Message

From: Jordan Penic [/O=IMO/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=PENICJ]
Sent: 2017-03-10 7:52:16 AM
To: Andrew Dow [/O=IMO/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=Dowa]
Subject: Fw: Today's News - Friday, March 10, 2017

Check the Peter tabuns and Todd Smith op eds. Good to keep a record of these and the topics covered for when we meet with them.

From: John Cannella <John.Cannella@ieso.ca>
Sent: Friday, March 10, 2017 6:34 AM
Subject: Today's News - Friday, March 10, 2017

Today's News

powered by:

Date: Friday, March 10, 2017
Edited by: John Cannella (John.Cannella@ieso.ca)

Contact Editor

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Cambrian, LU join forces; The hope is to boost research and innovation in Northern Ontario

Sudbury Star - Thu Mar 9 2017 Page: A3

Cambrian College and Laurentian University announced an agreement Wednesday they say will boost research and innovation in Northern Ontario. The agreement facilitates the creation of collaborative partnerships and enables faculty, ...

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Tory Leader Patrick Brown says Liberals hydro plan falls short

thestar.com - Thu Mar 9 2017
Byline: Rob Ferguson

The Wynne government's plan to cut hydro rates 25 per cent(https://www.thestar.com/») sets a "low bar" for fixing Ontario's expensive electricity system, ...

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Energy plan offers real relief, minister says

Waterloo Region Record - Fri Mar 10 2017
Byline: Glenn Thibeault
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The NDP hydro scheme is short on details and long on hollow promises. Many of their proposals rely on a vague and yet-to-be-determined "expert panel" that will be convened in the future, as well as pie-in-the-sky negotiations with the federal ...

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Brown's plan wrong, irresponsible

The Barrie Examiner - Fri Mar 10 2017
Byline: Glenn Thibeault
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(Re: 'PC hydro plan coming' in the March 4 edition of the Examiner) On Thursday, March 2, we announced the largest cut to electricity rates in Ontario's history. Recognizing that ratepayers are struggling, we are lowering ...

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Hydro cuts to make 'real difference' to small businesses, premier says

CBC.CA News - Thu Mar 9 2017, 12:26pm ET
Byline:CBC News

Premier Kathleen Wynne says her government's plan to slash hydro rates by up to 25 per cent this summer will help small businesses. Wynne was in Guelph Thursday morning speaking to the owners of an independently-owned flower shop and ...

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Wynne meets with Guelph business owners about hydro costs

GuelphMercury.com - Thu Mar 9 2017
Byline:cseto@guelphmercurytribune.com

Guelph small business owners say they're pleased with the province's plan to lower hydro bills, even if it means paying a little bit extra over a longer period. Premier Kathleen Wynne was in Guelph Thursday morning to meet ...

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Fixing hydro costs in Ontario starts with uncovering the details of government deals: PC Party

North York Mirror - Thu Mar 9 2017
Byline: Todd Smith

"How do we make Ontario electricity more affordable for residents and business owners?" When Sir Adam Beck lit up that first street sign that read 'For the People' he made it pretty clear who he thought the electricity system was ...

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Ontario needs to stop the Hydro One sale and reduce our surplus power: NDP

City Centre Mirror - Thu Mar 9 2017
Byline: Peter Tabuns

How do we make Ontario electricity more affordable for residents and business owners? Hydro bills have gone up 100 per cent since 2006. This question now comes up constantly: what can we do about these huge charges? When we ask how we ...

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All parties should lay out their plan for hydro

The Hamilton Spectator - Fri Mar 10 2017
Byline: Howard Elliott
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Next year's provincial election could be called the hydro vote. Of course there other issues - the length of the Liberal party's rule, the economy, and others. But nothing resonates with Ontarians right now like hydro rates. It's understandable, ...

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OPINION: Don't blame renewable energy for Ontario's electricity costs

Bloor West Villager - Thu Mar 9 2017
Byline: Keith Brooks

Is renewable energy responsible for driving up Ontario's electricity costs? Not so much. Many people have suggested that renewable energy is to blame for Ontario's rising electricity rates. But that's just not true. Based on ...

268599110

POWER STRUGGLE: Residents, critics wary of hydro rate cut that defers cost onto future generations

City Centre Mirror - Thu Mar 9 2017
Byline: Justin Skinner

This summer we'll see a break on hydro bill costs, but some residents particularly hard hit by high rates and delivery fees, aren't buying it. Daren Goodchild, a horse farmer from Markham, has felt the pinch. The electricity bill for his small ...

268639792

Info sessions for Entegrus, St. Thomas Energy merger; Combined utility will have nearly 60,000 customers

The Chatham Daily News - Fri Mar 10 2017 **Page:** A3

Members of the public will have a chance to learn more details and ask questions about the planned merger of Entegrus Powerlines Inc. with St. Thomas Energy Inc. Information sessions are planned for later this month where members of both ...

268629638

Manitoba government to take new steps to control spending, energy conservation; Manitoba taking new steps to control spending

Canadian Press - Thu Mar 9 2017

WINNIPEG - The Manitoba government took steps Thursday to control spending and policies at Crown corporations, and to set up a new agency to promote energy conservation. The Progressive Conservatives introduced a bill that would allow ...

268658398

'Rate mitigation' reveals lies behind Muskrat Falls

The Telegram (St. John's) - Fri Mar 10 2017
Byline: Brian Jones
Page: B5

A new phrase has entered the province's vocabulary: "rate mitigation." Quick, somebody inform the h'editors at the Dictionary of Newfoundland English. There is a new, self-defining phrase to go alongside "10-42," ...

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268579098

Cambrian, LU join forces; The hope is to boost research and innovation in Northern Ontario

Sudbury Star - Thu Mar 9 2017 Page: A3

Cambrian College and Laurentian University announced an agreement Wednesday they say will boost research and innovation in Northern Ontario.

