

Daily News - May 25

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MINISTER'S NEWS

NationalPost.com: [David Reevely: Ontario Liberals' jiggery-pokery on the hydro file means savings plan will cost twice as much as it saves](#) (Top Stories – Canadian Politics)

The jiggery-pokery the Ontario Liberals are using to cut hydro bills will eventually cost us almost twice as much as it saves, the province's budget watchdog reported Wednesday. This is the "Fair Hydro Plan," the Liberals' answer to the constant drumbeat of "hydro, hydro, hydro" from the opposition, the plan that Premier Kathleen Wynne hopes will save her party from annihilation next year. It cuts electricity prices by 25 per cent for residential and small commercial customers now, and the future is the future's problem. The Liberal plan is more consequential than the desolate nothings offered by the opposition. But in this case, desolate nothingness would be better. The metaphor the government is using is that it's refinancing the mortgage on the electricity system, extending the payments on long-term energy contracts to lower prices right now. Refinancing isn't free, though, and now the financial accountability officer Stephen LeClair and his staff have put numbers on the Liberal plan: It'll save us \$24 billion on our hydro bills now but cost us \$45 billion in the end. So by the 2040s, we'll be out a total of \$21 billion. That money will go to lenders, who'll put up the money to cover the costs of the energy contracts as signed and then accept our extra payments over a decade or so. The whole thing will be managed through the government-owned Ontario Power Generation utility, which keeps it off the province's books. (Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk, in a separate appearance before a Queen's Park committee Wednesday, said this is deceptive but it's legal.) "Temporary savings are achieved for electricity ratepayers by moving costs to the province and by deferring \$18.4 billion in electricity costs for 10 years," LeClair said. "After 10 years, ratepayers will be required to repay the deferred electricity costs plus approximately \$21 billion in interest, which will result in higher electricity bills than under the status quo." **Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault** responded to LeClair's report by acknowledging it's accurate but there'll be a plan released this summer that lowers long-term expenses by reducing the amount of electricity we expect to buy. There's some evidence that Ontario won't need as much power as the currently operative plan calls for, so this is plausible, but don't expect a very radical difference.

TorontoSun.com: [Wynne's hydro plan simply irresponsible](#) (Top Stories – A8)

If we fall for Premier Kathleen Wynne's "just get me through the 2018 election Fair Hydro Plan," we'll fall for anything. Because the Liberal government scheme, analyzed in a report released Wednesday

by Ontario Financial Accountability Officer Stephen LeClair, bears a striking resemblance to snake oil. That is “a product or policy of little real worth or value that is promoted as the solution to a problem.” Snake oil is my characterization of Wynne’s plan, not LeClair’s. But the independent financial watchdog’s clear-eyed assessment of what Wynne is doing shows why Ontarians should be alarmed by this looming financial disaster. Wynne’s promoting her Fair Hydro Plan as a solution to high electricity rates for Ontario consumers. (Rates caused in large part by the green energy blunders of her government and that of her Liberal predecessor, Dalton McGuinty.)

LOCAL NEWS

BayToday.ca: [Hydro plan will give temporary relief for long term pain](#) (Top Stories – Main Page)

The Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario, Stephen LeClair, says a government plan to reduce hydro costs will cost the Province \$45 billion over 29 years while providing overall savings to electricity ratepayers of only \$24 billion. This results in a net cost to Ontarian hydro users of \$21 billion. Titled "An Assessment of the Fiscal Impact of the Province's Fair Hydro Plan", the report, released today, reviews how Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan (FHP) will impact electricity ratepayers and Provincial finances. Under the FHP, average electricity bills are projected to decrease by 25% this year, followed by four years of growth at the rate of inflation. Starting in 2021, electricity bills are projected to increase by 6.8% annually until the end of 2027. After 2027, electricity bills are projected to be an average of 4% higher under the FHP than the status quo. "Temporary savings are achieved for electricity ratepayers by moving costs to the Province and by deferring \$18.4 billion in electricity costs for 10 years," says LeClair. "After 10 years, ratepayers will be required to repay the deferred electricity costs plus approximately \$21.0 billion in interest which will result in higher electricity bills than under the status quo." Ontario PC Leader Patrick Brown said in a news release, "Kathleen Wynne's unfair hydro plan is a sham. The government's own numbers confirm it and independent experts confirm it. Rates are going up – period," he said. "It's time for Kathleen Wynne to stop covering up the truth – under her plan, our hydro bills will go up. Everything will cost more. This will have a devastating impact on household budgets and the economy." "This is shocking. The Liberals have known all along that hydro bills will increase next year, then by a whopping 12% year over year starting in 2028," said PC Energy Critic Todd Smith. "To make matters worse, the Liberals are bringing back the debt retirement charge which will cost Ontarians four times more."

