

QP Briefing: May 17, 2018

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Q P B R I E F I N G

May 17, 2018

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Articles

1). Horwath rolls out transit plan as she slams the Conservatives

By: David Hains

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath outlined her priorities for transit in an announcement held at downtown Toronto's Bathurst Station.

Flanked by NDP candidate and co-founder of transit advocacy group TTCRiders, Jessica Bell, as well as prominent NDP-affiliated city councillors Mike Layton and Joe Cressy, Horwath said Toronto's Relief Line would be her top transit priority as premier.

David Hains @DavidHains

At NDP transit announcement by Bathurst Station in Toronto. She's flanked by candidate Jessica Bell, city councillors Mike Layton and Joe Cressy.

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"We are committed to funding the Downtown Relief Line," she said just outside of a subway

station. "If I become premier on June 7th my priority will be to get that Downtown Relief Line running, and that means prioritizing the planning of that Relief Line and getting some shovels in the ground."

Horwath's departure from the Liberals on the Relief Line is that she will build it "as soon as possible." Asked by QP Briefing what concrete steps she'll take to fulfill that promise, she argued it's about political priorities. "We will make sure come June 7th, should we have the honour of serving as government, that we are clear with Metrolinx that this is an absolute top priority and it needs to be resourced in that way." She added that "it needs to be fast-tracked."

The Relief Line has been known by various names and routes for about 108 years, when Toronto city council first considered a proposal that saw the line routed from Broadview down to the water, and then west to Spadina. Other plans came up in 1944, 1968, and then in 1985, when it was part of the Network 2011 proposal. But the line, considered by many transit experts to be crucial for the region, has never been realized. Meanwhile, the Yonge subway line is frequently over capacity during the morning and evening rush hours, with many commuters waiting three or four trains to squeeze onto a car. This crowding on the Yonge Line could become worse with the scheduled opening of the Eglinton Crosstown in September 2021, the east-west LRT line that will feed additional passengers onto the Yonge line.

A February poll of people in vote-rich Toronto showed the \$6.8-billion Relief Line was the number one transit priority, being chosen by 41 per cent of respondents. The second-place project was the one-stop Scarborough subway, with 16 per cent naming it their top priority. SmartTrack ranked third, at 10 per cent.

All three parties support the Relief Line in some form, and the Liberals included provincial funding for it in the 2018 budget. But Horwath took issue with the governing party, saying that they haven't made sufficient progress in 15 years. "We know that the problems that exist now continue to exist after 15 years of Liberal government," she said, referring to transit, a perennial political headache in the province's largest city.

The PCs have also included the Relief Line in their transit plan. However, on city council, Doug Ford and his brother first prioritized a subway extension on Sheppard over the Relief Line, and when that failed they made a push for a three-stop subway extension of the Bloor-Danforth line into Scarborough. Due to cost escalations, the subway extension has been reduced to one stop, although Ford has said he would like to revert to the three-stop plan. Doing so would cost about \$1.3 billion more, according to the most recent City of Toronto estimates. Ford voted, in 2012, against authorizing the TTC to enter discussions with Metrolinx to study the feasibility of the Relief Line (vote 5d).

Horwath painted the PCs as untrustworthy on transit, referring to the Mike Harris PC government downloading transit operating costs onto municipalities, a move she would reverse with a cost-sharing deal. She also mentioned the Tory move to bury the Eglinton subway tunnel, a longstanding local bugaboo. But Horwath focused her criticism on Ford for his transit record as a city councillor, singling out his moves to increase transit fares while reducing service. "I think [voters] need to look at Mr. Ford's record," she said. "When Mr. Ford was a city councillor he voted in favour of jacking up transit fares and reducing bus services," she said. While Ford did vote for a fare freeze in his first year as a councillor, subsequent years saw increases above inflation, even though service was reduced on 62 bus and streetcar routes. Ford's brother Rob, who was mayor, refused to call the reduction in bus frequency or increased crowding standards "cuts," instead calling them "efficiencies."