The agreement facilitates the creation of collaborative partnerships and enables faculty, students and staff at both institutions to pursue large-scale research projects, Cambrian and Laurentian said in a joint press release.

The schools will share professional expertise, facilities, equipment, and administrative services, the release said, in order to boost innovation, productivity and results.

The aim is to harness the resources and expertise of the two institutions, in order to enhance the educational experience for student researchers, attract and develop top-quality professionals, increase fundamental and applied research capacity and income, and to strengthen Sudbury's culture of innovation through post-secondary collaboration.

The memorandum of understanding provides guidelines for new research partnerships to be developed.

At a media conference on Wednesday, Laurentian University President Dominic Giroux, Vice-President of Research Dr. Rui Wang of Laurentian, Cambrian College President Bill Best and Vice-President International of Applied Research and Business Development Sonia Del Missier of Cambrian got a look at one initiative already underway under the auspices of the memorandum of understanding.

The collaborative project is led by Dean Millar, professor of energy in mining at Laurentian's Bharti School of Engineering and energy director of Laurentian's MIRARCO, or the Mining Innovation Rehabilitation and Applied Research Corporation.

Millar is investigating how a unique hydraulic air compressor (HAC) system may be developed to clean and cool the air in ultra-deep mining environments, where air temperatures may reach upwards of 40 degrees C. Laurentian researchers are collaborating with Cambrian College faculty and students to conduct trials on the BabyHAC, a pilot scale unit installed at Cambrian's Glencore Centre for Innovation.

In the meantime, construction of the much larger Dynamic Earth HAC is underway. Faculty and students in Cambrian's metalworking shops are fabricating a key part of the Dynamic Earth HAC: a 21st-century version of an air-water mixing head last used in the Peterborough Lift Lock HAC in 1967, which was designed by Graduate Students working within Laurentian's MIRARCO.

This Laurentian-Cambrian collaboration is one part of a long-term, large-scale research project with multiple partners, including industry and government, funded by the Ultra Deep Mine Network, the Independent Electricity System Operator, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation and Electrale Innovation Ltd.
sud.editorial@sunmedia.ca

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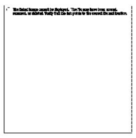

268624303

Tory Leader Patrick Brown says Liberals hydro plan falls short

thestar.com - Thu Mar 9 2017
Byline: Rob Ferguson

The Wynne government's plan to cut hydro rates 25 per cent (www.thestar.com) sets a "low bar" for fixing Ontario's expensive electricity system, Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown says.

As his party prepares to release its own plan in the "near future," Brown said Thursday it will delve deeper into problems than the Liberal effort in which lower rates will cost $25 billion in interest over 30 years.

But Brown - who will square off against Premier Kathleen Wynne in the provincial election just 15 months from now - refused to set a target for any savings he'll offer ratepayers.

"I think the Liberals have set a very low bar when it comes to simply smoothing out the burden and they're not addressing any of the structural issues," he told reporters after a luncheon speech to the Toronto Region Board of Trade.

Those issues include a surplus of electricity, expensive 20-year contracts for renewable energy and new projects now being built under contracts signed before a moratorium on renewable projects was declared last fall.

"It's the definition of insanity when you're going to keep on committing the same mistakes that got us in this position," Brown said.

"Not only do we believe we should offer relief but we need to make sure that the same mistakes that were committed before are not repeated," Brown said, charging the Liberal plan "largely misses the business community."

Brown was outflanked last week as the New Democrats unveiled their hydro plan, pledging to cut rates up to 30 per cent (www.thestar.com) , followed by the Liberal pledge several days later.

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault has warned that cancelling contracts could cost taxpayers billions and send a dangerous signal to businesses looking to invest in Ontario.

In an email to supporters Thursday, the minister defended the Liberal plan to kick in this summer as "the largest cut to electricity rates in Ontario's history, and the right thing to do."

"The costs of building the clean, reliable energy system of tomorrow have hit household budgets particularly hard today....so, starting this summer, we're spreading those costs out over a longer timeframe."

In his speech to about 270 people, Brown tried to set the ballot question for the next election in June 2018 as "who will make it easier for you and your family to makes ends meet and get ahead?"

After 13 years of Liberal government, he said "Ontarians work hard, Ontarians pay more, Ontarians get less....I want Ontario families to work hard to pay less and get ahead."

Those lines were repeated several times during Brown's 23-minute address, in which he called the Liberal plan to eliminate annual deficits in the coming fiscal year a "false balance propped up by one-time hydro money," referring to the partial privatization of Hydro One.

He made several accusations, saying the Scarborough subway is a "promise broken" by the Liberals and that the government is spending more on annual debt interest payments than on hospitals, transit and children.

Liberal officials called foul on those claims, saying provincial funding for the Scarborough subway remains on the table as Toronto city council (www.thestar.com) hashes out its plan for getting the project underway.

Debt interest now costs $10.9 billion annually, compared with combined spending of $82 billion on health care, transportation, education and children's services.

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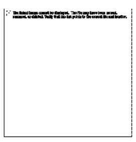

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Energy plan offers real relief, minister says

Waterloo Region Record - Fri Mar 10 2017
Byline: Glenn Thibeault
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The NDP hydro scheme is short on details and long on hollow promises. Many of their proposals rely on a vague and yet-to-be-determined "expert panel" that will be convened in the future, as well as pie-in-the-sky negotiations with the federal government. These offer little to Ontarians in the short-term, compared to the real and meaningful relief our government's Fair Hydro Plan will provide to everyone starting this summer.

The NDP's most expensive idea - buying back more than $4-billion in shares of Hydro One - will not take one cent off electricity bills. What it will do is send billions to the stock market instead of making much needed infrastructure investments in communities across Ontario.

