Message

From: Jane Leckey [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=2D516EEF12B444EDACA0EE56126664B3-JANE LECKEY]
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Today's News

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Date: Friday, May 26, 2017
Edited by: John Cannella (John.Cannella@ieso.ca)

Contact Editor

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Don't let Ontario sell you on its hydro 'savings' plan

The Globe and Mail - Fri May 26 2017
Byline: KONRAD YAKABUSKI
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Ontario's error-prone energy policy makers are at it again with a scheme to fudge paying for their previous mistakes that will end up costing consumers nearly twice as much over time. In order to pocket $24-billion in ...

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Wynne defends hydro rate cut despite watchdog's warning; Premier says $21-billion hit will give consumers the relief they've demanded, deserved

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Investment needed to continue renewables drive in emerging economies

Energy Monitor Worldwide - Fri May 26 2017, 9:27am ET
Byline: Energy Monitor Worldwide

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Premier visits KL; Kathleen Wynne focuses on health care during stop

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Byline: Brad Sherratt
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Ontario's hydro plan terrible public policy

Northumberland Today.com - Fri May 26 2017
Byline: David Reevely
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The jiggery-pokery the Ontario Liberals are using to cut hydro bills will eventually cost us almost twice as much as it saves, the budget watchdog reported Wednesday. This is the "Fair Hydro Plan," the Liberals'answer to the constant ...

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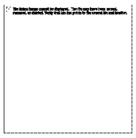

Don't let Ontario sell you on its hydro 'savings' plan

The Globe and Mail - Fri May 26 2017
Byline: KONRAD YAKABUSKI
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Ontario's error-prone energy policy makers are at it again with a scheme to fudge paying for their previous mistakes that will end up costing consumers nearly twice as much over time.

In order to pocket $24-billion in "savings" on their electricity bill over the next decade under the Liberal government's deceptively named Fair Hydro Plan, consumers will pay at least $45-billion starting in 2028. "After 10 years," says Ontario's Financial Accountability Officer, Stephen LeClair, "ratepayers will be required to pay the deferred electricity costs plus approximately $21-billion in interest, which result in higher electricity bills than under the status quo."

So, unless you're planning on living off the grid in Algonquin Park or moving out of the province by 2028, you will be materially worse off under the FHP than had the Liberals just left bad enough alone. And that's only if the government doesn't muck anything else up along the way.

Big if. In 14 years in office, the Liberals have mangled the energy file so many times, it would be naive to think they can't possibly do it again. For every good decision they've made - such as closing the province's coal plants - they've made several more bad ones that needlessly drove up costs.

Even the coal phase-out was hastily executed to meet a political deadline. So, instead of thinking through how best to replace coal capacity, the Liberals rushed to build new gas-fired generation plants and refurbish aging nuclear reactors at a cost of billions. Then, also for political reasons, they rushed to spend billions more on superfluous wind and solar power projects.

The result is that, though Ontario's nuclear power plants accounted for 36 per cent of the province's electrical-generating capacity in 2016, they ran full steam and provided 61 per cent of its power last year. Gas plants, usually only run during peak consumption hours, accounted for 28 per cent of capacity, but only 9 per cent of the electricity that was actually produced.

More than a third of the wind power that was produced was unusable in Ontario, either exported to the United States at a loss or "dispatched." The latter occurs when the grid operator stops delivery of wind power even though producers are often still paid for the power under contracts signed by the Liberals. Usable solar power accounted for a meaningless share of the province's electricity consumption. Yet, all this surplus wind and solar power contributes to lower overall market prices for electricity, creating the massive gap between what Ontarians pay for power and what it is actually worth on the open market.

Now, Premier Kathleen Wynne's government is touting powersharing deals with

Quebec to further reduce the use of gas-fired electricity during peak hours, making these costly gas plants even more redundant. And antinuke groups such as the Ontario Clean Air Alliance want to import yet more Quebec hydro power in order to shutter the Pickering nuclear plant in 2018, instead of 2024 as planned, and scrap the $13-billion refurbishment of the Darlington nuclear station.

Unfortunately, the time to have planned for more Quebec imports was a decade ago, before phasingout coal, building gas plants and signing long-term contracts to procure wind and solar power under the Green Energy Act. It would have taken that much time to upgrade existing transmission links with Quebec, build new ones and allow for Hydro-Quebec to set aside capacity to supply Ontario. Doing so now would merely add new costs to those Ontarians must already bear.