The NDP leader also fielded questions on the mounting controversies that surround the PC campaign, calling the incidents "shocking." When asked whether the OPP should investigate former PC candidate Simmer Sandhu, who has been accused of breaching the data of 60,000 people at his former workplace, the 407ETR, she said "absolutely."

On the news about the fundraiser Ford attended in contravention of Election Finances Act rules, she likened it to the "cash-for-access" fundraising that the PCs strongly criticized the Liberals for, and said the Tory leader was flouting the rules.

Horwath also reiterated her opposition to road tolls, arguing that they aren't a progressive tax and disproportionately hurt the pocketbooks of "working-class folks."

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2). Interview: Why Horwath is feeling optimistic, and says she

By: David Hains

PARIS, Ont. — The NDP campaign is decidedly upbeat as the party continues to rise in the polls, and is within a few percentage points of the leading Tories. It's the best position for the party during a campaign since they formed government in 1990, and Queen's Park Briefing caught up with NDP Leader Andrea Horwath at the back of the bus (named the Proletariat Chariot, if you must know), to get her assessment on the campaign and whether the party is ready to govern on day one.

QP Briefing: We're a bit more than one week into the campaign. How are you feeling?

Horwath: I feel great. I feel great. I'm excited about the sense that people are hearing our platform, they're feeling some hope and we have folks that are showing up at our bus and asking for photos and bringing me flowers. It's kind of cool. It's nice. It shows that even though we're three weeks from election day that there are people that are engaged in this campaign. I understand that it's an important decision they have to make.

Monday there was a poll that came out from Ipsos, and it had you at 35 per cent, five percentage points back of the PCs. I looked back through some old polls, and it's the highest the NDP has polled during any campaign since 1990. What's different this time?

Well it's a different time. It's certainly not 1990. It's 2018. And people have just had 15 years of Liberal government, eight years of Conservative government before that. And life just continues to get harder.

I mean, the young woman who came to speak to me at the side the bus just before we took off from our last stop. She's a mom with three kids – her eldest daughter is in Grade 10. She went to university, she got a degree, she couldn't get a good job, so she struggled. She finally got a good job, so she works in her field. A decent job. But she can't pay all the bills. Her rent is high. Her utility costs are high. Her kids – there are three kids, so that's expensive – so she has to go to the food bank to be able to feed her kids on a monthly basis. She goes to the food bank, she says, once a week to feed her kids. That shouldn't be happening. People should be able to build a good life here.

So I think as I meet these everyday Ontarians they're telling me that what they see in our platform, including the young women that we talked to at the child care centre this morning, they see in our platform hope for the future. That's what's different. People are saying they want hope. They don't want just negativity. And they don't want just attacks. What they want is somebody to say it doesn't have to be this way. We can make life better for families.

As you've been climbing in the polls over the past couple of weeks both the Liberals and the PCs have started to go after you more. You saw the other day when the Liberals had their criticism about the budgeting in the platform and so on. Doug Ford has taken to calling the party 'filled with radicals.' What would you say to voters who might be concerned by some of what the Grits and Tories are raising?

First of all, I think people become very cynical about politics when it's all about throwing mud at the other party as opposed to offering something up that people can get behind. And we're going to try to stay positive in our campaign, we're going to focus on making sure that people know it doesn't have to be this way and they can actually have change for the better in the province that helps families to build a better life.

And if Ms. Wynne wants to send out untruthful press releases about our platform as a way of trying to throw mud at us, or if Mr. Ford wants to raise ancient history and try to scare people, what I have to say is you don't have to vote for a party that is trying to scare you. You don't have to vote out of fear and out of a sense of dread. You can actually vote for a party that is prepared to bring hope back to you and your family.

