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Your morning briefing

22.03.2017 [Sabrina Nanji O](#)

Headlines

No matter what does (or doesn't) come down for Ontario in the federal government's budget, which will be tabled in the House of Commons around 4 p.m. this afternoon, provincial Finance Minister **Charles Sousa** assures his own budget will "absolutely" achieve fiscal balance "this year, next year, and the year after that," [The Toronto Starreports](#). The Star has even ventured on a drop date: April 6 or 13. Mark your calendars.

In the meantime, sate yourself with Ottawa's budget. Of note will be a [focus on women and gender equality](#), and for the first time, [Chatelaine magazine will be in the federal budget lock-up](#). Stay tuned, as the premier might say.

Today is significant in another way for Ontario: It's the first cap-and-trade auction day. The [Canadian Pressreports other provinces will be keeping an eye glued](#) to the outcomes for Ontario as it embarks on an ambitious plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Though Environment and Climate Change Minister **Glen Murray** isn't saying much until the results of the auction are made public on April 3, PC Leader **Patrick Brown** has changed his tune somewhat, and is talking about a "revenue negative" carbon tax. [QP Briefing has the story](#).

Here are QPB's other stories from yesterday:

- [Heard: Liberal MPP wants apology after PC MPP suggests female engineer 'do something about this coffee'](#)
- [Patrick Brown: Federal Conservative probe into alleged vote-buying 'has nothing to do with' Ontario PCs](#)
- [Liberals hit voters with double-barrelled advertising blitz for hydro plan](#)
- [Julia Munro, Ontario's longest-serving female MPP, to retire](#)

The New Democrats released some Freedom of Information requests that they say suggest the Liberals' hydro relief package will do little to help hospitals, some of which have seen their bills rise by up to 105 per cent, [The Toronto Sun reports](#).

The judge presiding over the Metrolinx-Bombardier case is wondering why the provincial transit agency is in such a hurry to know whether it can proceed with cancelling a \$770-million deal with the manufacturer to build light rail vehicles, [The Globe and Mail reports](#).

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario has found a Barrie dermatologist guilty of several allegations, including sexually abusing a patient by touching her breasts under her bra

without medical justification, [The Toronto Star reports](#). The focus of the disciplinary committee had to do with allegations involving contact with the doctor's genital-area, and, according to the Star, the doctor's defense was that "he could not possibly have rubbed his penis against his female patients because it was covered by his large belly."

In an attempt to steer clear of a projected \$1.2-million price tag for school bus costs, [students at 28 schools in Durham will have to deal with a time change](#) for the starting bell this fall.

In the opinion pages:

- Cap and trade? [More like cash grab](#), writes **Lorrie Goldstein**.
- **David Reevely** [public deserves more than "police technicalities"](#) says the when it comes to the death of **Abdirahman Abdi**.

Bills

Third reading of Bill 92, An Act to amend the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014 and make related amendments to other statutes.

Committees

9 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts will meet to consider Child and Youth Mental Health (Section 3.01, 2016 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario). Room 151.

Events

8:20 a.m.

Environment and Climate Change Minister Glen Murray to deliver a keynote address at the Economic Club of Canada. 1 King St.W., Toronto.

9:15 a.m.

Liberal MPP **Han Dong** to address re-occurring delays in elevator repair times in residential and commercial buildings in Ontario. Queen's Park media studio.

12 p.m.

Premier **Kathleen Wynne** to attend a cabinet meeting.

4:45 p.m.

Finance Minister Charles Sousa will be available to comment on the federal budget. Queen's Park media studio.

Liberals hit voters with double-barrelled advertising blitz for hydro plan

21.03.2017 Geoff Zochodne 0

The Liberals have turned an advertising campaign for their new hydro plan into a two-pronged assault on voters, targeting them with promotions paid for with both government and party funds.

Government ads had already been making the rounds on the radio and social media, fuelling heated debate at Queen's Park, but leaflets from the Ontario Liberal Party – offering the same sort of message – were being distributed to Toronto commuters Tuesday morning, touting the Grits' plan to reduce hydro bills by an average total of 25 per cent.