SooToday.com: [What if they liquidate Essar Steel Algoma?](#) (Top Stories – Main Page)

The spectre of Essar Steel Algoma being plasma-torched and sold off in pieces was raised yesterday by provincial byelection candidate Joe Krmpotich. "If it is liquidated, and it does fail, it's gonna impact on 50,000 people in this municipality. Between workers and between surrounding business and between the pensioners," Krmpotich, the NDP candidate, said during a candidates' debate organized by the Sault Ste. Marie Real Estate Board. "That's how critical it is, for real estate jobs, for people's property and everyone else that lives in the surrounding areas, including Sault Ste. Marie," Krmpotich said of the local steelmaker, which is still struggling to emerge from the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act proceedings that have protected it from creditors since November 2015. "What we have to do, is we have to make sure those jobs are there for our young people, so they're able to come and purchase new homes the same way we had that opportunity when we were their age. That's what we gotta do. The Number 1 thing is to make sure those 3,000 jobs are there." Krmpotich cited J.D. Aero Technical as a local success story. Working in partnership with Sault Ste. Marie Airport Development Corp., the company has grown from the original three employees to more than 75. J.D. Aero specializes in maintaining aircraft including the De Havilland Dash 8 family, Bombardier Canadair CRJ family and the Fairchild Metro. "These are good jobs for our young people. That's the way we have to do it," Krmpotich said. "We've gotta work together in partnerships with business, with the EDC and others to be able to grow our local economy and make sure that these jobs are still there for our children."

TimminsPress.com: [Wynne says gov't plan on Ring of Fire only 'weeks' away](#) (Top Stories – Main Page)

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne will be in Timmins Wednesday — one of several stops she is making in Northeastern Ontario over the course of several days. She was in Sudbury on Tuesday,

where she told a gathering hosted by the Sudbury Chamber of Commerce that movement on a Ring of Fire infrastructure plan should come "within weeks, not months." "I think we'll find a way to move forward," said Wynne, who is scheduled to speak at the Timmins Native Friendship Centre Wednesday afternoon. "Nobody in the province wants a shovel in the ground more than I do." The Premier was responding to a question from a Laurentian Mining Innovation and Technology representative, who pointed out promising times lie ahead for the industry. "Mining is a very cyclical sector and we're heading into a boom now," he said. "But mining does need some support and there's an amazing opportunity for us, with \$60 billion in the Ring of Fire that's locked up." Wynne said her government has been busily negotiating with the Matawa First Nations on a regional framework agreement, noting she personally met with the Cree and Ojibwe leadership as recently as a couple of weeks ago. "It's very much my commitment and belief that we are better off if communities that are in the region can benefit and be part of that economic development," she said. The government has already made investments in training and social supports for the remote communities, she said, but cannot wait indefinitely for an agreement on a transportation route for ore. "What I said to the Matawa First Nations now is that we need to come to some consensus, because we need to get infrastructure built," she said. "If a consensus isn't possible, we need to start working with communities that want to work with us and get some of that building done."

SUDBURY ISSUES

Labour: [Premier coy on workplace reforms](#)

With labour advocates protesting outside and an indoor audience comprised primarily of business owners, Ontario premier Kathleen Wynne spoke carefully -- and coyly -- about her government's plans for workplace reform. "There was some speculation last week that your government had decided to make certain changes to the Labour Relations Act, as well as the Employment Standards Act," said Michael Macnamara of the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, which hosted a "fireside chat" with the premier on Tuesday at the Holiday Inn. "Can you outline what those changes will be?" Referencing a massive report released this week called the Changing Workplaces Review, Wynne said her government will be implementing some reforms, while declining to specify which ones exactly. "What I can tell you is that there's a long list of recommendations, 173 of them," she said. "We will be moving very soon to identify where we are going to make changes and where we're not, because we won't be implementing every single one of those." Among other things, the review calls for part-timers to be paid as much as full-timers for comparable work; increasing paid vacation time to three weeks (for employees with five years under their belts); and a week of unpaid personal emergency leave for all workers. The report did not, as some had anticipated, go as far as recommending paid sick days -- although the authors do "recognize that this protection would be beneficial" -- nor did it insist the minimum wage rise to \$15.