Do you have poll numbers and research that support that kind of hopeful pitch? Because one sense that I get on the campaign trail is that there is a big swath of the electorate that's pretty

angry. That angry campaign pitch, or one that plays on fear, might be pretty effective.

Well again, my mom used to say that you don't want to cut off your nose to spite your face. In other words, you've gotta be careful about what it is that you're hoping for. In other words there's no doubt that people are frustrated with the Liberals, they're disappointed with the Liberals, and depending on where you are in Ontario, I've heard people use very strong language – angry, mad – people, depending on where you are in Ontario, have these really negative feelings about the last 15 years with Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals. And I guess that is what's framing this election campaign.

People have a serious decision to make. If they've decided, which they're telling me, that they're not interested in having Kathleen Wynne or the Liberals at the helm anymore, then the decision becomes: "Do you want a Ford government that's going to cut public services, that's going to privatize public services?" That's going to, on the one hand, pretend that he's giving you something, while on the other hand taking away everything that you rely on. You know, a decent health care system, education for your kids, child care.

All the problems that people are grappling with are not going to be fixed by a meagre \$18-a-year tax cut from Mr. Ford. So he'll give with one hand and take away in volumes with the other hand. That's what people need to think about. Is that what you want? Or do you want a government to say the richest people and the richest corporations are going to be asked to give a little bit more so that the rest of Ontarians, families in this province, can begin to have hope for the future, a good life, affordable child care, dental care and a pharmacare plan that meets people's needs, Hydro One that's working in people's interests again, with rates down – not just for us but for the next generation as well. You know, these are big decisions people have to make.

You've been leader for nine years now. Far longer than Wynne and Ford, certainly. But a lot of voters might be considering you for the first time. One question that might come up if the polls stay like this for the next few weeks is whether the New Democrats are ready to govern on day one. What steps have you taken to make sure that happens?

Well I'm absolutely confident that if people put their trust in myself and my party we will be able to deliver a government that meets the obligations that we set out in the campaign. In other words, we are not going to do what Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals have done, and say one thing before the election and turn into someone totally different after the election. Things we think families need and want, what families have told us they need and want, are the things we talk about, as I say, before an election, during an election, and then implement after an election.

Whether it's having experienced folks around, which I do, in terms of, for example, my campaign director [and] chief of staff, or working with the public service, which we know that they have a process that they have to go through as well to get ready for a new government to come in. New governments are elected all the time around the country and nationally as well. So there's always a transition to new government, particularly when the parties who are governing change. And it won't be any different for us than it was perhaps for any other party as they took the reins in the province. There's work that we need to do to make sure our commitments to the people of Ontario are fulfilled.

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3). Ford struggles to juggle trio of campaign controversies

By: Christopher Reynolds

Progressive Conservative Leader Doug Ford had his hands full Thursday trying to keep three flaming campaign balls from flying out of his control.

Following a Brampton-area candidate's resignation this week, Ford avoided a direct answer on whether he would revoke the nominations of any other PC candidates who may have accessed customer information gleaned through an "internal theft" from a highway tolling company.

Simmer Sandhu, former Tory candidate for Brampton East, stepped down just before a National Post story broke Wednesday on customer information taken from 407 ETR, which

Sandhu used to work for.

"I found out about this yesterday," Ford said "I immediately made the decision; we accepted his resignation."

Asked whether other would-be MPPs had used the customer info to political advantage, Ford said: "You can ask the candidates."

Ford's second flaming ball is a Toronto Star report that Ford attended an April 29 fundraiser in breach of provincial campaign finance rules.

"I go to hundreds of events, and I was misinformed, very clearly misinformed," Ford said Thursday at a campaign stop in Cambridge.

He stressed that he "acted immediately— like every other time, we act immediately." Tory organizer Srini Suppiramaniam was fired shortly after the campaign was contacted by the Star.

Ford also cited an ongoing internal investigation and pledged to return the cash to donors present at the \$250-a-plate event.

