

Briefing for February 8

Your morning briefing	2
Union Gas reviewing winter disconnection policy after St. Thomas residents left in the cold	6

Your morning briefing

08.02.2018

Headlines

The first Tory leadership debate has been set, and it will occur February 15 in Toronto. Featuring leadership candidates **Doug Ford**, **Christine Elliott**, and **Caroline Mulroney**, the debate will be moderated by TVO's **Steve Paikin** and live streamed on Facebook and Twitter. The second debate will occur someplace other than Toronto. PC officials also unveiled details of how members can vote for the leadership contest, and *QP Briefing* has all the details.

Meanwhile, Elliott leads the way in the PC caucus endorsement race, reports the *Star*. But that's no guarantee she'll win the leadership on March 10; she also handily won the PC caucus endorsement race in 2015, when she finished second to **Patrick Brown**. Elliott enjoys the support of nine MPPs, Mulroney has the backing of five, and Ford has one. Thirteen others remain neutral, undecided, or unknown. *QP Briefing* is maintaining an ongoing tracker here.

The CBC breaks down where the PC leadership contenders stand on the carbon tax. **Mike Crawley** notes that dumping the tax would blow a \$4 billion hole in the Tory platform, money which is currently used for a variety of tax cuts and rebates.

In case you missed our stories Wednesday:

- [First of two Tory leadership debates set for February 15](#)
- [Chamber of Commerce issues warning about lack of confidence in Ontario economy](#)
- [Union Gas reviewing disconnection policy after St. Thomas residents left in the cold](#)
- [In Brief: Ms. Wynne goes to Washington, GTHA housing prices skyrocket over 10 years, Doug Ford on women](#)

The Globe has details on how Ontario's potential retaliation to New York state's protectionist buy-American law would work, and how it could target steel and iron in the Empire state.

Justin Trudeau will meet with Silicon Valley executives on a trip to California. That includes a meeting with **Jeff Bezos**, the CEO and founder of Amazon. The PMO "isn't predicting" whether the meeting will include Trudeau pitching Toronto as a site for Amazon HQ2, which could bring 50,000 high-income jobs to the city the online giant chooses for its second headquarters.

Left-wing think tank Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives looks at precarious work at colleges and universities across the country, and finds temporary jobs increased by 46 per cent since 1998.

The *Globe* provides an explainer on how marijuana legalization will work, province by province (Paywalled).

TVO looks at whether widening the 401 in eastern Ontario is worth the cost, and how it might become a regional election issue.

Ottawa police have laid the first charge under the new abortion clinic buffer zone legislation, which came into effect on February 1. The alleged offender, whose name was not released, will appear in court on March 23.

And in the opinion pages:

Margaret Wente explains why she was incredulous at **Sarah Thomson's** allegations of sexual harassment against **Steve Paikin**, which the TVO broadcaster has denied. Wente goes on to say that she's willing to hear more facts in the case, but is inclined to believe Paikin is the same person she thought he was last week.

Jonathan Kay also sympathizes with Paikin, and analyzes the #MeToo movement in the context of the Thomson's allegation against him.

Thomas Walkom writes that Doug Ford's rage might be a big part of his appeal to PC voters.

For CBC, **Graeme Gordon** writes that Doug Ford's opponents shouldn't count him out.

Heather Mallick assesses the PC leadership contenders, and finds shortcomings in each of them.

Christine Van Geyn of the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation argues that the PCs should ditch the People's Guarantee.

David Reevely analyzes Wynne's negotiating tactics when it comes to protectionist trade threats from New York state, and see wisdom in laying out consequences.

James Wallace says Wynne shouldn't be believed when she takes up the trade warrior cause.

Events

9:30 a.m.

Premier Wynne to attend a Cabinet Meeting. Main Legislative Building – Room 275, Queen's Park, Toronto.

11 a.m.

Ann Hoggarth, MPP for Barrie, will make an announcement on behalf of **Jeff Leal**, Minister Responsible for Small Business. Canplas Industries Ltd., 31 Patterson Rd., Barrie.

12:30 p.m.