Over and above the 25 per cent on average electricity bill cut for every family and small business, our Fair Hydro Plan will expand the Ontario Electricity Support Program to provide targeted help to the most vulnerable Ontarians. The expanded program will deliver an additional $180 to $276 per year for eligible families. Meanwhile, support for low-income Ontarians doesn't even factor into the NDP plan, other than a promise to consider it in the future. Our government believes that support for the most vulnerable should be a central pillar of any energy plan, and that's why we will provide targeted and meaningful relief to those who need it most.

Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan will also eliminate the delivery charge for on-reserve First Nations customers and remove some monthly service charges. This measure will save the average customer $85 a month and is a move that Ontario Regional Chief Isadore Day has commended and acknowledged it will "allow a path forward for greater quality of life for First Nations in Ontario". Under the NDP proposal, First Nations are not mentioned once.

And as if the NDP proposal wasn't damaging enough, their scheme would scrap Time of Use pricing, which would dial back conservation savings, and potentially lead to supply gaps. Time of Use has been a success, reducing our peak demand by up to five per cent, which means we don't need to build costly new generation. However, it may not be the best model for everyone in the province. That's exactly why we are already piloting different models that can give electricity customers choice in how they're billed. But this needs to be implemented responsibly, not through a short-sighted system like the NDP have proposed.

Through Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan, our government is cutting electricity bills by 25 per cent on average for all families starting this summer, along with about half a million farms and small businesses. It is the single largest rate reduction in the province's history and for each of the next four years any increase will be in line with inflation - approximately 2 per cent. Our plan is about real relief for Ontarians and a way to ensure greater fairness in our electricity system. The PCs have no plan and the NDP hydro proposal offers nothing practical or substantial when it comes to reduced electricity costs for Ontario families and small businesses.

Glenn Thibeault is Ontario's Minister of Energy.

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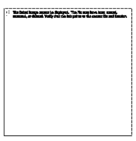

268649716

Brown's plan wrong, irresponsible

The Barrie Examiner - Fri Mar 10 2017
Byline: Glenn Thibeault
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(Re: 'PC hydro plan coming' in the March 4 edition of the Examiner) On Thursday, March 2, we announced the largest cut to electricity rates in Ontario's history.

Recognizing that ratepayers are struggling, we are lowering electricity bills 25% on average for families. Many small businesses and farms would also benefit from the initiative.

For those living in rural communities or with low incomes, the break will be even greater. Rate increases over the next four years will also be held to the rate of inflation for everyone.

Bringing rates down substantially and fixing the system's structure, that's an approach we believe in. It's better for Ontario and it's fairer for families. And Ontario's strong, growing economy allows us to do it while also delivering a balanced budget this spring.

While our plan provides fast, substantial, widespread and long-lasting relief, Official Opposition leader Patrick Brown (Simcoe North MPP) and the Progressive Conservatives have yet to bring forward anything credible.

Their idea main idea - tearing up contracts -won't take one cent off electricity bills. It's both wrong and irresponsible for them to continue to repeat that incorrect information.

As they well know, energy rates will continue to be set by the independent Ontario Energy Board, which has a mandate to protect ratepayers. Tearing up contracts would lead to increased rates, lawsuits and penalties.

Under our plan, electricity rates will come down, stay down and benefit families and businesses across the province. By providing real, long-lasting relief, our Fair Hydro Plan makes sense for Ontarians.

Glenn Thibeault

Ontario minister of energy

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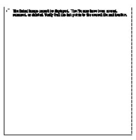

268608706

Hydro cuts to make 'real difference' to small businesses, premier says

CBC.CA News - Thu Mar 9 2017, 12:26pm ET
Byline:CBC News

Premier Kathleen Wynne says her government's plan to slash hydro rates by up to 25 per cent this summer will help small businesses.

Wynne was in Guelph Thursday morning speaking to the owners of an independently-owned flower shop and bookstore.

"This will make a real difference to businesses that are on main street, that are family businesses, that are serving communities," Wynne told CBC News during her stop in The Bookshelf.

The reduction will be "substantial" for small businesses and will "make a huge difference to their bottom line," she said.

"When I've talked about the reductions, I've talked about mom-and-pop shops, so they're family, community businesses that we want to thrive," Wynne said.

Reduced costs means more chance to invest

Barb Minett of The Bookshelf said the reduced rates will help them with green energy projects, like adding solar panels to the roof of the building, which also houses Miijidaa restaurant, a cinema and the eBar.

"We can invest in more things," she told the premier during a conversation in front of the media.

Ben Minett said the cost of electricity can reach $4,000 a month for the entire building.

Wynne said the cost reduction will come from spreading the cost of paying for green energy projects out over a longer period of time.

"If we had it to do again, we'd probably spread those costs over a longer time to start out with. That would have been the fairer thing to do," she said.

'A good start'

Jason Dendekker and Francine Saliba are a young couple who opened The Bloom Room Floral Company on Queen Street in May 2016.

"Being a florist, we have two coolers that are running 24 hours a day. The space also has to be temperature controlled, so definitely within the summer months, we are running air conditioner. And this is about 2,500 square feet so that does substantially add up," Dendekker said.

"It goes, it averages anywhere from $500 to $700 a month."

When asked if the reductions go far enough to help them, Saliba said the province "had to start somewhere" and Dendekker called it "a great start."

"I think it's going to work well for small business owners and rural property," he said. "Everybody within Ontario is definitely going to see a difference in their hydro bills, and I think that's a good step and a good start."

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Wynne meets with Guelph business owners about hydro costs

GuelphMercury.com - Thu Mar 9 2017
Byline:cseto@guelphmercurytribune.com

Guelph small business owners say they're pleased with the province's plan to lower hydro bills, even if it means paying a little bit extra over a longer period.

Premier Kathleen Wynne was in Guelph Thursday morning to meet with two downtown business owners to chat about their hydro costs.

