, have come out swinging, with leader Andrea Horwath signalling they will not be voting in favour of the cuts.

"A little bit of temporary relief is going to turn into a huge increase," Horwath told The Intelligencer.

At the heart of the contention is the Liberals' announcement they will set up a special purpose financial entity to manage the borrowing of billions of dollars to fund the cuts.

Interest payments would fall on the shoulders of Ontarians, with ratepayers picking up the tab for an estimated \$25 billion in interest over 30 years, in an effort to lower rates this year.

Prince Edward-Hastings MPP Todd Smith was behind the leak.

"We were the ones who released the cabinet document last Thursday. I had received them from a whistleblower who was upset the government was talking about providing instant relief when really what they're doing is making the problem worse," Smith said. "What the document shows is, after the next election, electricity bills will start to skyrocket again."

Smith said the documents reveal the Liberals setting up a debt entity at Ontario Power Generation OPG.

"We will see the debt retirement charge returning to electricity bills in the mid-2020s," he said. "They're taking the cost of the global adjustment off the bills and they're moving that cost over to the new debt (\$25 billion) entity at OPG. Customers are going to pay the interest on the new debt they're creating."

The Liberals say the aim of the proposed Fair Hydro Plan is to give people a break on rates now, but Horwath told The Intelligencer there is no concrete plan to put a lid on the root cause of the increases and the "borrowing scheme" is simply a political ploy to revive the premier's slumping ratings.

"Her plan is going to have those rates start soaring in about three or four years time," said Horwath. "All she's doing is borrowing money to try to get her through the next election."

Files from the leaked document suggest rates will fall this year, increasing by an average of about two per cent over the next four years, before jumping 6.5 per cent annually.

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault has called the leaked documents outdated, dismissing claims rates will only hike.

Horwath has promised to cut hydro rates a minimum 30 per cent if she wins the June 7, 2018 polls.

The Liberals haven't wasted any time before taking shots at Horwath's plan.

"Their biggest idea - buying more than \$4 billion worth of Hydro One shares on the stock market - will not take one cent off electricity bills," a release sent to The Intelligencer newsroom stated. "Other alleged savings rely on a vague, yet-to-be determined 'expert panel' to be convened sometime in the future. And they're banking on lengthy, uncertain negotiations with the federal government for supposed reductions as

well."

Despite Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan helping families, businesses, and farms across the province - including in Belleville - Horwath said the "NDP can't and won't vote in favour of this" during a press conference this morning," the Liberal release stated.

Horwath responded, saying selling off Hydro One is going to make hydro bills go up even further.
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Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake): NDP to vote against Liberal government's hydro bill plan; A5; 2017.05.17

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SECTION: Ontario News

EDITION: Final

SOURCE: Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake)

KEYWORDS: ontario,leader,andrea,horwath,party,against

ILLUSTRATION: Ernest Doroszuk, Toronto Sun Files / Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath says her party will vote against the Liberal plan to lower hydro bills in the short term and raise the bills in the long term.;

DATELINE: TORONTO

WORD COUNT: 344

NDP to vote against Liberal government's hydro bill plan

Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath says her party will vote against the Liberal government's plan to lower hydro bills, calling it a ploy to buy votes for the next provincial election.

Under legislation tabled last week, Ontarians will see lowered hydro bills for the next 10 years before paying higher costs for the following 20 years.

Horwath says Ontarians can't afford the plan.

She cited a Liberal cabinet document leaked to the Progressive Conservatives last week, which contains a projection that electricity bills will drop this year, rise slightly for four years while increases are limited to the rate of inflation, and then rise quickly after that.

Premier Kathleen Wynne says the figures in that document are out of date, but the government isn't ready to release updated numbers.

Horwath is accusing the government of hiding information from the public and is calling on the government to release all of its projections about how much the hydro plan will cost in the long run.

Horwath also says the government is giving the public no time to give feedback on the plan as it's attempting to get the legislation passed before the House rises for the summer.

"I think people knew that, one way or another, they'd pay the prices for Premier Wynne's latest move on hydro, but the costs Wynne is expecting us all to take on with this plan is truly disgusting," Horwath said.

The hydro legislation will lower time-of-use rates by removing from bills a portion of the global adjustment, a charge consumers pay for above-market rates to power producers. For the next 10 years, a new entity overseen by Ontario Power Generation will take on debt to pay that difference.

Then, the cost of paying back that debt with interest - which the government says will be up to \$28 billion - will go back onto ratepayers' bills for the next 20 years as a "Clean Energy Adjustment."

Horwath acknowledged that the Liberal majority government can implement their plan, even with her party and the Progressive Conservatives opposed. - The Canadian Press

Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake): Liberals like an octopus trying to roller skate;
A4; 2017.05.17

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BYLINE: Jim Merriam
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KEYWORDS: experts,described,observing,white,house,fumbling
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