Labour: [Liberals play politics with hospital funding: Union](#)

CUPE executives are asking whether the Liberal government's decision to give Sault Area Hospital a higher funding increase than other Northern Ontario hospitals could be related to the fact Sault Ste. Marie is in the middle of a byelection. Michael Hurley, CUPE's Ontario Council of Hospital Unions, travelled Wednesday to Sudbury, where he noted that the majority of Northern Ontario hospitals, including Health Sciences North, which has a regional hospital with a cancer centre, got \$5.8 million or about a 2 per cent funding increase, while the Sault Area Hospital saw a 3.8 per cent allocation that amounts to \$5.5 million in 2017. Although the Sault Area Hospital fared better than other Northern hospitals, Hurley said, the money it received in throes of the byelection "the Liberals are desperate to win, is still not enough to restore staff, beds and services that have been cut following eight years shrinking provincial funding for hospitals." Following years of zero base funding increases, Hurley said, the consensus among healthcare stakeholders from the association representing hospitals to front-line staff unions is that hospitals need a minimum of about a 5 per cent increase in funding, simply to maintain existing services. In the April budget, the provincial government provided an a province-wide funding increase of 3.1 per cent for hospitals. Northern hospitals are getting 2 per cent, with the exception of the Sault. In 2016-17, the Liberals planned to increase funding 2 per cent, Hurley said, but were forced by community and labour campaigns focused on patient need to increase funding 3.5 per cent by the end of the year. "Like last year, communities have to drive hospital funding higher this year as well," Hurley said in a statement.

"Two per cent just won't do."

Health: [High incidence of ALS among miners who inhaled McIntyre Powder](#)

The number of miners recorded as having amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) in a database of those who inhaled McIntyre Powder compiled by the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) has increased to 11 from the original five reported last fall. It's a significant shift, since the database includes just 325 people. By comparison, the national average of ALS diagnoses, according to the patient and research advocacy group ALS Canada, is two in 100,000. ALS — also known as Lou Gehrig's disease — is a rapidly progressing neuromuscular disease that paralyzes muscles in the body, eventually leading to death. There is neither a cure nor an effective treatment for the disease, which affects about 2,500 to 3,000 Canadians. "The ALS number was jumping out at us, even though it was only five, but now we have 11 people who've come forward," said Dave Wilkin, OHCOW's chief operating officer, during a presentation on McIntyre Powder research at the Workplace Safety North mining conference, held in Sudbury in April. "It's either the case that we have already located every person who was exposed to that powder in an Ontario mine who ever got ALS — and even then it's too high, but maybe a coincidence — or there's something happening here with that."

Agriculture: [Northern farms, food businesses get funding boost](#)

Northern Ontario farm and food businesses have received a boost of \$313,428 from the Sustainable New Agri-Food Products & Productivity, or SNAPP program. In partnership with FedNor, Northeast Community Network, reThink Green, and Cloverbelt Local Food Co-operative, the Rural Agri-Innovation Network has established a multi-year funding program for farm and food businesses in Northern Ontario. SNAPP supports Northern Ontario agriculture and food producers, businesses, collaboration, communities, and First Nations to create new products, enhance abilities for season extension, scale up production, or enhance productivity. Last year, FedNor announced \$921,300 in SNAPP funding over a three-year period, \$825,000 of which will be used as microgrants to support eligible project costs. ReThink Green oversees the funding of SNAPP, and works with the committee of Northern partners to review applications. SNAPP's first intake period was Nov. 15, 2016 to Feb. 28, 2017, during which the project partners distributed just over \$313,000 in grants to 63 applicants, bringing the total value of investment to \$744,519. In the Sudbury, Parry Sound, and Muskoka regions, 19 applicants were approved. Each applicant is eligible to receive up to \$5,000 at 75 per cent cost share to purchase equipment for approved projects. Collaborations of three or more entities are allowed up to \$15,000. "Over the last 20 years we have been presenting regionally produced food to our retreat guests," Todd Lucier, co-founder of Northern Edge Algonquin, said in a statement. "The SNAPP grant enables us to expand our partnerships with Stonemote Cottage, Highlander Brew Co., and area producers to bring new value added Northern Ontario food products and experiences to market."

Community Services: [Council to decide whether to continue in-house animal control](#)

City councillors will decide next week whether to extend the pilot animal control program for another two years. The city took animal control in house in October 2016, taking over from the private operator that had run the system dating back to amalgamation. City staff said that the city could take the service in house at a cost of \$675,000 a year, using its own bylaw enforcement officers and renting space in a shelter on Kari Road in Wahnapiatae for \$4,500 a month. A staff report headed to council May 30 recommends extending that agreement for another two years. "While the current shelter is not ideally located from a citizen convenience and distance perspective, it is highly functional and has excellent outdoor spaces for animals to exercise and continuing to provide the service at this location can easily be supported in the current service delivery model," the staff report says. The 2,600-square-foot facility has 15 interior dog runs and 34 individual cat cages. And to house cats during the redemption period, the shelter has five communal cat areas that can each hold five or six cats. City shelter and enforcement staff have had training through Canine Foundations and staff who work at the shelter also spent time in the city-operated Brampton Shelter.

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