Wynne's first stop was at the Bloom Room Floral Company on Quebec Street. Joined by Guelph MPP Liz Sandals, the pair chatted with owners Jason Dendekker and Francine Saliba about Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan.

The plan was announced March 2 and involves reducing bills for ratepayers by roughly 17 per cent.

This will be done by essentially refinancing the debt on electricity assets, stretching out the repayment a little further into the future so ratepayers won't have to shoulder so much of the cost upfront. Pay less now, but pay a bit more in the future.

Add this to the eight per cent rebate of the provincial portion of the harmonized sales tax that was introduced in January and it adds up to a savings of 25 per cent. This announcement comes a little more than a year before the next provincial election.

Premier Kathleen Wynne to cut hydro rates by 25 per cent

Sitting in a cosy room on the second level of the store, the Bloom Room owners expressed their delight at the announcement.

With two coolers running all the time and an air conditioning system working hard to keep the 2,500-square-foot shop temperature controlled, the Bloom Room's electricity bills are higher than most spaces of this size.

Dendekker said they pay between $500 and $700 a month. He estimates that once these cuts come into effect this summer, the business could save more than $100 a month.

"I think right now it's a great start," he said.

"Everyone within Ontario is definitely going to see a difference on the hydro bills.

"I know there's a lot of infrastructure upgrading that has been done and that will need to be done. I'm well aware of the debt that Ontario has to take on as a result of doing this to help out individuals and families," he said.

While the debt is a concern to him, especially as a father, he said he sees these cuts to hydro bills as a positive move overall.

As part of the plan, rate increases over the next four years would be held to the rate of inflation for everyone.

Premier Kathleen Wynne and Guelph MPP Liz Sandals visit The Bookshelf in downtown Guelph on Thursday morning to speak with owner Ben Minett and his mother Barb about their hydro expenses.

Wynne next stopped in to The Bookshelf for a sit-down chat with owner Ben Minett and his mother Barb. Sitting at a small table at the back of the store, surrounded by books, Ben expressed his delight in the electricity bills being cut. He also used the opportunity to praise the government's work in shutting down Ontario's coal power plants in an effort to combat climate change.

"The hydro bill going down is fantastic for us," he said. With the eBar, the movie theatre, the restaurant Miijidaa and a kitchen in the basement all under one roof, the hydro costs are huge. "We pay between $3,000 and $4,000 a month," Ben said.

"Politicians always say small businesses are the engine of the economy but there's always so much for small businesses to fight against," Barb said, adding every little bit of saving helps.

With the money saved, Barb said the business might consider putting solar panels on the roof to save even more money.

Wynne said over the past few years, the government has made large investments in electricity infrastructure projects across the province, but these investments weren't financed the right way.

"The costs need to be spread out over a longer period of time," she said. "If we had it to do again, we'd probably spread those costs over a longer time to start out with. That would have been the fair thing to do. Better late than never."

The savings should show up on hydro bills by the summer, she said.

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268580384

Fixing hydro costs in Ontario starts with uncovering the details of government deals: PC Party

North York Mirror - Thu Mar 9 2017
Byline: Todd Smith

"How do we make Ontario electricity more affordable for residents and business owners?"

When Sir Adam Beck lit up that first street sign that read 'For the People' he made it pretty clear who he thought the electricity system was supposed to serve.

You wouldn't believe the stories that I get in my office. Just this month, I had one couple contact me to let me know that they had to take out another mortgage on their house. Another resorted to technology that Sir Adam would have recognized. They turned off their electric heat and put in a wood stove.

Such is the state of the electricity crisis in Ontario. Earlier this week a senior official in Ontario's Liberal government told the CBC "We created a bit of a monster" when they described the surging electricity costs in Ontario. That might qualify as the understatement of the year.

Somewhere along the line, we stopped viewing the consumer as the person flipping a light switch and started seeing it as the government agency signing the power contract.

And now neither can afford the system.

When we talk about where we go from here, it's important to understand that your answer is only as good as your information. And this Liberal government hasn't been all that forthcoming with information. We don't know the terms of the deals that were signed. We don't know what clauses may be available to future governments or what companies were allowed to proceed with their projects even though they had violated the terms of their deal.

So, the first thing we have to do is commit to picking through each of these contracts to see if the terms were violated, if the deadlines were adhered to or, to put it simply, if there's a way out. In my own riding of Prince Edward-Hastings, I've watched power companies ask for and get extensions from the government that drag the project out years beyond what was envisioned by the original deal. That's not something you do if you're on the side of the people paying hydro bills. It's something you do if you're on the side of the people sending them.

We also have to stop the Hydro One sale. According to the Auditor General, the company has a $4.4 billion transmission infrastructure deficit. The Auditor also pointed out that the result of this infrastructure deficit has been blackouts that are 24 per cent more frequent. Hydro One stockholders aren't paying to improve transmission. Guess who will end up paying?

That's where we have to start. But the reality is, the Liberals have such a hold on the information, we don't know how bad the monster they admit they've created actually is.

Todd Smith is the PC Energy Critic and MPP for Prince Edward-Hastings.

READ MORE: Cutting hydro bills by 25 per cent is a fair and lasting plan, says premier Wynne

READ MORE: Ontario needs to stop the Hydro One sale and reduce our surplus power: NDP

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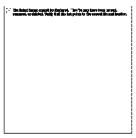

268580386

Ontario needs to stop the Hydro One sale and reduce our surplus power: NDP

City Centre Mirror - Thu Mar 9 2017
Byline: Peter Tabuns

How do we make Ontario electricity more affordable for residents and business owners?

Hydro bills have gone up 100 per cent since 2006. This question now comes up constantly: what can we do about these huge charges?

When we ask how we can make electricity more affordable, we first have to ask how it became unaffordable in the first place.

