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

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Morning Media Scan: March 17, 2017

MEDIA SCAN: HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

March 17, 2017

Click links below to view article:

Print Coverage
Daily Observer (Pembroke): Rewiring power agency key to lower hydro costs; A5; 2017.03.17

Print Coverage

Daily Observer (Pembroke): Rewiring power agency key to lower hydro
2017.03.17

PUBLICATION:	Daily Observer (Pembroke)
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BYLINE:	Brian Platt
SOURCE:	Daily Observer (Pembroke)
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Rewiring power agency key to lower hydro costs

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Sarnia Observer: Rewiring power agency key to lower hydro costs;

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Orillia Packet & Times: Voters plugging into short-term rate relief; A

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Voters plugging into short-term rate relief

Incredibly and against all odds, Ontarians may be prepared to forgive Premier Kathleen Wynne and her Liberals when they go to the polls in June 2018.
According to a Mainstreet Research/Postmedia poll, approximately 47 per cent of Ontarians approve of Wynne's decision earlier this month to lower electricity rates by an average of 17 per cent, beginning with the June billing - even as that decision would create additional long-term debt of an estimated $26 billion.
Indeed, the same poll found 41 per cent of Ontarians believe the Liberals' electricity plan is really a ploy to put the controversial issue behind them as Wynne and her party gear up for the next election campaign.
But guess what? They're also willing to accept it for what it is and enjoy lower electricity bills. It's not only the Liberals who are cynical here; it is also those who support them while acknowledging and even applauding their opportunism.
What's interesting is even as Wynne's personal approval rating drags, her party continues to enjoy more support than the New Democrats, for whom only 17 per cent of Ontarians would vote if a general election was held today. The Liberals stand at 22 per cent, while the Progressive Conservatives are at 32 per cent.
But the number of undecided Ontarians sits at 25 per cent, and they will probably be the ones to elect the

next government. Their decision will not be based on electricity rates alone but on a wide variety of issues, including the popularity of party leaders.
But by slightly moving the issue of electricity rates off the table, the Liberals have potentially removed an enormous obstacle to re-election. And with their plan set to begin in June, they'll have 12 months to remind Ontarians they were able to cut electricity rates.
The Mainstreet Research/Postmedia poll illustrates a compelling truth: many voters are searching for short-term and immediate solutions while disregarding long-term consequences. They are willing to be bought.
The NDP's Andrea Horwath has also put forward a plan to deal with Ontario's electricity challenges but the New Democrats have received little public traction, and what they have received pales to the Liberals' ability as the sitting government to simply cut immediate electricity bills while pushing the actual cost down the road.
Many voters aren't worried about "down the road" - they want relief, and are apparently willing to reward the party that provides that relief, even while understanding their relief will leave a substantial debt for future generations. - Postmedia Network

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Owen Sound Sun Times: Rewiring power agency key to lower hydro c

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BYLINE:	Brian Platt
SOURCE:	Owen Sound Sun Times
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Niagara Falls Review Rewiring power agency key to lower hydro cos

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The Barrie Examiner Rewiring power agency key to lower hydro cos

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EDITION: Final
BYLINE: Brian Platt
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Windsor Star Despite rebates, growers say hydro still too costly;

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SECTION: City & Region
EDITION: Early
BYLINE: Doug Schmidt
SOURCE: The Windsor Star
KEYWORDS: blame,essex,sticky,humid,climate,hydro
ILLUSTRATION: Nick Brancaccio / Bob Delaney, the parliamentary assistant to the minister of energy, discusses the Ontario government's new Fair Hydro Plan at Enwin on Rhodes Drive on Thursday.;
IMAGES: Nick Brancaccio / Bob Delaney, the parliamentary assistant to the minister of energy, discusses the Ontario government's new Fair Hydro Plan at Enwin on Rhodes Drive on Thursday. [WIST_20170317_Early_A1_02_I001.jpg];
WORD COUNT: 824

Despite rebates, growers say hydro still too costly

Blame Essex County's sticky humid climate, and not just high hydro rates, for local greenhouse growers fleeing Ontario for more southerly climes like Ohio, the province's parliamentary assistant to the minister of energy told reporters Thursday.

Bob Delaney (L - Mississauga-Streetsville) said he had met earlier in the day with local greenhouse growers and "they said part of what caused them to move were the high levels of humidity."

Asked to clarify, Delaney added that "electricity costs are (also) a factor."

