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Today's News

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Thousands remain without power in wake of weekend ice storm

National Post - Tue Apr 17 2018
Byline: The Canadian Press

TORONTO - Utility crews continued repairing severed power lines on Tuesday morning after a wild few days of rain, freezing rain, snow and strong wind across much of southern, central and eastern Ontario. The province's largest utility, ...



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T.O. In Recovery Mode; Trees down, power out, flights delayed

Toronto Sun - Tue Apr 17 2018
Byline: Nicole Thompson And Peter Cameron
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Toronto Star - Tue Apr 17 2018

Byline:Robert Benzie Queen's Park Bureau Chief With files from Laurie Monsebraaten

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thestar.com - Mon Apr 16 2018

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TORONTO - Utility crews continued repairing severed power lines on Tuesday morning after a wild few days of rain, freezing rain, snow and strong wind across much of southern, central and eastern Ontario.

The province's largest utility, Hydro One, was reporting around 40,000 homes and businesses without electricity - down from a high of about 300,000 in the early stages of the storm.

Just over 2,000 Hydro Ottawa customers remained in the dark - down from about 75,000 - and Toronto Hydro was reporting a few hundred outages by Tuesday morning. Hydro Quebec was dealing with almost 19,000 outages in Montreal and surrounding areas.

The blast of winter weather also impacted the boys of summer, when a chunk of ice falling from the CN Tower poked a hole in the SkyDome roof and cancelling a game between the Toronto Blue Jays and Kansas City Royals.

They were scheduled to play a doubleheader on Tuesday.

Police said an area around the tower would remain roped off until Tuesday morning.

Toronto's Pearson International Airport said they expected higher than normal volumes as they recover from the storm. Travellers were advised to check their flight status before heading to the airport.

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Toronto, along with much of southern and central Ontario, is recovering from an ice storm that resulted in power outages, cancelled flights and road collisions over the weekend.

By late Monday afternoon, provincial power utility Hydro One said crews had

restored power to more than 300,000 customers across much of the province.

Hydro One said crews were still working to reconnect another 82,000 customers affected by approximately 700 outages.

Toronto Hydro said the number of customers in the dark had shrunk to about 1,500 late Monday afternoon from about 40,000. In most cases, crews were dealing with power lines and poles downed by high winds or ice-coated trees that snapped during the storm.

The mix of snow, freezing rain, ice pellets, rain and powerful winds that battered the region Saturday and Sunday had made driving treacherous, with provincial police reporting more than 1,600 non-fatal crashes on the highways surrounding Toronto over the two days. Hwy. 400, south of Barrie, which had been closed in both directions after a collision involving two trucks took out the highway divider, was reopened to traffic Monday afternoon.

The poor conditions also prompted bus and school cancellations in parts of the province Monday, with schools in Hamilton, Halton and Peel regions closed for the day and buses cancelled in various other districts.

After pummeling Ontario over the weekend, the storm slowly moved east.

In Ottawa, which was under a freezing rain warning, all entrances to the Centre Block on Parliament Hill were closed because of falling ice.

Air travellers were advised to check the status of their flights before heading out Monday, with delays and cancellations reported at airports in Ontario and Quebec.

Some universities and colleges also cancelled exams due to the weather, and with heavy rain continuing overnight there were concerns about localized flooding.

In Toronto, officials said the clearing of some streets was delayed as crews concentrated on clearing catch basins in an effort to prevent flooding as temperatures rise.

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Andrea Horwath is promising affordable child care - free for families who earn \$40,000 or less and an average of \$12-a-day for most others - if the NDP wins the June election.

That's the cornerstone pledge of the party's ambitious 97-page platform, Change for the Better, launched on Monday at Toronto Western Hospital.

"Our plan is not based on your little one's age; it's based on making sure everyone has child care they can afford," said Horwath, taking a shot at the Liberals' new free

daycare plan, which is limited to preschoolers aged 2 1/2 years until junior kindergarten.

About 70 per cent of Ontario parents would either have free child care or pay an average of \$12 per day in a licensed not-for-profit daycare starting with toddlers late next year and preschoolers in 2020 - considerably lower than the \$100-daily-rate, now paid by some.