Some blame green power for the high bills. Not true. Green power is about 12 per cent of our power bills, which have gone up 100 per cent in a decade.

In reality, the sell-off to private companies of the electricity system, piece by piece, is the fundamental problem. It started with the Conservatives in the late 1990s, and the Liberals are continuing the process. That adding of profit into our hydro bills has increased the cost of power without giving us any benefit. At the same time, because of the way these new private power contracts are written, we are stuck paying guaranteed profit for power plants whether we need them or not. Right now, Ontario generates more power than we can use, about $2 billion a year worth of surplus power that we sell to Quebec and New York at a deep - 75 per cent - discount. In fact, many times we have to pay them to take our power.

So, the answer to how we deal with the problem encompasses three actions. We need to stop selling off the system. We need to reduce all this surplus power. And, when we do need more power we need to invest in low-cost options like conservation for peoples' homes and businesses to cut their power use, and new renewable power which has been dropping sharply in price.

That means stopping the sell-off of Hydro One, which has been in public hands for over a century. Hydro One provides the web of high-voltage power lines that holds the whole system together. A drive to higher profits for the investors will mean higher bills for all of us. It also means that when private contracts for power plants run out we need to end the contracts if we don't need the power. Right now quite a few gas power plant contracts are coming to the end of their term. Generally speaking, we don't need them and should pull the plug.

Recently the NDP put out a plan to reduce power costs by ending the privatization of the system. We also called for an end to time-of-use pricing that drives bills up. For many people time-of-use pricing increases their costs by about 10 per cent of their bill without actually making the electricity system work better. For young parents or seniors at home through the day, or for small businesses, this could make a real difference in their expenses.

The Liberal government has proposed to cut bills by borrowing tens of billions of dollars to buy down hydro bills with all of us paying for this later. It is a very pricey solution.

Peter Tabuns is the NDP energy critic and MPP for Toronto-Danforth.

READ MORE: Cutting hydro bills by 25 per cent is a fair and lasting plan, says premier Wynne

READ MORE: Fixing hydro costs in Ontario starts with uncovering the details of government deals: PC Party

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All parties should lay out their plan for hydro

The Hamilton Spectator - Fri Mar 10 2017
Byline: Howard Elliott
Page: A12

Next year's provincial election could be called the hydro vote. Of course there other issues - the length of the Liberal party's rule, the economy, and others. But nothing resonates with Ontarians right now like hydro rates.

It's understandable, even though some of the hyperbole being bandied about is over the top. So is laying all the blame at the feet of the Liberals when the Progressive Conservatives also played a role in setting the table. But whether you agree with the weight being attached to energy as an election issue or not, it is what people are talking about. That's why the Liberals have finally moved on plans to reduce bills. According to Alectra Utilities, Hamilton ratepayers will get a bigger than average break on their bills, with residential fees set to drop 27 per cent, and small business rates 28 per cent. That's not insignificant.

The Liberal plan, though, is something like remortgaging your house. The money will be paid back over a longer period of time, so the resulting interest payments will end up costing more. Does that really matter to people if their bills go down? We'll see.

NDP leader Andrea Horwath won't be outshone. She has put forward a plan she says will save up to 30 per cent on bills and doesn't involve remortgaging the house. The plan would allow consumers to opt out of time-of-use pricing, cap profits for private power producers supplying the grid and return Hydro One to full public ownership by buying back shares. This plan will appeal to many, especially since the partial privatization of Hydro One is widely opposed.

But wait, say the Liberals and other skeptics. The money from privatization is being used to fund health and education. If that money is used to buy back shares, it will be at the expense of those other priorities. Now the NDP plan doesn't sound quite so solid.

At least the two parties are putting out (relatively) clear messages. And by getting her party's oar in the water on the most significant issue of the election, Horwath automatically positions the NDP as a credible alternative, on this matter at least.

Patrick Brown, come out, come out, wherever you are. The Progressive Conservatives have yet to outline in detail what they'll do on energy. Perhaps because there is still a lot of time left. Perhaps because it's a sticky issue for them, too. After all, it was Brown's party that initiated the last attempt to privatize, which blew up in their face. And it's going to be difficult for a party that believes in privatization to argue for making Hydro One public again. Then again, who would have predicted that the PCs would favour a carbon tax and support a modernized sex education curriculum. So who knows what they might have up their sleeve? They'd be smart to get at least some cards on the table soon though.

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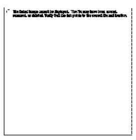

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OPINION: Don't blame renewable energy for Ontario's electricity costs

Bloor West Villager - Thu Mar 9 2017
Byline: Keith Brooks

Is renewable energy responsible for driving up Ontario's electricity costs? Not so much.

Many people have suggested that renewable energy is to blame for Ontario's rising electricity rates. But that's just not true.

Based on analysis commissioned by Environmental Defence, the average Ontario household pays about $11 per month for wind power, and $9 for solar power. Taken together, wind and solar are only responsible for about 12 per cent of an average Ontario residential electricity bill.

Yes, wind and solar power are new additions to Ontario's electricity system. Yes, they are paid a premium compared to some other forms of power generation. And

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yes, they play a role in the province's rising electricity rates. But it's a small role.

Even though Ontario is now a North American green energy leader, renewable energy still represents a small share of total power generation in the province and, consequently, a small share of the average person's bill. Wind and solar power, collectively, are responsible for about $20 of an average $170 monthly residential electricity bill.

The delivery charge is actually the largest component of bills. And when it comes to the electricity itself, nuclear is the largest cost. Natural gas is the second largest.

The same goes for the Global Adjustment, which has received attention of late. Many media reports suggest that the Global Adjustment is due entirely to renewable energy. However, nuclear is the largest component of the Global Adjustment and natural gas is the second largest. Hydro power is also a larger component of the Global Adjustment than wind or solar power.