"I take Elections Ontario very seriously — the rules," he added. "We'll put a new protocol, better protocol, in place to make sure this doesn't happen again."

Regarding the third flaming ball — booting former Tory MPP Michael Harris from caucus over a flirtatious 2012 text message conversation with a former party intern that had previously been deemed a non-issue — Ford said reporters "would have to ask" Harris.

Ford added that the party nominations committee made a recommendation, and he followed it. PC MPP Toby Barrett has contradicted that version of events, saying the decision to turf Harris came from Ford himself and did not stem from a committee recommendation.

The Waterloo Region Record revealed the texts Thursday, which Harris's wife — who was not married to Harris at the time of the text message conversation — said she considered overblown.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath weighed in Thursday: "I guess all of these controversies that we're hearing out of that campaign are pieces of information that I hope people take into consideration as they determine what kind of change they want."

PC candidate for London West Andrew Lawton comprises a still-smouldering fourth issue after the Liberals this week floated more bigotted remarks from the former radio host. Ford said Lawton has apologized and noted Lawton's defence that made his comments during a time of poor mental health. The latest Lawton comments to surface, however, were from 2015 and 2016, after the time period cited by Lawton.

Ford fielded the questions during a campaign stop at a 46-year-old pizza shop in suburban Cambridge, where he announced a Tory government would lower the small business tax rate to 3.2 per cent from 3.5 per cent.

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4). Funding portal: Who got funded – Week of May 14, 2018

Christopher Reynolds

Overall Disbursements: Funding for the week of May 7, 2018 under Canadian federal and provincial grants and business incentive programs reached \$598.3M, down from \$1.19B during the previous week.

Top Sector: The municipal and nonprofit sector ranked first this week, attracting \$170.4M, 28% of total incentives.

Top Region: Quebec is the top province this week, securing \$218.5M and accounting for 37% of total national disbursements.

Top Recipients in Ontario:

- SOTI Inc. receives \$31.9M through the Jobs and Prosperity Fund to help accelerate the company's global growth and build a state-of-the-art facility in Mississauga.
- The Elliot Lake Recreation Facility project receives \$13.7M from the Government of Ontario.
- Bonduelle Canada Inc. receives \$8.5M through the Jobs and Prosperity Fund (Food and Beverage) to support upgrades to three vegetable processing facilities.

Sectors:

<https://fundingportal.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/chart.png>

Provinces:

<https://fundingportal.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/chart-1.png>

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5). Choose your own adventure: Kathleen Wynne plays the 'what if' interview

By: Jessica Smith Cross

If someone were to write a book about this period in Ontario politics, perhaps they'd take a speculative leap and write a few alternate endings, showing us how things could have gone differently if only a few small things were changed.

Liberal Leader Kathleen Wynne might read it, curious to know what paths in this choose your own adventure-style novel about her life would have led her to a better place than where she is today: standing in third place in the polls on wrong side of a change election.

In a one-on-one interview with QP Briefing this week, Wynne engaged in a little speculation about what might have been.

What if... CTV had never published its story on the sexual misconduct allegations against then-PC leader Patrick Brown? It's quite possible he'd still be the Tory chief today — the story seemed to break open the vault of party unity, and damaging allegations about Brown's finances and electoral misconduct began to pour out.

So what would things be like for her, if she was running against Brown?

According to Wynne, some her party's plans would have been the same. "There were cuts inherent in the People's Guarantee, in his so-called People's Guarantee platform. And we were going to have to talk about what those cuts would mean."

Indeed, on the campaign trail today, she's talking about the cuts she believes PC Leader Doug Ford will have to impose — they're just bigger. At a media event in Ottawa Thursday, she said her party had warned against the \$6- to \$10-billion in cuts they believed Brown's platform would have required, but now the impact of the tax cuts alone proposed by Ford is an estimated \$20 billion over four years.

"That will mean that there will be devastation in education and health care," she'd said. "You can't take \$20 billion. That's practically the whole Ministry of Education budget. That's practically the money that funds all of our 5,000 publicly funded schools."