A *QP Briefing* reporter was actually handed a Liberal party flyer at a subway station. On one side, there is a picture of power lines, the Liberal logo, and text declaring “25% off your monthly hydro bill.” On the other, readers were informed that “The Ontario Liberals recognize that electricity rates are rising too quickly” and given details about the 25-per-cent plan and the proposal to hold hydro hikes to the rate of inflation for four years. The flyer directs readers to “learn more” by directing them to a Liberal-run website.

An Ontario Liberal Party spokeswoman said the information was being distributed by volunteers, “outside of working hours, on a voluntary basis and using solely party resources.”

“The material that was handed out was paid for by the Ontario Liberal Party,” **Patricia Favre** said in an email. “In addition to today's campaign, we have set up a dedicated website. The campaign is being funded by the Ontario Liberal Party.”

The Liberal party ads could also be considered taxpayer-funded promotion, as the Liberals, Green Party, NDP and Progressive Conservatives began receiving a per-vote subsidy this year, following changes made to the province's political fundraising rules. Parties are still receiving donations, [albeit at a reduced rate since corporate and union donations were banned](#).

“Political parties, including the NDP and PCs, often spend time promoting policies and values they believe in,” said Favre. “Getting this information to Ontarians is an important part of our democratic process.”

But the opposition parties were critical of the two-front offensive by the Liberal government and party, calling the Grits' tactics a sign of desperation.

“It absolutely makes it more egregious,” said PC Leader **Patrick Brown**. “They’re spending a few dollars of Liberal Party pamphlets and they’re spending millions possibly when it comes to the government buy.”

“I think right now they’re desperate, that’s why they’re abusing taxpayers,” Brown said.

Energy Minister **Glenn Thibeault** [said Monday](#) that the government had spent under a million dollars on its ad campaign thus far, but intended to promote the Grits' "Fair Hydro Plan" in the same way it had with other, bigger spending efforts.

Brown also pointed out that the province's auditor general [had rapped the government's knuckles](#) last year for running ads about the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan at the same time as the Ontario Liberal Party was running television spots starring Premier **Kathleen Wynne** talking about pensions. Auditor General **Bonnie Lysyk** reported that she was previously able to address this "overlap" by forcing the government to pull its ad, but the Liberals amended her powers in 2015, preventing her from doing so. The auditor general has said the government's new ads on the "Fair Hydro Plan" would not have been approved under the old rules.

But Deputy Premier **Deb Matthews**, who is also co-chairing the Liberals' 2018 re-election campaign, said Ontario still has "the most restrictive rules around partisan government advertising." Matthews also defended the new ads as necessary information, and said everybody does it.

"This is political advertising," she told reporters. "Other parties do this kind of event, the blitz, letting people know what we're doing. This is not government advertising at all. This is Liberal Party advertising."

"We know we've got a campaign in a little over a year," Matthews added. "So of course we're doing that kind of work that you would do in a lead-up to an election."

The Progressive Conservatives tried to halt the Liberal campaign Tuesday by asking the legislature for unanimous consent to suspend taxpayer funded ads until Speaker **Dave Levac** rules on whether they are in contempt of the legislature. The attempt was quickly shot down by boisterous Liberals, leading to a rowdy question period that saw PC energy critic **Todd Smith** kicked out of the chamber because of heckling.

Levac warned that Smith was "very close to being expelled," which could have been referring to a suspension, punishment that could have kept Smith out of the chamber for the duration of this legislative session, which could last until the next election. Levac has yet to rule if the government hydro ads are in contempt of the legislature, something the PCs maintain is the case because they were published before legislation was tabled outlining the Liberals' hydro plan.

"Clearly, the legislation is coming forward, and the minister is making a mockery of this Legislature and its members as he runs self-congratulatory ads, paid for by taxpayers," said Brown during question period. "Will the Premier stop her re-election campaigning and using taxpayer resources to do it?"

Brown also told reporters that, if he forms government in 2018, he would reinstate the auditor general's old power to spike ads that are too self-congratulatory.

Liberal Government House Leader **Yasir Naqvi** said Brown and the Tories are just deflecting from the fact that they have no hydro plan of their own yet. "Their plan is a blank piece of paper," Naqvi said during question period.

NDP Leader **Andrea Horwath** accused the Liberals of being "desperate" and "blurring the lines" between government and party with their new leaflets. "I think it's obvious: they had a

plan to do what they could by using public money on the radio ads and now they're doing the same thing with their party ads," Horwath said. "But I don't think people distinguish the difference."