So what's behind rising electricity costs? It's complex, but we can point to these contributing factors:

- Investments to increase the reliability of the electricity grid.(Remember brown-outs? Or the massive 2003 blackout?)

- The rising costs of nuclear power. The rates we pay to Ontario Power Generation and Bruce Power, the two companies that generate nuclear power, have increased by 60 per cent and 54 per cent respectively since 2002. That's added billions to electricity costs.

- Gas power plants are actually very expensive. On average, gas plants are paid more on a per kilowatt hour basis than wind power.

- Ontario has a power surplus.Due to the recession, changes to the economy, and conservation measures, Ontario has too much power and exports some at a loss.

- In 2016, Ontario ended a 10 per cent subsidy on electricity bills.Now Ontario is taking the provincial HST - eight per cent - off bills. But that just masks the real price of electricity.

- It cost something to get rid of coal. But the coal phase-out is also estimated to have saved Ontario $4.4 billion each year in health and environmental costs. Getting rid of coal has made our air much cleaner, and it's one of the main reasons that smog days have become a thing of the past.

It's this combination of factors that led to Ontario's high electricity costs - not just renewable energy as many claim.

And it's important to put this all in context. Electricity rates in Ontario are not the highest in North America, and rates are very low by European standards.

And electricity rates aren't likely to send businesses packing. For example, when compared to Michigan, electricity adds about $6 to the cost a car made in Ontario that sells for $30,000. Hardly a deal breaker.

THE OPPOSING VIEW: "Ontario's renewable energy 'disaster' is what drives up the cost of your hydro"

Meanwhile, renewable energy has done lots of good for Ontario. Tens of thousands of homeowners now generate income and clean power thanks to rooftop solar projects; thousands of farmers have a new revenue stream; tens of thousands of Ontarians have jobs in clean energy; and, Ontario is Canada's clean technology leader, attracting about half of all clean tech spending in Canada.

None of this is to take away from the real fact that for some Ontarians, the high price of electricity is an issue. And the government has now moved on that, promising to cut rates by 25 per cent.

Refinancing the Global Adjustment is obviously the centrepiece of the government's package of reforms. But the plan also contains important new conservation initiatives. The $200 million Affordability Fund, which will help people renovate their homes to make them more energy efficient, is on the money. Going forward, we need to see more energy conservation, because the best way to help people pay less for electricity is to help them use less electricity.

The government's reforms made no changes to the supply mix - the amount of power we get from nuclear, versus gas, versus wind. But to keep costs low, we need to see more renewables in Ontario's future. Wind and solar power costs are plummeting, while costs for nuclear power are rising. Renewable energy has created a solid foundation for a clean economy - one that Ontario now needs to build upon.

Keith Brooks is Programs Director at Environmental Defence, Canada's most effective environmental action organization, where he directs the Climate & Clean Economy, Water and Blue Flag programs. He holds a Masters of Environmental Studies from York University.

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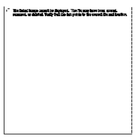

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POWER STRUGGLE: Residents, critics wary of hydro rate cut that defers cost onto future generations

City Centre Mirror - Thu Mar 9 2017
Byline: Justin Skinner

This summer we'll see a break on hydro bill costs, but some residents particularly hard hit by high rates and delivery fees, aren't buying it.

Daren Goodchild, a horse farmer from Markham, has felt the pinch.

The electricity bill for his small farm from October to December 2016 totalled $592, including $130 in delivery fees alone. With an electric well-pump for water and an oil-burning furnace in his 160-year-old home, the costs of running the farm are fast spiralling out of control and he feels there's little hope of slowing it.

"We save doing laundry until weekends. We have LED lights. We try and do everything after 7 p.m. (during off-peak hours). We try our best to keep the electricity off because it is so damned expensive," he said. "It's gotten to the point where we have changed our behaviour as best we can but it doesn't seem to make a lick of difference."

Premier Kathleen Wynne announced March 2 that the government would reduce hydro rates by 25 per cent, which includes the eight per cent rebate on the Ontario portion of the HST. In order to do this, the plan effectively refinances the payments to private electricity providers who signed on for 20-year contracts. Those contracts guaranteed a certain level of electricity purchase - whether Ontario needed it or not.

Under the new plan, the province has increased the payment term from 20 to 30 years, which will incur $25 billion in interest charges over that time.

QUIZ: Where can you save energy in your house?

Goodchild said the Liberals are just kicking the can down the road.

"Instead of reducing rates, it is going to cost us more in the long run," he said. "This is not going to help us whatsoever. They're doing this for votes."

The government's new measures also include helping low-income residents and broadening the rural and remote rate protection program by subsidizing rural homeowners who have unusually high distribution rates. The savings could be between $12 and $75 depending on consumption and rate plan.

Those subsidies will cost the government's treasury, and taxpayers, about $2.5 billion over the next three years.

MAP: THE RANGE OF DELIVERY FEES, NOV. 2016

It remains to be seen whether that relief will help Erin couple Sheryl and John Oldfield whose January bill was $1,406 for their home and hobby farm. The delivery charge was $463. John doesn't believe Wynne's plan is a genuine reduction and Sheryl feels the premier is "buying votes."

"It's a shell game," said John, adding the province is deferring debt charges and he believes these fees will be charged to Ontarians through their income tax. The government needs to come clean on the real costs of producing hydro and then develop a plan to adjust rates, he said.

"(Wynne's) stuck in a tough place, and she's made very bad decisions," he said.

The premier, in her announcement last week, did acknowledge the government's mishandling of the electricity file, but said blame falls on parties of all stripes.

"For decades, bad choices have been made," Wynne said. "Those governments who put off investing in the system - that was a mistake. Asking hydro users alone to pay for policies that ought to be paid for by all taxpayers… that was a mistake."

Critics say lowering the cost of hydro artificially without addressing broader structural issues is another mistake.