This is confirmed in a technical report released this month by Ontario's Independent Electricity System Operator that concludes it would take up to seven years and about $250-million just to upgrade current interprovincial transmission links in order to reliably import a "firm" 2,000 megawatts from Quebec. Boosting total imports by a further 2,000 MW would require at least 10 years of planning and construction to build an entirely new transmission link - at a cost of $1.4-billion - on top of the amount HydroQuebec would have to spend to build additional generating capacity to supply Ontario, whose peak consumption tops 23,000 MW in the summer.

Quebec power might have proved a cost-effective, low-carbon option had it been secured years ago. Now, it will be far pricier, as Hydro-Quebec would charge Ontario at least its marginal cost of production for new hydro capacity, which is far higher today than it was in 2007.

Such a plan would also run up against local opposition to a new transmission line through the Ottawa suburbs - building new transmission lines is almost as hard these days as building new oil pipelines. Besides, enough power from Quebec would not be available soon enough to allow for an earlier shutdown of Pickering. As for Darlington, the choice is between refurbishing or decommissioning. Neither comes cheap.

Remember this all the next time the Liberals take credit for cutting your electricity bill.

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Wynne's hydro fix: Debt and more debt

Toronto Sun - Fri May 26 2017 **Page:** A18

If any one financial blunder sums up 14 years of Liberal rule in Ontario, it's Premier Kathleen Wynne's, ahem, "Fair Hydro Plan".

That's because the same Liberal government that made Ontario the most indebted sub-sovereign borrower in the world, is now trying to solve its biggest political problem, soaring electricity rates, by taking on more debt.

Wynne's $45-billion plan to give hydro ratepayers a $24 billion temporary reprieve on their electricity bills, will cost Ontarians $21 billion over three decades, according to Financial Accountability Officer Stephen LeClair.

But that's only if the Ontario government can maintain a balanced budget for 29 years, which is never going to happen, given Ontario's fiscal track record.

If, as will inevitably happen, future governments have to take on more debt to finance the $21 billion cost of Wynne's plan, then, LeClair warns, the final cost to taxpayers could soar from $45 billion to as high as $93 billion, depending on interest rates.

But it gets worse. As LeClair notes: "The government's electricity cost refinancing initiative involves a complicated accounting structure that will increase gross debt by approximately $26 billion by 2027-28, but does not impact the Province's net debt due to the creation of a regulatory/investment asset. If the creation of (this) asset does not meet with public sector accounting standards, then the Province's annual surplus/deficit would deteriorate by a total of $26 billion over the next 11 years ...

"The Financial Accountability Office recommends MPPs obtain assurance from the Office of the Auditor General that the Province's proposed accounting treatment will not impact the Province's annual surplus/deficit and net debt."

If that statement inspires confidence in you about how Wynne's plan is going to roll out over the next 30 years, we have some ocean front property in Alberta to sell you.

Once again, the Liberals are pretending there's a free lunch.

That is, that you can ignore public debt by shifting if off the government's books into a newly created account overseen by a newly created agency, and that there will never be a day of reckoning when you have to pay it back, with interest.

We can't afford this Liberal "logic" any longer.

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Flood Of Denial; Dam regulators insist they didn't release too much water

Ottawa Sun - Fri May 26 2017
Byline: Tom Spears
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The organization that oversees Ottawa River dams says it did not add to the flooding problem in Ottawa and Gatineau by letting too much water through its dams farther upstream.

Facebook reports have been circulating with pictures of low water on the river near Mattawa, about 300 kilometres upstream, and claiming this contributed to flooding in Ottawa and Gatineau.

But the Ottawa River Regulation Planning Board, which oversees the dams, says there was nowhere left to hold the torrential rain on May 1.

The board represents different levels of government and utilities on both sides of the river.

The problem is that dams upstream from Ottawa aren't designed to hold back water to form a significant reservoir, said Michael Sarich, the board's senior regulation engineer.

Yes, he said Thursday, it's true that water near Mattawa was low. But that doesn't mean that the closest dam - at Rapides des Joachims (known as Swisha on the Ontario side) could have held back more water. The dam is owned by Ontario Power Generation, but the Ottawa River board tells OPG how much water to let through.

If the Des Joachims dam allows water to build too high instead of releasing it downstream, that would flood Mattawa, he said.

