



Communications Branch
Your Strategic Partner

Media Analysis
Ontario Government Advertising
2016-17

Quantitative Summary

- 77 separate media placements between May 2016 to August 2017
- 69 articles in print (89%) + 8 TV (11%)
- 15 articles mention political donor funding (19.4%)
- 19 articles mention partisan ads (24.6%)
- Tone is largely negative overall

Qualitative Summary

From May 2016 to August 2017, there were more than 70 media clips on government advertising. The dominant theme was government's alleged use of partisan ads, and its refusal to take the Auditor General's advice.

The government is routinely criticized for not being "committed to openness and transparency, but to exercising power as it sees fit." (Lorrie Goldstein Toronto Sun, Feb 19, 2017). The Auditor is quoted repeatedly saying that she "wouldn't have approved that ad" if she still had oversight of government advertising.

In August 2016 there was widespread media coverage on government's fundraising practices, including a front-page story in the Globe and Mail ("Ontario bends on tightening donation caps, but won't ban cash-for-access fundraisers" August 23, 2016).

The primary focus since March 2017 has been the ongoing PC and NDP criticism about partisan Hydro ads.

Most stories in May, June, July and August of 2016 were about advertising for elections. In June 2016, stories were written about government's "fear-mongering" with Ontario's Climate Action Plan advertising campaign. Also in June 2016, media covered the province's promotion and demise of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

Notable Articles:

Partisan Ads

- **“Brown has some advice for Wynne” (Sault Star, August 29, 2017)**
“They're using taxpayer dollars to campaign, and the real purpose of government advertising is for a public good, and understanding this (opioids) is a crisis where we need an education campaign.”
- **“Tories, NDP criticize Liberals for increased spending on government ads” (Star.com, December 1, 2016)**
“Premier Kathleen Wynne's government is being hammered for spending an extra \$20 million on government advertising that Ontario's auditor general dubbed “misleading” at times.”
- **“Wynne Liberals spending millions more on ads: auditor” (CBC.ca, December 1, 2016)**
“The Ontario government has ramped up spending on taxpayer-funded advertising that the auditor general believes is primarily designed to make Kathleen Wynne's Liberal Party look good.”
- **“Basking in the sunshine; Grits think your tax dollars are there to serve them” (Ottawa Sun, Todd Smith guest column April 1, 2017)**
“In the last two weeks, we've seen millions of dollars of partisan government advertising, unnecessary government polling and now a Sunshine List that is 7,500 employees and \$966 million bigger than last year's.”

Donor Spending

- **“Close loopholes in reform plans” (TorStar, Editorial August 24, 2016)**
“As the Star has noted in the past, the Wynne administration made a serious mistake when it changed the province's landmark Government Advertising Act to remove the auditor's ability to block taxpayer-funded partisan pitches.”
- **“Reintroduce tough oversight on government ads: Editorial” (Star.com, Aug 14, 2016, Opinion)**
“It's not too late for the government to reverse course and bring back the independent auditor's authority over government ads. It's one flip-flop that would be applauded by opposition parties, taxpayer groups and voters.”
- **“Auditor: new ad rules would help Liberals” (Yorkregion.com, August 16, 2016)**
“Ontario's auditor general is warning that advertising rules in the Liberal government's proposed election finance reforms could give the governing party a political advantage.”

- **“Fundraiser reforms would give Wynne edge, auditor warns” (TorStar, august 12, 2016)**
 “While there are spending limits on advertising for opposition parties and lobby groups in terms of advertising six months before and during elections, there are no such restrictions on the government, Lysyk said Thursday. “There is a loophole,” she told MPPs on a Liberal-dominated legislative committee studying the reforms as they returned to Queen's Park after hearings across the province this summer.”

CPP

- **“That smell? It's the Grits; Still in power despite being well passed best-before date” (Ottawa Sun, Aug 19, 2016 Christina Blizzard)(Tone Negative)**
 “A slick Liberal campaign and millions of dollars of third-party union advertising - helped Premier Kathleen Wynne cruise to a majority government... Witness the way they re-politicized government advertising with a recent ad patting themselves on the back for bringing about changes to CPP. Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk said recently she would not have approved the ad under the previous rules, but the Liberals changed them last year. ...The auditor previously had discretion to nix ads she considered partisan.
- **“Robyn Urback: Ontario Liberals wasted millions and are now buying radio ads to congratulate themselves” (National Post, August 18, 2016)**
 “A couple of months later, with Ontario's pension plan formally in the ground and the province \$70 million in the hole, Wynne's government has again decided to tout its influence by taking to the airwaves to remind Ontarians of the good work it did on the file.”

ORPP

- **“Hard to argue ad buy wasn't partisan” (Waterloo Record, Opinion, November 24, 2016)**
 “Documents obtained by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation through a freedom of information request reveal that the Ontario government spent nearly \$800,000 on a brand-new ad buy from the budget of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP) after they had cancelled the plan.”
- **“Premier says \$600,000 for pension ads was a coincidence; Taxpayer advocates call for Liberals to reimburse cash spent during election run-up (TorStar, Feb 9, 2016, Rob Ferguson)**
 “Premier Kathleen Wynne is defending almost \$600,000 spent on Ontario Retirement Pension Plan ads during last year's federal election as a coincidence”

Climate Change

- **“Partisan warming; Global warming TV ads pit Wynne, auditor general” (HamSpec, June 13, 2016)**

“Lysyk announced this month that the ad (climate change) should be banned. And she's still fuming that the government reined in her ability to censor such advertising last year.”

- **“Liberals fear mongering on the taxpayer's dime” (Toronto Sun, guest column – Christine Van Geyn, June 5, 2016)**
“...the ad's overarching and sole message seems to be "climate change is bad, the government is good.”
- **Ontario government ad promoting climate change plan would have been banned under old rules: AG (National Post, Allison Jones, June 3, 2016)**
“Ontario's auditor general would have banned a new government ad promoting an upcoming climate change plan as partisan, had the Liberals not changed the rules last year.”

Hydro Ads

- **“Partisan hydro ads are paying off for Liberals; With an election on the horizon, Wynne needs good news” (Ham Spec, Aug 30, 2017)**
“It appears all those taxpayer-funded ads about hydro rate cuts are finally paying off for Premier Kathleen Wynne.”
- **“Rules? What rules?” (Huron Expositor, Opinion May 31, 2017)**
“The only reason they didn't violate the rules themselves is that there are no rules on content when the government sends inserts to homeowners.”
- **“PCs say hydro ads are in contempt of parliament; Andrea Horwath and Patrick Brown charge taxpayer-funded ads are only meant to boost Liberals' sagging popularity” (HamSpec, March 21, 2017)**
“Taxpayer-funded ads about planned hydro bill reductions put the Liberal government in contempt of parliament, the Opposition charged Monday. Both the Progressive Conservatives and NDP say the radio and social media ads are only meant to boost the popularity of a party sagging in the polls.”