The NDP leader, who also vowed to increase by 50 per cent the number of child-care places in her first four-year mandate, said change is in the offing June 7 after almost

15 years of Liberal governance.

"Who will replace (Premier) Kathleen Wynne?" asked Horwath, cautioning against gambling on right-wing rookie Progressive Conservative Leader Doug Ford.

"Doug Ford's billions of dollars in cuts will hurt the very people who need help. He'll cut hospitals. He'll cut our children's schools. He'll cut transit, child care and so much more," she said.

"That's not change; that's going from bad to worse."

Horwath insisted an NDP government would be more fiscally responsible than Wynne's Liberals. In that vein, her administration would run a \$3.3-billion deficit this year - this is half the Liberals' \$6.7-billion shortfall - and, just as the Grits have forecast, remain in the red for five years before balancing the books.

The New Democrats' fiscal plan, signed off as "reasonable" by former parliamentary budget officer Kevin Page, is bolstered by higher taxes.

An NDP government would raise the corporate tax rate to

13 per cent from 11.5 per cent, close big business loopholes, and increase personal income tax on amounts earned more than \$220,000 by one percentage point and on earnings more than \$300,000 by two percentage points.

As well, a new 3-per-cent surcharge will be slapped on luxury cars and SUVs that cost more than \$90,000.

"We are going to protect middle- and lower-income families and make sure everyone has better services," Horwath said.

"To get it done, we will make sure the most profitable corporations and the wealthiest people start paying their fair share," she said, noting rich businessmen such as Ford will see their taxes rise.

"Let's ask those at the top to pay a bit more."

Along with means-tested child care, which would be free for low-income earners and an average of \$12 per day for others, the NDP is promising publicly funded dental care for the one-third of Ontarians without workplace coverage.

While the Liberals have a free pharmacare program for seniors and those 24 and under for 4,400 medications, the NDP would cover all age groups, but only for 125

prescription drugs.

The New Democrats would hike hospital spending by

5.3 per cent annually and add 2,000 beds immediately.

On electricity, the NDP would buy back the majority stake of Hydro One that Wynne sold off, using dividends from the shares to bankroll that. But the party would cancel the Liberals' "Fair Hydro Plan," which has already cut bills by 25 per cent through a costly borrowing scheme.

The NDP believes its own proposals, including an end to time-of-use pricing, could cut hydro bills by 30 per cent, more than offsetting the end of the Liberal subsidy.

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Martin Regg Cohn: NDP's Andrea Horwath finds her footing on progressive platform

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This just in - Ontario's Tories have ceded first place to the opposition New Democrats.

Not in polls, but platforms.

With the June 7 election just weeks away, Andrea Horwath's NDP is first out of the gate with a fully-costed, 97-page catalogue of campaign promises www.thestar.com if they form Ontario's next government. Or a shopping list, should the election produce a minority government that requires NDP support to prop it up.

Caring and sharing (as in taxing) top the list - cheaper child care (averaging \$12 a day, details to come); partial pharmacare www.thestar.com for all ages; denticare for those who need it; and more health care spending; all bankrolled by higher taxes on the rich and corporations. Lower hydro rates also rank high.

If all this sounds familiar, it is - last month's Liberal budget was similar, but different. Premier Kathleen Wynne promised free child care for pre-schoolers, financed by even bigger deficit spending than the NDP, but the Liberals' final campaign platform remains a closely guarded secret.

In fact, Ontario's Progressive Conservatives led the way on ideas last November when they unveiled The People's Guarantee, but their campaign policies are now in limbo. As soon as Doug Ford replaced Patrick Brown as party leader last month, he suspended the PC platform until further notice - leaving the field wide open for New Democrats to get a head start.

To their credit, the NDP is attempting to set the agenda www.thestar.com. As they've been trying to do ever since Horwath's flawed 2014 campaign www.thestar.com, which famously deviated from the party's ideals and let Wynne eat their lunch on the left.

Now, the NDP is back - back to their roots as a progressive force. And backed by a leader who increasingly looks like she's on a roll, even if she remains stuck in the polls.

It's about time, because Horwath is running out of time. This is her third provincial campaign, and nearly nine years after becoming leader she is now the political veteran facing off against a rookie Ford and a wounded Wynne.