"This is a question that we get every year. It's not something special this year," he said.

Legislation requires that the dams not make any flooding worse than what would happen under natural conditions, he said. That means that from Temiscaming through to Montreal, "as flows increase, dam operators continue to open their gates and essentially pass all flow that is coming."

Des Joachims is "tricky" because when water rises at the dam, it can block more water from coming downstream behind it. Engineers call it a "constriction point" on the river.

The water is let down every year in late winter to prevent a backup during the spring flood, he said.

"That water, if you were to maintain your normal summer level under highflow conditions, would allow water to back up (upstream).

"It's very simple in that water runs downhill. So if the bottom of the hill (water at the dam) is higher, it makes the top of the hill (the river near Mattawa) higher too. It would prevent water from coming down and it would flood Mattawa."

When heavy rain came across the region in early May, operators had to let water through the big dam to avoid a backup that would flood Mattawa, he said. That led to the social media complaints from people saying they should have held back the water to protect Gatineau and others downstream.

The dam is owned by Ontario Power Generation (not Hydro One, as reported in many social media posts) and regulated by the Ottawa River Regulation Planning Board. OPG is a member of the board. tspears@postmedia.com twitter.com/TomSpears1

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Wynne defends hydro rate cut despite watchdog's warning; Premier says $21-billion hit will give consumers the relief they've demanded, deserved

Toronto Star - Fri May 26 2017
Byline: Robert Benzie Toronto Star
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Premier Kathleen Wynne is making no apologies for the Liberals' 25-per-cent hydro rate cuts that a legislative watchdog warns will cost at least $21 billion over three decades.

In the wake of Financial Accountability Officer Stephen LeClair's report on the "Fair Hydro Plan," Wynne emphasized that Ontario electricity consumers demanded and deserved relief.

"You all read the newspaper, you listen to the radio and you watch television - you know the problems that families are having around the province paying for their electricity costs," the premier told reporters Thursday in Timmins, Ont.

That's why the government moved forward with a rate cut that will see the average household's monthly hydro bill drop from $156 to $123 once it fully takes effect next month.

In a 15-page report released Wednesday, the financial accountability officer estimated the initiative would cost the province $45 billion over the next 29 years while saving ratepayers $24 billion for a net expense of $21 billion.

Both the Progressive Conservatives and the New Democrats oppose the Liberal rate cut.

But Wynne said the government has in effect renegotiated a mortgage so it will bankroll hydro infrastructure improvements over a longer time period in order to give customers a break now.

"We're talking about a 30-year window here. It took at least 30 years, probably 40 years, to let the electricity system degrade to the stage that it had in 2003," she said, noting "we were having blackouts and brownouts around the province" before her party took office that year.

"There were thousands of kilometres of line that needed to be rebuilt ... that work hadn't been done over those generations, so electricity costs were low over that period of time but the work wasn't being done."

When her predecessor Dalton McGuinty came to power in 2003, Wynne said Queen's Park began spending billions on infrastructure improvements, including expensive subsidies for green energy, such as wind turbines and solar panels.

"There's a lot of work that has been done since then.

"Literally thousands of kilometres of line have been rebuilt.

"The coal-fired plants have been shut down. The air is cleaner. There's less pollution in the air. The system is reliable and renewable," she said.

"So there's a cost associated with that and what was happening was that was work that had to be done - and all of those costs were on the shoulders of people today."

Wynne noted "this electricity grid is an asset that is going to be used for generations to come."

"My grandchildren are going to benefit from this asset, so I think it's fair that we spread the cost of that over that 30-year period," she said.

"That's how we made this decision."

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We're on track to cut carbon footprint, but still love our cars; More people have to walk, bike, use transit: advocate

Waterloo Region Record - Fri May 26 2017
Byline: Catherine Thompson, Record staff
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The people, businesses and organizations of Waterloo Region are well on their way to reaching a target for reducing greenhouse gases, but only because the province phased out coal-fired electricity plants.

As a community, Waterloo Region managed to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 5.2 per cent between 2010 and 2015, according to the latest progress report on local efforts to shrink our carbon footprint. That's a major step toward achieving the community's goal of a six per cent reduction from 2010 levels by 2020, said Danielle Laperriere, plan manager for Climate Action Waterloo Region, which put out the report.