Delaney and other government members, including Premier Kathleen Wynne, have been fanning out across the province to trumpet their new Fair Hydro Plan.

It was implemented, after withering public complaints over skyrocketing electricity prices, to give average Ontario household and small-business customers a 25 per cent break on their hydro bills by the summer.

In introducing Delaney at a media event hosted by Enwin Utilities, CEO Helga Reidel made a point of explaining that only 20 per cent of a Windsor household's monthly bill relates to the local utility's operations and costs.

Reidel said almost half of the more than 122,000 queries handled last year by Enwin Utilities' call centre dealt with anger and fear over customers' high monthly hydro bills. More than 2,000 of Enwin's nearly 76,000 customers had to be provided some form of payment plan in 2016 to assist them with those costs, she added.

Participants at the earlier business session were surprised to learn Delaney was explaining humidity as a cause for local industry investing across the border.

"That's a misunderstanding," said Jim DiMenna, president and CEO of Red Sun Farms. "Humidity, that's not a deal breaker - the cost of energy is a deal breaker," he told the Star. Ohio is as humid as Essex County, he added.

Matt Marchand, president and CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, said local business and industry is still waiting for answers from the province about what, if any, relief they can expect on their hydro bills. He said there's still been "no clarity" provided, for example, on whether greenhouse operations would be eligible for the rate relief currently being touted for Ontarians.

"We need help - this is scary for us," said DiMenna.

Marchand estimates that hydro bills in Ontario have gone up at least 350 per cent over the past 10 to 15 years for business and industry.

Standing in front of some Enwin Utilities trucks and speaking before an audience of Enwin employees, Delaney said high electricity costs are due to two key reasons: The need to invest more than $50 billion in generation, transmission and distribution improvements after "decades of under-investment" by governments of all stripes. Elimination of Ontario's coal-generated electricity and a switch to cleaner, renewable power.

Delaney said the $50-billion deficit remains, but that the 25 per cent rebate is paid for in part by extending the repayment period for the hydro debt.

"The immediate relief is obviously welcome," said Tecumseh Mayor Gary McNamara, who attended the announcement. "The last three or four years, all we've seen are increases, increases, increases," he added.

Delaney said residential and small-business hydro consumers will start seeing the savings when their air-conditioning bills get delivered in the summer. As part of the plan, he added, rate increases from the province would be held to the rate of inflation over the next four years.

High power prices aside, Essex Powerlines CEO Ray Tracey advised Delaney that investment opportunities were being threatened due to the length of time it's taking to increase the power supply to Kingsville and Leamington.

"We need to move at a faster pace, if we don't, they (industrial customers) move," he said.

Delaney said Ontario's economy will benefit with a power grid that's more reliable than that found in parts of the United States suffering occasional brownouts and blackouts because similar infrastructure upgrade investments aren't being made.

But Marchand said Ontario businesses are making decisions to move now. "Once we lose an investment, it's gone - we have to deal with the reality now," he said.

Delaney said he "heard a lot about agricultural potential in Essex County" on his trip. Referring to the area's opposition-party representation, but insisting he wasn't being partisan, he said it was "the kind of feedback we have not been getting the last few years from this area."

Delaney wasn't able to answer some questions: Enwin bills have a separate line advising customers how much they're saving through a recently enacted eight per cent provincial rebate. Asked why there's no separate line for the new carbon tax the province began charging in January, Delaney said the Ontario Energy Board doesn't make that a requirement. Asked why the next Sunshine List (publishing the names of all Ontario civil servants earning over $100,000) won't include Ontario Hydro employees (always the largest number with the highest-paid executives), Delaney said that's a question for the finance ministry.

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BYLINE: Brian Platt
SOURCE: Cornwall Standard Freeholder
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Rewiring power agency key to lower hydro costs

When Premier Kathleen Wynne finally announced her hydro relief package earlier this month, it put to rest the immediate political question of how to reduce bills quickly.

The reduction mostly comes from kicking generation costs further down the road, which makes bills cheaper now but will eventually cost us more. Further relief directed at low-income and rural residents will come from drawing money out of general tax revenues.

Yes, this was politics. It simply shifts around money so it seems like you're paying less. But everyone was demanding substantial relief right away, and there was no painless way to do it. What did you expect? Magic? The real question is how to lower the total cost of the system so we can stop monkeying around with "refinancing" and tax subsidies. Here, there's a big project worth watching.