"Eighty-two or -three per cent of what government does is to pay people to deliver services, whether it is in hospitals or long-term care homes or in schools, that's what government does,"

she continued. "So you take \$20 billion worth of people out of communities and out of schools and hospitals, and you really undermine the very institutions that make this province what it is, and really cause havoc in people's lives."

Another what-if: Suppose Vic Fedeli, the PCs' bookish and avuncular former interim leader, had been allowed to helm the party through this election — a likely possibility, if the Tories' internal political turmoil had played out in a slightly different way.

How would things be for her on the campaign trail today?

"I think the level of the discussion would be different," Wynne said. "You know, Doug Ford is very much someone who campaigns in sound bites in slogans and really very, very little depth in terms of policies and real implications of the things that he says. And I think that he's kind of unique in that way — I mean he's unique in terms of Ontario politics, he's very much like, and we've talked about this, he's very much like Trump. It's like Trump's style. So I think that he is different from other people in his party in that way."

But perhaps Tory politics are only a branch path.

Many of the biggest criticisms of the premier are on the hydro file. The Liberal government's choices on the Green Energy Act and the gas plant cancellations occurred under the leader before her but motivate angry windmill opponents on call-in radio shows to this day. But the government's arguably slow response to rising electricity prices and the controversial financial scheme it has implemented to deal with them are squarely under her purview.

But if only as a thought experiment: Where would Wynne be if Ontarians never had a reason to get angry over the hydro file?

"Where would we be if government after government before ours had done the investments that needed to be done in electricity?" she asked in response. "We would be way better off. Because those investments would have been done over time, and the system wouldn't have been allowed to degrade. So that's, that's the 'what if' that I go to."

If that had happened, Wynne said her government wouldn't have needed to "make the investments" that it did to shore up the system, spending \$50 billion to fix the grid.

Perhaps then voters wouldn't have quite so high hydro bills to blame on the windmills — and she does admit there were mistakes in her predecessor's days when the province first plunged ahead into green energy.

But not necessarily any regrets.

"Under my predecessor, we jump-started an industry, and that's a really good thing," she said. "But the cost associated with the rebuild of the system was really hard for people to bear."

Those costs led Wynne to seek a solution to deal with them, the Fair Hydro Plan, which has faced sharp criticism from the auditor general and the press for its high costs and the apparent political motivation behind it.

In a nutshell: The plan includes a massive borrowing scheme that artificially lowered prices in advance of this election, and will contribute to increasing their costs in a few years when they're allowed to rise again, as ratepayers will be made to pay back the cost of the debt, with interest, on their bills. The unusual way the borrowing is structured increases the interest's costs but has allowed the government to keep the debt off its books and claim to have balanced its last budget.

Wynne said she believes things will be better years down the road, as the government of the day "takes costs out of the system" and believes that investments in better energy storage technology will allow the province to take advantage of the solar panels and windmills, so rates will go down and the repayment of today's debt won't be such a burden.

"To the political motivation: I mean, it was literally about people who were saying to us, and whose bills had gotten so high that they could not afford them, so we can call it political motivation or we can call it a solution to a problem," she said.

What-ifs aside, Wynne says she has found herself here before — in an election it doesn't look like she's going to win.

When she was elected in 2007, she'd fought what looked like an unwinnable campaign against then-PC leader John Tory, and back then, she'd had another possible alternate ending in mind.

"If I go back to 2007, when John Tory ran against me, Jane and I had a plan B, because really, nobody expected me to beat the leader, that just didn't happen," she said. "So, I would say, it feels a lot like it has felt before.

"I look at every election I have been in, and I always am prepared to lose. And I did lose my first election, to be school trustee — not that that was as big as running to be premier for the second time, but it was pretty devastating," she said. "You know, losing is not fun. You always have to be prepared to lose, and I always am."

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