"Nothing in the government's new plan changes the underlying costs of the power system," said Tom Adams, an independent energy and environmental advisor.

He challenged the notion that Wynne's plan was like refinancing a mortgage.

"Not true. Her plan is like refinancing monthly rental costs. The monthly rent payments will go down, but after the next election the renter will be in much worse trouble."

Adams says Ontario is actually enjoying something of a "power cost sweet spot" at the moment, with relatively affordable nuclear power. But that's about to change, he said, with nuclear generating units in Darlington about to go down for a refurbishment at a cost of approximately $13 billion. The nuclear units in Pickering will need the same refurbishment in about six or seven years, Adams estimates. Bruce B units are also in line for an upgrade.

"A decline in nuclear production and a sharp increase in cost is about to happen," Adams said.

Keith Brooks, programs director at Environmental Defence, is pleased the government's plan includes conservation initiatives like the $200 million Affordability Fund, which helps people make their homes more energy efficient.

But he said the government's reforms make no changes to the supply mix - the amount of power we get from nuclear versus gas versus wind.

"... To keep costs low, we need to see more renewables in Ontario's future," he wrote in an opinion piece for Metroland Media. "Wind and solar power costs are plummeting, while costs for nuclear power are rising. Renewable energy has created a solid foundation for a clean economy - one that Ontario now needs to build upon."

HOW TO MAKE EFFECTIVE CHANGE?

Brooks said the Ontario government needs to follow a proper tender process when it comes to all energy matters. He said, for instance, that the province did not put out a tender for feed-in tariffs, which provides payments to consumers who generate renewable energy for use in the system.

"They just said 'here's what we're going to pay,'" he noted. Ontario's PC and NDP energy critics both contributed opinion pieces to Metroland Media on the matter and both agree stopping the sale of public electric companies is priority Number 1. The cost to consumers is being hijacked by the drive for profit.

"...Because of the way these new private power contracts are written, we are stuck paying guaranteed profit for power plants whether we need them or not," wrote Peter Tabuns, NDP energy critic. "Right now, Ontario generates more power than we can use, about $2 billion a year worth of surplus power that we sell to Quebec and New York at a deep - 75 per cent - discount. In fact, many times we have to pay them to take our power."

Transparency on the government's current energy contracts is also lacking, said Todd Smith, PC energy critic.

"In my own riding of Prince Edward-Hastings, I've watched power companies ask for and get extensions from the government that drag the project out years beyond what was envisioned by the original deal," he wrote. "That's not something you do if you're on the side of the people paying hydro bills. It's something you do if you're on the side of the people sending them."

MORE: Cutting hydro bills by 25 per cent is a fair and lasting plan, says premier Wynne

MORE: Ontario needs to stop the Hydro One sale and reduce our surplus power: NDP

MORE: Fixing hydro costs in Ontario starts with uncovering the details of government deals: PC Party

Mark Rodger, a lawyer with Borden Ladner Gervais and an expert in the utility sector, meanwhile, said delivery charges are a necessary hit. Simply being hooked up to hydro costs money even when energy is not being used.

Those costs could be cut, however, should some of Ontario's 60-plus utility companies merge. By having different companies running their own distribution systems, he said, it adds $1 billion in costs.

"Through consolidation, you can remove those costs through efficiency gains," he said.

WHAT CAN HOMEOWNERS DO?

Unless and until those steps are taken, it will be up to homeowners to find ways to save, whether through switching to energy efficient light bulbs and appliances, shifting the bulk of their energy use to off-peak hours or investing in their home.

With heating and cooling accounting for a huge percentage of many homes' energy costs, investing in a smart thermostat with timers and remotes could lead to big savings down the line. "The cheapest thing is just not to use energy when you're not there," said Sheena Sharp of Coolearth Architecture.

"Get an ecobee smart thermostat with all the little remotes for your nest - I made a capital investment of $500 and got a $100 rebate, and I've been saving ever since."

Similarly, stuffing up unused chimney flues and sealing your house can take time but save money. Older homes in particular can lose heat through drafts, said Greg Labbé of the Blue Green Consulting Group, and caulking wooden windows, baseboards and trim can help solve the issue.

MORE: 10 ways to save energy and cut your hydro bills

"For a lot of Toronto (and other older) homes, as much as a quarter of their energy use is lost through (winter) cooling and (summer) heating due to simple air leakage," Labbé said.

An alternative energy-buying option has arrived on the scene by way of Kitchener-based EnPowered, a bulk energy buying company that negotiates better prices from generators and passes savings on to consumers. The company primarily serves small businesses that consume most of their energy during peak hours but it's looking at solutions for average homeowners.

"People who are at home all day, if it works out, we can help them, but it's usually not a big savings," said EnPowered founder Tomas van Stee.

- with files from John Edwards, Simon Martin and David Nickle

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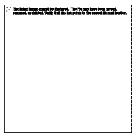

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Info sessions for Entegrus, St. Thomas Energy merger; Combined utility will have nearly 60,000 customers

The Chatham Daily News - Fri Mar 10 2017 **Page:** A3

Members of the public will have a chance to learn more details and ask questions about the planned merger of Entegrus Powerlines Inc. with St. Thomas Energy Inc.

Information sessions are planned for later this month where members of both organizations will be available to answer questions.

Although both companies are currently in the due diligence phase and continue to finalize merger agreements with a projected merger date of Jan. 1, 2018, both agree with providing the affected communities an opportunity to learn more about the merger.

"Local is a key aspect of this merger," said Jim Hogan, president and CEO of Entegrus Inc., in a written release.

"As a merged utility, we will have a larger voice in the industry and reap the benefits of a larger utility, with the benefit of continuing to be locally owned and operated - ensuring local community interests are met," he added.