The Independent Electricity System Operator, the agency in charge of the province's electricity grid, is in the midst of what it calls "market renewal." Currently, Ontario manages its daily electricity demand using a 15-year-old system built for a simpler time - before the province shut down its coal-fired plants and built renewable generators such as wind and solar, and before time-of-use pricing was introduced.

"What it's really about is revisiting the fundamental design of the market," said IESO's Chuck Farmer.

The market is how generators are contracted to produce a certain amount of electricity in a certain amount of time. It's tricky: produce too little and you have brown-outs; produce too much and you have to sell the excess to U.S. states at a loss.

How it all works in practice is an extraordinarily complex thing for the average person (or newspaper columnist) to understand, but the core goal of market renewal is to improve how the IESO anticipates daily electricity needs, and to build in more flexibility. A large report on how to do this was just released, and the IESO is now gathering feedback. Any changes are still about four years away.

There are two other big elements of the renewal process. One is to improve how Ontario trades electricity with neighbouring jurisdictions so that it's done more efficiently and reduces the cost of selling our surplus. The other is to use "technology-agnostic" auctions when the province needs to build new power plants.

In other words, instead of calling for a certain amount of wind, solar or natural gas, the province will simply go for the most cost-effective solution that meets its needs (including on carbon emissions).

How much money will all of this save consumers? Over roughly 10 years, the IESO hopes about $3.5 billion in total. It's not a gamechanging amount. The government's plan to "refinance" the global adjustment charge, for example, will take about $1.5 billion off bills annually (for now). But the IESO's project represents permanent savings, not artificial ones created through financial gimmicks.

There are other programs underway. The Ontario Energy Board has launched pilot projects with distribution companies to experiment with peak and off-peak prices. Eventually you may be able to choose your own electricity pricing plan, which could help some people (especially seniors, who tend to be home during peak hours).

So, yes, there is some money to be saved in the system. Overall, these reforms are common-sense initiatives that are just hard to achieve in practice. Yet what all of this really shows is how grindingly hard it

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The Chatham Daily News *Rewiring Power Agency Key To Lower Hydro*
2017.03.17

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Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake): Rewiring power agency key to lowe A4; 2017.03.17

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BYLINE:	Brian Platt
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Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake): Voters plugging into short-term rat
2017.03.17

PUBLICATION:	Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake)
PAGE:	A4
DATE:	2017.03.17
SECTION:	Opinion
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WORD COUNT:	417

Voters plugging into short-term rate relief

Incredibly and against all odds, Ontarians may be prepared to forgive Premier Kathleen Wynne and her Liberals when they go to the polls in June 2018.
According to a Mainstreet Research/Postmedia poll, approximately 47 per cent of Ontarians approve of Wynne's decision earlier this month to lower electricity rates by an average of 17 per cent, beginning with the June billing - even as that decision would create additional long-term debt of an estimated $26 billion.
Indeed, the same poll found 41 per cent of Ontarians believe the Liberals' electricity plan is really a ploy to put the controversial issue behind them as Wynne and her party gear up for the next election campaign.
But guess what? They're also willing to accept it for what it is and enjoy lower electricity bills. It's not only the Liberals who are cynical here; it is also those who support them while acknowledging and even applauding their opportunism.
What's interesting is even as Wynne's personal approval rating drags, her party continues to enjoy more support than the New Democrats, for whom only 17 per cent of Ontarians would vote if a general election was held today. The Liberals stand at 22 per cent, while the Progressive Conservatives are at 32 per cent.
But the number of undecided Ontarians sits at 25 per cent, and they will probably be the ones to elect the next government. Their decision will not be based on electricity rates alone but on a wide variety of issues, including the popularity of party leaders.
But by slightly moving the issue of electricity rates off the table, the Liberals have potentially removed an enormous obstacle to re-election. And with their plan set to begin in June, they'll have 12 months to remind Ontarians they were able to cut electricity rates.
The Mainstreet Research/Postmedia poll illustrates a compelling truth: many voters are searching for short-term and immediate solutions while disregarding long-term consequences. They are willing to be bought.
The NDP's Andrea Horwath has also put forward a plan to deal with Ontario's electricity challenges but the New Democrats have received little public traction, and what they have received pales to the Liberals' ability as the sitting government to simply cut immediate electricity bills while pushing the actual cost down the road.
Many voters aren't worried about "down the road" - they want relief, and are apparently willing to reward the party that provides that relief, even while understanding their relief will leave a substantial debt for future generations.

Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake) Vanthof wants answers regarding h
Front; 2017.03.17

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BYLINE:	Brad Sherratt
SOURCE:	Northern News
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DATELINE:	KIRKLAND LAKE
WORD COUNT:	485

Vanthof wants answers regarding hydro prices

Timiskaming-Cochrane MPP spoke in the legislature about the impact of high hydro rates on small businesses in Northern Ontario.

He gave the example of Leis Wood Products, located in the Cobalt area.

"Leis Wood Products takes shavings from our local planning mill, puts them in bags, and the bags are distributed throughout Ontario to horse farms and other people. It's a family business. Bruce helped out his kids, Andrea and Jason. It's a thriving little business, but it has the problems that other businesses in the province and in the riding share. I'd like to explain one of them. They need some answers." He went on to say.

Meantime NDP Leader Andrea Horwath is calling on Premier Kathleen Wynne to table her promised hydro bill on Monday.

"Premier Wynne, has issued a news release and delivered talking points - now it's time to deliver a plan," said Horwath. "Ontario families, businesses and municipalities have a right to know what will happen to their bills and who will pay the price for $40 billion going to pay interest rather than investing in hospitals, schools, transit and roads."

Horwath said the media appearances and talking points have raised more questions than answers. There's confusion throughout the province on whether Wynne's borrowing deal will help all Ontario businesses, NDP Leader Andrea Horwath whether there will be any relief on time-of-use premiums or if hospitals, schools and municipal facilities like community rinks will qualify for relief.

Plus, noted Horwath, there have been no details around repayment of interest costs that could amount to as much as $40 billion.

"If Wynne is planning to sign Ontarians on to a $40-billion borrowing deal, she owes us all one heck of an explanation. That's why I'm calling on her to table a bill Monday - so it can be properly debated by the legislature, by the public, and by experts."

Horwath is concerned that the Liberals plan on tabling their bill close to the end of the legislative session, undercutting scrutiny and debate. "Kathleen Wynne might think such a strategy will be good for her and the Liberal party but it is yet another affront to the people of Ontario".

Unlike the Wynne government, Horwath has already publicly released her plan to lower hydro rates by up to 30 per cent. The extensive NDP plan includes immediate bill-cutting measures like scrapping time-of-use premiums and unfair higher delivery charges; and it repairs the hydro system for the long-term by reversing the selloff of Hydro One.

Horwath's plan will bring an additional $7 billion in dividends to the province - money that can be used in schools and hospitals - while Wynne's borrowing deal is expected to cost Ontarians as much as $40 billion more in interest payments.

While the Wynne plan appears to benefit bankers most, the Conservatives haven't provided any sort of a plan at all to deal with sky-high hydro bills.

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SECTION: News
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BYLINE: Cheryl Browne
SOURCE: Postmedia Network
KEYWORDS: tucked,behind,coolers,stuffed,exotic,cheeses
ILLUSTRATION: Mark Wanzel, Photo / With more than 150 kinds of cheese keeping cool in four large coolers, a reduction in hydro costs would help lower their operating costs, sayJ'adore Fine Cheese & Submitted / Chocolate Shop co-owners Jessi Fournier and Bekki Martin. Premier Kathleen Wynne visited the shop in downtown Barrie while talking to business owners Tuesday about about her recently announced Fair Hydro Plan.; / Bekki Martin and Jessi Fournier, owners of J'Adore Fine Cheese & / Chocolate Shop on Dunlop Street East with Barrie MPP Ann Hoggarth and Premier Kathleen Wynne discussing electricity reductions on Tuesday.;
WORD COUNT: 829

Wynne and cheese at Barrie shop

Tucked in behind the coolers stuffed with 150 exotic cheeses is the $800 hydro bill to keep those freezers and the chocolate tempering machine running.

When Premier Kathleen Wynne dropped in to the J'Adore Fine Cheese & Chocolate shop on Dunlop Street East, Tuesday morning, the fresh scent of chocolate, as well as sheep and goat cheeses, assailed her senses.

"This is the kind of business that builds community. The cheese and chocolate are amazing, j'adore," Wynne said, standing in the SpeakCheasy or basement tasting rooms of the shop.

Addressing cheese and chocolate shop owners, Bekki Martin and Jessi Fournier, Wynne turned her attention to the reason for her visit.

"You told me your hydro bill is your second highest bill after your rent, and then you said, every bill is a challenge for an entrepreneur when they come in," Wynne said.

"What we've heard over the last number of months and years is that there are challenges that are being faced by businesses like yours, by farms, by residents, that are seeing their hydro bills go up at a rate or a pace that's too fast for you to keep up with and too high," she added.