But if Ontario hadn't completely eliminated coal-fired generating stations by 2014, local greenhouse gas emissions would have jumped 4.4 per cent between 2010 and 2015.

A major challenge will be to get people out of their cars and doing more trips on foot, by public transit or by bike, Laperriere said. Vehicle ownership in the region rose twice as quickly as the population.

"For every person we added to the community, we put two more cars on the road, which means people who used to get around without a vehicle or without a second vehicle have chosen to purchase a car," she said.

That's still evidence that the community is working to cut its energy consumption, Laperriere said, since the population jumped 5.7 per cent in that period, and the number of jobs and homes also went up.

"Each individual in Waterloo Region is actually producing less carbon" now than in 2010, she noted.

Even though the 2020 target is fairly modest, to reach it will require a considerable effort, beyond what's been already done, she said.

Because transportation accounts for half of the region's carbon footprint, it's imperative that people start opting for other ways of getting around than sitting alone in a vehicle, she said.

The launch of light rail transit in 2018 should help encourage more people to opt not to travel by car. The growth in cycling infrastructure and increasing availability of services like Carshare and Community Access Bikeshare also make it easier to choose cars less often, Laperriere said.

"Start to think about changing behaviour for one day of the week, or for one trip, on a day when the weather's nice," she said.

There's a strong business case for cutting emissions, Laperriere said, and that's why the biggest reduction in emissions in the five-year period comes from workplaces, which cut emissions by 17 per cent. "It makes business sense to reduce your emissions," she said. "We all know energy costs are a major expenditure for businesses."

Although larger employers are often more willing and able to make the investments needed to curb their energy use, there is help for small businesses, too. Local utilities have launched a pilot program that offers and installs smart thermostats for small businesses - for free.

Although climate change can seem pretty abstract, "there certainly should be a sense of urgency," Laperriere said, pointing out that we've started to see more severe weather. In 2016, for instance, we had 27 days above 30 degrees, compared to eight during a typical year.

But she also sees room for optimism.

"When I'm walking through the community, I see more people doing the same, or cycling, and it shows me there are definitely people who understand they can change their behaviour and reduce our impact on the environment," Laperriere said.

The progress report will be available online after June 7 at climateactionwr.ca.

cthompson@therecord.com,

Twitter: @ThompsonRecord

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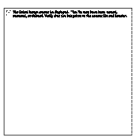

Cameco signs 10-year extension with Bruce Power

Peterborough Examiner - Fri May 26 2017
Byline: Cecilia Nasmith
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Jobs retained, communities enriched and power costs held down are expected after Thursday's announcement that the contract Cameco holds to supply Bruce Power with nuclear fuel will be extended by 10 years through 2030.

The announcement was made at Cameco's Port Hope plant that the exclusive fuel-supply arrangement will be extended - and that a new arrangement has been made for Cameco to provide reactor components for all six of Bruce Power's Major Component Replacement projects starting in 2020.

The total value of these arrangements is estimated at about $2 billion.

Fuel-cost savings realized by Bruce will go directly to reducing the cost of electricity to ratepayers, Bruce president and chief executive officer Mike Rencheck stated.

"By entering into a long-term arrangement for fuel now while the market conditions are favourable, we are in a position to deliver an estimated $200 million in ratepayer savings over the next decade, based on current forecasts, while also giving Cameco business certainty - which is important to both Ontario and Port Hope," Rencheck said.

For Cameco, the company president and chief executive officer Tim Gitzel commented, the deal provides a bright future for the 600-plus Port Hope employees and the 150 at their Blind River facility.

"It's not every day you can stand in front of people and say, 'You are going to have a job through 2030, a good-paying job you can raise your family on,'" Rencheck said.

"It's good news for those who benefit from clean, safe, reliable nuclear power that Bruce Power generates every day," Gitzel added.

"Bruce is our largest customer, producing 30% of Ontario's electricity, making Ontario a leading jurisdiction for nuclear-power deployment that is recognized around the world."

The benefits of this agreement extend beyond Ontario, Gitzel stated - the uranium they require is mined in Saskatchewan by a work force that is more than 50% indigenous workers, "making this the largest employer of indigenous people in Canada."

Rencheck pointed out that nuclear power comes at the most favourable kilowatt-hour rate around. At 6.6 cents per KWH, it even beats out solar power (48 cents), wind power (14 cents). And the uses of nuclear energy go beyond power into such areas as cancer treatment.