Premier Wynne to deliver remarks at the Queen's Park Pyeongchang Olympics Flag Raising Ceremony. Main Legislative Building – South Lawn, Queen's Park, Toronto, ON.

2 p.m.

Daiene Vernile, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, will make an announcement. Ontario Place, 955 Lake Shore Blvd W (access via Remembrance Drive), Toronto.

3:30 p.m.

Doug Ford holds a rally in Hamilton in support of his PC leadership campaign. 2799 Barton St. E., Hamilton.

6 p.m.

Premier Wynne to attend the Annual Toronto Region Board of Trade Dinner Reception. Metro Toronto Convention Centre, North Building, 255 Front Street West, Toronto.

Union Gas reviewing winter disconnection policy after St. Thomas residents left in the cold

07.02.2018

A house in St. Thomas had its gas cut off overnight, leaving one tenant huddling under blankets and other tenants seeking emergency accommodation — and exposing a loophole in the province's legislation banning winter gas and electricity disconnections.

The incident prompted Union Gas to review its voluntary policy on winter disconnections.

Landlord **Aurel Pauser** told *QP Briefing* he's furious the gas to his property was cut off Monday over his failure to pay a \$500 deposit owed to Union Gas.

"This is serious, this is not June, July," he said.

There are five rental units in the large, two-storey residential home, which relies on natural gas for heating, hot water and cooking. When the gas was cut off, it left one tenant, an older woman with a disability, huddled under blankets, while other tenants, including a mother and baby, were forced to sleep elsewhere overnight, Pauser said.

He paid what he owed the following morning, and Union Gas confirmed that the gas has been turned back on.

Pauser said he'd missed the deposit in the first place because a business partner had failed to alert him about the arrears notices that began arriving after he bought the property in September, so he wasn't aware he owed any money — but he was adamant that all he owed was the \$500 deposit and \$300 for the property's current bill.

Union Gas would not confirm details of the billing issue, citing privacy concerns.

In any case, no one disputes that the tenants were left in the cold — something that legislation the provincial government passed last year was intended to prevent.

The province passed the *Protecting Vulnerable Energy Consumers Act* in February 2017, giving the Ontario Energy Board the power to stop electricity and natural gas distributors from cutting small-volume customers — residential and commercial — in the wintertime.

The OEB has moved forward with its power to stop electricity companies from making winter disconnections, but did not take action on the natural gas side.

According to Union Gas spokeswoman **Andrea Stass**, the OEB order didn't extend to natural gas because the company already had voluntary policies against disconnecting residential customers in winter months, as does Enbridge.

However, the property in question was listed as commercial, and fell outside of the company's voluntary moratorium. Stass said property owners, or ownership companies, can register their properties as commercial even if they have residential tenants in them. Some multiresidential properties remain registered as commercial because that used to mean they would get a lower rate, even though the residential and small commercial rates are now the same.

"In talking with our customer service group, they're going to be reviewing that policy as it pertains to smaller, tenanted properties," Stass said. "It's prompted by this situation — and I believe it's the right thing to do, to take a look at that policy and make sure the spirit of the what the OEB was attempting to do is captured there."

Spokeswoman Alexandra Day said the OEB is consulting with consumers and others on customer service rules for both natural gas and electricity distributors, "to assess how effective the OEB's rules have been and whether they continue to serve the needs of consumers."

"Rules relating to disconnection for non-payment and related service charges are a key part of that review," Day said. "Any customer with concerns or issues about their natural gas service can contact the OEB's Public Information Centre at 1-877-632-2727."

Update:

NDP Energy Critic **Peter Tabuns** responded to the story, saying he's frustrated to hear what the residents went through.

"I think it's pretty clear to people in Ontario that nobody should be cut off from their heat in the middle of winter. It's one of those life and death things," he said.

Tabuns said it only makes sense to require gas utilities to obey the same moratorium on winter disconnections as electricity utilities.

"We shouldn't be leaving any loopholes open like this," he said. "The Liberals should have covered this loophole earlier, I'm sorry they didn't before and I hope that they'll do it now."