Rob Kent, chief operating officer of St. Thomas Energy, said, in a written release: "Our companies have similar values and operating philosophies.

"We welcome the public to come out and learn about both companies and see that once the merger occurs, there will be no changes to their service," he added. "If anything, they will experience a more robust utility."

Currently Entegrus, of which the Municipality of Chatham-Kent is a majority owner, operates and maintains electrical distribution systems for more than 40,000 customers in southwestern Ontario. The merger of St. Thomas Energy will see that grow by more than 17,000 more customers.

Three public sessions, which will run 6:30-8:30 p.m., are planned, beginning in Chatham on March 21 at the John D. Bradley Convention Centre in Meeting Room 1A.

A session will be held in Strathroy on March 23 at the Gemini Sports Complex and on March 30 in St. Thomas at the CASO Station.

The companies have launched a website - www.poweringourpath. com - where relevant information regarding the merger will be posted as it becomes available.

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Manitoba government to take new steps to control spending, energy conservation; Manitoba taking new steps to control spending

Canadian Press - Thu Mar 9 2017

WINNIPEG - The Manitoba government took steps Thursday to control spending and policies at Crown corporations, and to set up a new agency to promote energy conservation.

The Progressive Conservatives introduced a bill that would allow cabinet ministers to set specific policies and performance targets for any Crown corporation they are responsible for.

Ron Schuler, the minister for Crown services, said advertising at monopoly entities such as Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Public Insurance is one area where policies could change.

"The public has been expressing a lot of concerns that they see monopolies that are advertising simply for the sake of advertising," he said.

The government has already given some marching orders to Crown corporations. Premier Brian Pallister ordered them last month to start cutting the number of management jobs by 15 per cent.

Schuler said the previous NDP government also gave firm directions to the Crowns, but his bill would make the process more transparent by setting down clear guidelines and publicly reporting any new policies and directions.

A second bill introduced by the Tories would fulfil a campaign promise by setting up a new agency, separate from Manitoba Hydro, to promote energy conservation.

The idea was raised in 2014 by the Public Utilities Board, which said it did not make sense to have Manitoba Hydro handle both energy sales and energy-conservation promotion.

The new body, Efficiency Manitoba Inc., will take over Hydro programs that subsidize homes and businesses that install measures such as better insulation or energy-efficient appliances.

The corporation will be tasked with achieving savings in consumption each year of 1.5 per cent for electricity and 0.75 per cent for natural gas.

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'Rate mitigation' reveals lies behind Muskrat Falls

The Telegram (St. John's) - Fri Mar 10 2017
Byline: Brian Jones
Page: B5

A new phrase has entered the province's vocabulary: "rate mitigation."

Quick, somebody inform the h'editors at the Dictionary of Newfoundland English. There is a new, self-defining phrase to go alongside "10-42," "resettlement" and "out-migration."

Accusations that Premier Dwight Ball has done nothing for the province during his almost year-and-a-half tenure are now demonstrably false - he has given us "rate mitigation."

Well, the phrase, anyway. The actual thing is yet to be defined and implemented.

It had to come. The epic disaster that is the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project has, thus far, been a mistake and foolishness in merely political terms. As slow and expensive work on the white elephant progresses, and the beast laboriously rises to its knees, the mistake becomes more personal.

The day when the first electricity bills arrive in the mail showing a rate of 22 cents per kilowatt hour rather than 11 cents kWh is no longer in the distant future. On that day, whatever supporters of the Muskrat Falls project remain will realize they've been suckered. Who will they blame? Will they look in the mirror and through their tears cry a lament, "I should have paid attention!"

Lest they blame the Liberals, Ball is already talking about "rate mitigation."

Presumably, RM will be the government's attempt to dull the inevitable public anger when the Muskrat Falls bills come due.

The premier offered no details this week, but the government's options are limited.

RM could involve a direct subsidy to ratepayers who have lower incomes - however that is defined.

That approach could be problematic. A $500 monthly power bill doubling to $1,000 is going to be a dilemma for a lot more people than just those at the lower end of the salary scale. It will be a challenge for the middle-class as well. The Muskrat Falls fiasco is an equal-opportunity disaster.

Perhaps Ball, Bennett and Co. will opt for a direct subsidy to Nalcor Energy, enabling "savings" to be passed down the line - literally - to electricity consumers.

Although, with the subsidy approach the government's debt will continue to grow if it annually hands over, say, $600 million to Nalcor.

Most importantly, rate mitigation will be an admission of the ineptness, lies, manipulation and propaganda that propped up the Muskrat Falls project from the beginning.

Astute observers will recall that, circa 2010, the Tory government touted Muskrat Falls hydropower as a cash generator for the province, as electricity would be sold to the New England states, New York and beyond.

"Show us the contracts," a sharp Telegram pundit opined as early as 2011. (OK, that might have been me, but it also could have been Wangersky or Frampton.)

No contracts were ever produced, of course, and the cash cow predictably morphed into the massive white elephant that will soon lumber through the provincial economy and decimate much in its path.

Consumer demand? Watch it drop as electricity bills mount.

Government debt? It will go up in direct correlation to "rate mitigation."

Board of Trade? Its members' cluelessness about economic drivers is already exposed.

This week, officialdom finally admitted Muskrat Falls will cost the government money rather than earn money for it.

Some people have suggested a public inquiry is needed to determine how a monumental mistake such as Muskrat Falls could have happened. There is no need. The entire sorry process is a matter of public record: disallowing the Public Utilities Board's involvement, amending the Electric Power Control Act to give Nalcor a monopoly, the lack of interest from private investors, each preposterous "decision gate."

A public inquiry would waste $3 million to arrive at an answer that is already known. How did this disaster win approval? How was this economic blunder foisted on the public? The answer is short and painful: people weren't paying attention.

Brian Jones is a desk editor at The Telegram. He can be reached at bjones@thetelegram.com.

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