He gave Cameco a lot of credit for the role played in Bruce recently becoming the first Canadian company to receive a Top Innovative Practice Award. The applicable processes were built around using Cobalt 60 in their absorber rods, which are manufactured by Cameco.

Northumberland-Quinte West MPP Lou Rinaldi said the province values the environmentally friendly quality of nuclear power. In spite of having perhaps the hottest summer ever last year, he said, Toronto did not have a single smog day.
cnasmith@postmedia.com

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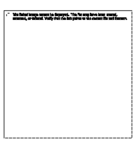

Jobs in Port Hope and Cobourg Cameco secure with Bruce Power deal

Northumberland News - Thu May 25 2017 Page: 1

PORT HOPE - Bruce Power and Cameco Corporation inked a deal to extend their fuel supply agreement for an additional 10 years.

The two companies announced the long-term arrangements at the Cameco facility on Dorset Street in Port Hope on May 25. The deal will secure the 619 jobs currently at the Port Hope and Cobourg locations and support Ontario's Long Term Energy Plan.

Cameco will provide reactor components for all six of Bruce Power's major component replacement (MCR) projects starting in 2020. The total value of the arrangements is estimated to be approximately $2 billion to 2030.

"By entering into a long-term arrangement for fuel now while the market conditions are favourable, we are in a position to deliver an estimated $200 million in ratepayer savings over the next decade based on current forecasts, while also giving Cameco business certainty, which is important to both Ontario and Port Hope," said Mike Rencheck, Bruce Power's President and CEO. "We are also leveraging Cameco's proven capability in Ontario to manufacture key components for our MCR program with production beginning in the near future and representing a spend of up to $60 million across our fleet."

As a private sector operator, Bruce Power is responsible for meeting all investment requirements for its life-extension project, including the procurement of reactor components from Cameco for future MCRs.

"We are delighted to extend our fuel supply arrangement with Bruce Power to meet 100 per cent of their requirements out to 2030 and participate in their life extension program by supplying reactor components," said Tim Gitzel, Cameco's president and CEO. "Bruce Power's commitment to continue delivering clean, reliable and affordable nuclear power provides a bright future for 700 people employed at our Ontario operations."

Both Lou Rinaldi, MPP for Northumberland-Quinte West, and Kim Rudd, MP for Northumberland-Peterborough South, said the agreement will support jobs and provide energy well into the future. Bruce Power is part of Ontario's plan to provide low-cost electricity to families and business through 2064, said Rinaldi.

"This agreement between Bruce Power and Cameco will continue to bring major long-term economic benefits to the Northumberland region," Rudd said.

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Investment needed to continue renewables drive in emerging economies

Energy Monitor Worldwide - Fri May 26 2017, 9:27am ET
Byline: Energy Monitor Worldwide

China and India are pushing down the cost of producing solar power considerably and taking a lead in shifting the world towards a cleaner development path, according to a senior World Bank official.In India, for example, recent auctions to construct and run solar plants have seen prices for solar energy drop as low as for coal-fired power, tilting the economics of the electricity market towards renewables.John Roome, senior director for climate change at the World Bank, said India had evolved from a decade ago when it was seen as part of the problem, insisting on its peoples right to develop above all else. In the last two years it has become a leader on clean energy and climate action, he said.They see the co-benefits between dealing with congestion, air pollution and other development needs, and they see the falling costs of the technology, and they see the opportunity for getting ahead of the curve to create new jobs in developing an electric vehicle industry, an air-conditioner industry, a battery industry, he said while at a conference in Barcelona.In November, the largest solar farm in the world was constructed in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, taking the record from a facility in California. But India and other big developing countries cannot make the transition alone, Roome said.For example, Februarys Indian solar power auction in Madhya Pradesh - where the cost of solar fell to a level equal with fossil fuels for the first time - was aided by World Bank help to acquire the land for a solar plant to be constructed.Major improvements in energy efficiency, alongside new technologies, can enable poorer countries to grow in a green way, Roome noted, but its going to take very concerted work between the policies, the incentives, the financing (and) focusing on developing the markets.He and other experts at the Innovate4Climate conference pointed to trillions of dollars now sitting in low-yielding investments or cash, looking for higher returns - much of which could be channelled into making economies greener and more resilient.Currently less than 1 per cent of global investment is certified as green, Roome noted.A mixed picture has developed in India where alongside a boom in solar power plants, the country is planning to build 370 coal plants that would ultimately breach its commitments under the Paris Agreement if constructed. Jos Manuel Entrecanales Domecq, chief executive officer of Acciona S.A., a Spanish energy, water and infrastructure firm, said investors are drooling at the prospect of putting money into high-growth environments like Ethiopia.But moving capital into those new markets depends on finding the right levers, and achieving a balance between risks and expected profit, he noted.You need to attract capital by giving stability and returns, he said.Gemedo Dalle, minister with Ethiopias Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, said his country has done its best to put in place a stable investment environment, including laws and policies.Ethiopia estimates it will need more than $150bn (116) to implement its national climate action plan by 2030.As an industrialising nation, with the aim of becoming middle-income and carbon neutral by 2025, it has already built some modern infrastructure such as a light rail system in its capital - and the private sector is showing rising interest, Dalle said.But the Horn of Africa country is not seeking to partner with companies offering old technologies, he emphasised.We are not looking for any kind of investment - we are looking for a climate-resilient, green economy, he told the conference.Roome said development banks could assist in working out what policy measures are needed to reduce the risks of investing in climate change measures in developing nations, and then structuring deals to support that - whether its a guarantee that power will be purchased as agreed or that communities will be resettled if displaced by a clean energy project.Government and philanthropic funding should be used in a way that encourages private finance to enter the market, he said.We need to be much more rigorous about assessing the transformational value of any dollar that we spend, he added.In February the World Bank called out the West for failing to make the same gains in renewable energy generation that developing companies have achieved in recent years.