It has been a slow climb, but judging by her highly charged speech to party supporters Monday - roused by the throbbing beat of Young & Wild (by the Strumbellas) - the NDP leader is finding her mojo.

With mojo comes the magic of campaign math, which can sometimes be an optical illusion. While Horwath may gain traction with soaring rhetoric, her platform remains slippery in spots - brimming with good ideas on caring, but burdened by a black hole on hydro promises that sound too good to be true.

Like the Liberals with their ambitious budgetary spending, the New Democrats stress caring while downplaying paying for it.

Horwath's child care plan will cost \$12 a month on average (free for household incomes below \$40,000), but what if your family income exceeds, say, \$85,000? Can't say just yet, but we'll get back to you once we're in government.

How much less will hydro cost you? Trust us, we can do what no other party in power has ever done with hydroelectric power - reduce hydro costs (and therefore rates) by an unprecedented 30 per cent.

The NDP keeps blaming rising hydro rates on the Liberals' partial privatization of Hydro One - a logical leap, given that the utility's transmission rates remain independently regulated. In another leap (of faith), Horwath vows to buy back www.thestar.com what Wynne sold for more than \$9 billion, and claims she can do it without costing taxpayers a penny: she'll merely repurpose what's left of the dividend stream from the government's remaining stake in Hydro One to buy the rest of it back.

Were it only so easy to buy companies using dividends. But the shell game gets worse, for those precious dividend streams are already accounted for in future budgetary spending, so if the money is repurposed to buy back Hydro One, a future NDP government would have to replace the lost funds to pay for ongoing budget items.

The Hydro One buy-back may be Horwath's Achilles' heel as she tries to push an otherwise plausibly bold platform on child care. The NDP fiscal plan calls for a budget deficit of roughly half the \$6.7 billion projected in the Liberal budget in 2018-19, thanks to higher taxes on the rich and corporations - a party perennial, but fair enough.

May the best platform prevail in the coming campaign. That is, if campaign platforms matter anymore.

They surely do for New Democrats, who were first off the mark Monday; and the Liberals have promised one soon (based on their spring budget). We'll see soon enough whether Ford's PCs - and voters - are content to rely on campaign populism as a substitute for substance.

Martin Regg Cohn is a columnist based in Toronto covering Ontario politics. Follow him on Twitter: @reggcohn

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Ford coming to Mildmay; PC leader to stop at Bruce Power, local dairy farm in tour of Bruce

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Ford Nation is coming to Bruce County.

Progressive Conservative leader Doug Ford will be holding a rally in Mildmay on Thursday evening, following stops at Bruce Power and a Teeswater-area dairy farm.

"It is great to have the leader of the PC Party of Ontario come out and meet with everyone in the Huron-Bruce, Grey-Bruce-Owen Sound and Perth-Wellington region," Huron-Bruce MPP Lisa Thompson said Monday.

Doors to what is being called a "Rally for a Better Ontario," open at 6 p.m. at the Mildmay Carrick Recreation Complex, with the rally set to start at 6:30 p.m. The event is open to the public.

Thompson said she wanted to get Ford to the riding as she had heard from many people that they want to meet him prior to the June 7 provincial election.

"They are sensing change is afoot and he is going to be the leader at the head of that charge," said Thompson.

Ford was chosen leader of the PCs at a leadership convention on March 10, defeating Christine Elliott, Caroline Mulroney and Tanya Granic Allan. He ran for the party leadership following the sudden resignation of Patrick Brown in January following allegations of sexual misconduct.

The older brother of former Toronto Mayor Rob Ford, Ford is a former Toronto city councillor and will run for the PCs in the riding of Etobicoke North in the upcoming election.

Thompson said she believes that those who meet Ford in her riding will like him, if the rallies she has witnessed in the last few weeks are any indication.

She called Ford a robust and sincere leader.

"I say robust because he has got great ideas and sensible approaches to getting Ontario back on track," said Thompson. "He is sincere in getting the job done, and what you see is what you will get with Doug Ford."

Ford has yet to release details of his election platform, but has vowed to fire the head of Hydro One and its entire board if he is elected premier. On Monday, he came out with a pledge that anyone making minimum wage will not pay any income tax.

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