After speaking with Martin and Fournier about the intricacies of monitoring air conditioning for the chocolate, as well as heat in a room with four cheese coolers, she said she could appreciate the specific electrical requirements of the chocolate and cheese shop.

"So what we hope is that the 25% reduction in your electricity bill will help, and it will allow you a bit more flexibility so that your business can grow," Wynne said.

Wynne spoke about the $50 billion investment the government has made to ensure Ontario has a clean and reliable electricity grid, and how those fees have left many small businesses and residents facing expensive bills.

"And what we determined was that we need to spread those costs over a longer period of time. Instead of a 20-year mortgage for example, we're looking at 30-years and asking that the generation that comes next - that will use the assets we've invested in - to also take part in paying for those," she said.

Additional reductions in energy charges will be made for Innisfil customers using Innpower, whose distribution rates are "disproportionally high" she said, as well as expanding the electricity-bill support for low-income consumers.

Martin and Fournier moved into their new location at 123 Dunlop St. West last September after running

their shop for more than a year in a store-front three doors down.
Fournier said they had installed a high-efficiency air-conditioner and use LED lights wherever possible.
But expanding the store to include the SpeakCheasy wine and cheese tasting rooms in the basement and adding a patio in the rear of the building (facing the lake) were expensive expansions.
"Hydro costs are scary," said Martin and Fournier added, "As a small business owner, you feel every bill. When you have a slow month, you still have to keep those fridges running."
A little closer to the Five-Points, Don Kellett of Donaleigh's Irish Public House said he took advantage of a retrofit through PowerStream to offset his electricity bills.
"We were the first business to sign up for the energy refit program," Kellet said. "PowerStream came in and changed all our lightbulbs to energy efficient ones, as well as swapped out all the motors on all our compressors in fridges and freezes with newer, more efficient motors."
Kellet said he can't give a dollar figure of how much money the bar saved, but said there has been a "noticeable difference."
Joining Wynne and Barrie MPP Ann Hoggarth at J'Adore was the new president and CEO of the newly-formed Alectra electricity company, Brian Bentz.
He spoke about the merger of Barrie Hydro that brought about PowerStream and with it, annual savings of $100/year for consumers in 2013.
The latest amalgamation of municipal hydro utilities including Barrie, parts of Simcoe County, York Region, Hamilton, Mississauga, St. Catharines and Brampton, is the second largest municipally-owned consortium in North America, he said.
"Our new company is really all about value for customers," Bentz said. "The goal is be customer focused. We're in a changing world of energy. We want to provide new, innovative, faster, better, more reliable electricity solutions for customers and we are committed to doing that."
The 25% reduction to energy costs won't just be felt by small business owners and residents.
Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre (RVH) spends approximately $3.4 million on electricity each year to run its HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning), diagnostic equipment, cancer treatment accelerators and lighting, etc.
With the 25% reduction, RVH would save more than threequarters of a million dollars.
"We had anticipated a 4% to 6 % increase in those costs, but with a 25% hydro rate cut, we could realize a savings of $850,000 over the year," said Rob Purdy, RVH's operations director of facilities support services. cbrowne@postmedia.com
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London Free Press Rewiring Power Agency Key To Lower Hydro Cos

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BYLINE:	Brian Platt
SOURCE:	London Free Press
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WORD COUNT:	598

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Kingston Whig-Standard Rewiring power agency key to lower hydro c

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BYLINE:	Brian Platt
SOURCE:	Kingston Whig-Standard
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Tillsonburg News: Voters plugging into short-term rate relief; A4; 2

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SOURCE: Tillsonburg News
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WORD COUNT: 417

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But guess what? They're also willing to accept it for what it is and enjoy lower electricity bills. It's not only the Liberals who are cynical here; it is also those who support them while acknowledging and even applauding their opportunism.
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The Mainstreet Research/Postmedia poll illustrates a compelling truth: many voters are searching for short-term and immediate solutions while disregarding long-term consequences. They are willing to be bought.
The NDP's Andrea Horwath has also put forward a plan to deal with Ontario's electricity challenges but the New Democrats have received little public traction, and what they have received pales to the Liberals' ability as the sitting government to simply cut immediate electricity bills while pushing the actual cost down the road.
Many voters aren't worried about "down the road" - they want relief, and are apparently willing to reward the party that provides that relief, even while understanding their relief will leave a substantial debt for future generations.