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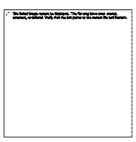

Premier visits KL; Kathleen Wynne focuses on health care during stop

Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake) - Fri May 26 2017
Byline: Brad Sherratt
Page: A1 / Front

Premier Kathleen Wynne said increases to health care funding and the new prescription drug plan announced in the new provincial budget will benefit Kirkland Lakers and all Ontarians.

The premier visited the area on Wednesday, touring Kirkland and District Hospital before journeying out to Matachewan First Nation.

The Premier's remarks at the hospital focused on the recent budget. She touched on several areas and how she feels they will positively impact the north.

"I'm happy to talk about how our health care plan is going to be able to deliver faster access to health care services across the north.," she said. "It includes the OHIP plus (the government's new prescription drug plan), but we are also increasing hospital operating budgets, So it means the Kirkland and District hospital and all hospitals in Ontario will be able to provide a better environment for both patients and staff. They will see a minimum of a two per cent increase across the system and a three percent increase in hospital budgets. That investment will help to reduce wait times across Ontario so that means that we will see seniors getting surgeries sooner and getting access to their local health support during their recovery. We also heard very clearly the Northern Ontario travel grant was not adequate. We are increasing that. We are putting $10 million into the Northern Ontario travel grant which will mean that more people will be able to access that support."

In an interview with Northern News following her speech, Wynne was asked about the cancellation of the Northlander train service and the changes to the bus schedules, and how that plays into people getting better access to health care in the south. She didn't address the passenger train service specifically, but said the issue of transportation in the north is being studied.

"We are working on a multimodal strategy for the north," she said. Certainly the ONTC was and is part of that but I want to make sure we are working with the coach lines. We've got a situation where we had a better system in the northeast than in the northwest and I want to see us have a northern multi-modal transportation strategy so that means ONTC, it means buses, it means coach lines so the Minister of Transportation is working on that as we speak."

As for what kind of model they are looking at the Premier stated it comes down to a question of "who are going to be the carriers of the routes that have either been abandoned or where there isn't enough traffic and they are at risk of being abandoned. That is one of the challenges. I want to make sure we have the right regulation in place. There has been a lot of talk for years about re-regulation or deregulation of the coach industry so there could be different kinds of vehicles and that is some of the stuff the Minister (is looking at)."

Wynne added the matter is being looked at it now.

Kirkland and District Hospital president and Chief Executive Officer Gary Sims said it was a thrill to have the Premier visit the hospital and feels it was positive recognition of the work the staff does on a daily basis.

"Its wonderful to get recognized and having the Premier hear means recognition of the work we do and it is a pleasure to have somebody come from so high in the government and recognize the good work, and to promote what the hospital is doing."

As for the increase in funding, Sims feels it is very important.

"It's tight. We have had some tough times. We have had several years of almost know increases at all, one per-cent, which puts us behind every year. However we do welcome the recognition. That two per cent is the minimum that we need. We know obviously lobby and work with the government and the LHIN (Local Health Integration Network) to try to leverage multiyear funding and of course I think the OHA (Ontario Hospital Association) put in for over four per cent and that is where I think we could really grow and develop."

Wynne was also very impressed with the hospital's hospice beds.

"There are really good ideas in northern communities. I (in her speech) pointed to the hospice beds. That is something we need to make sure everyone across the province, particularly in rural communities, even in the south, know that is happening because it is a really good idea. The Northeast LIHN have done a very good thing in supporting those."

During her presentation Wynne also spoke about Ontario Hydro and during her interview with the Northern News, she stated how important the changes will be to those of use in the north.

"Everyone is a residential ratepayer across the province across the province will see, on average, a 25 per cent reduction by summer. People who live in the rural and more remote areas, Hydro One, R1 and R2 customers as well as some higher paying remote distribution areas will see up to a 40 to 50 per cent reduction because we're going to reduce the distribution costs. That is what I really heard from northern folk is that those distribution costs could be higher than the electricity they actually used or just as high as the electricity as they use. That is not right. There should be some more evenness across the system."

Kirkland Lake Mayor Tony Antoniazzi was also on hand for the event.

"It is certainly always an honour to welcome Premier Wynne to our community. Since I have been Mayor it's her second trip to Kirkland Lake. She brought some good news, not new news. Increasing the travel grant and looking at ways of doing things differently."

After the event at the hospital Antoniazzi had a private meeting with the Premier. After that she travelled to Matachewan where she met members of the Matachewan First Nation before heading on to Timmins.

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Ontario's hydro plan terrible public policy

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The jiggery-pokery the Ontario Liberals are using to cut hydro bills will eventually cost us almost twice as much as it saves, the budget watchdog reported Wednesday.

This is the "Fair Hydro Plan," the Liberals'answer to the constant drumbeat of "hydro, hydro, hydro" from the opposition. It cuts electricity prices by 25 per cent for residential and small commercial customers now, and the future is the future's problem.

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 now. Refinancing isn't free, though, and the financial accountability officer Stephen LeClair and his staff say it'll save us $24 billion on our hydro bills now but cost us $45 billion in the end.

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.

The provincial government will also forgo about $1.5 billion a year in sales taxes on electricity, the report says, leaving the money in Ontarians' pockets. Assuming the government never runs a deficit that forces it to borrow, there's no net cost to that. That's an iffy assumption, obviously.

By 2027, the budget officer figures, electricity prices will be four per cent higher than they would otherwise.

What makes the plan "fair," Wynne said, is that it makes future Ontarians pay more and today's Ontarians pay less. What was unfair before, in Wynne's formulation, was today's Ontarians were having to pay too big a share of the costs of modernizing the power system when tomorrow's Ontarians will also benefit.

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 evidence Ontario won't need as much power as the operative plan calls for.

What would actually be fair would be to go back in time and make the Ontarians of the 1970s, '80s and '90s pay a little bit more for electricity to keep the system in good repair. Power, in the glory days, was unsustainably cheap.

Yes, part of what we're paying for now is ill-considered green-energy contracts. Part of it is from ditching dirty coal generation, which was a wiser decision but not a free one.

A lot of what we're paying for is simply dragging Ontario Hydro back from the brink of collapse. Decades of self-indulgence achieved that decrepitude and decades of selfdiscipline are the only way to undo it.

The Fair Hydro Plan is the Liberals'declaration that we're not quite up to the self-discipline they thought we were. The Fair Hydro Plan addresses a big political problem for the governing party but it's terrible public policy. It exemplifies the attitude that got us into trouble in the first place.

The opposition parties have no meaningful alternatives.

Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown promises to review generating contracts to look for loopholes, as if the Liberals hadn't thought of that. NDP Leader Andrea Horwath says an NDP government would buy back Hydro One, the sale of which has basically nothing to do with electricity prices. Each party's plan has other elements but at most they amount to fiddling the decimals.

So Ontario's electricity prices are high and in complaining about them with Trumpian vapidity, the opposition parties have stampeded the government into buying temporary relief by making them much higher than they'd have to be if we just gutted the next few years out.

Well done, everybody.

dreevely@postmedia.com

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