Infomart Newsletters

From: Infomart Newsletters
Sent: December 12, 2017 8:02 AM
To: Rosemarie Leclair
Subject: Morning News Clippings - Tuesday, December 12, 2017

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Morning News Clippings

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Date: Tuesday, December 12, 2017
Edited by: Paul Crawford (Paul.Crawford@oeb.ca)

Contact Editor

Clippings Summary

News - 22 Results

Proposed Union Gas utility merger with Enbridge would create 'virtual monopoly,' says analyst - Windsor - CBC News

www.cbc.ca - Mon Dec 11 2017
Tone: Neutral
Permalink

Paul Crawford noted on Monday, December 11, 2017
OEB is mentioned.

Energy analyst Dan McTeague is concerned a proposed merger of the Union Gas and Enbridge natural gas systems in Ontario would create a "virtual monopoly."

Decision Day: Councillors to vote on possible Guelph Hydro merger Wednesday | GuelphMercury.com

www.guelphmercury.com - Tue Dec 12 2017
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On Wednesday, Guelph councillors are faced with a tough decision: keep the city-owned Guelph Hydro just the way it is, or go forward with a merger with one of North America's largest municipally-owned utilities.

Industry's message to the Ontario government: Help! Your power prices are killing us!

Financial Post - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Negative
Byline: Special to Financial Post
Reach: 607500

Expensive industrial **electricity** prices in **Ontario** are killing our industry's competitiveness. Does a funeral for **Ontario** industry seem premature? Perhaps. But ask the steelworker who was downsized, the miner whose ...

Conservatives ask OPP to investigate ineligible expenses by power generators | CTV News

www.ctvnews.ca - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral
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The Progressive Conservatives have asked the Ontario Provincial Police to investigate millions in ineligible expenses -- including scuba gear and raccoon traps -- filed by nine power generators in the province.

Province announces new energy conservation incentive | CTV News

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Tone: Neutral
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Lindsay hospital uses extra funds to pay hydro

Kawartha Lakes This Week - Mon Dec 11 2017
Tone: Negative
Ad Value: $39
Reach: 29544 **Page:** 1

LINDSAY - The **Canadian** Taxpayers Federation is hoping to shine the light on the extent of how high **energy** bills affect communities by focusing on hospitals. The Stop High **Energy** Bills campaign is part of a more ...

Decision Day: Councillors to vote on possible Guelph Hydro merger Wednesday

GuelphMercury.com - Mon Dec 11 2017
Tone: Positive
Byline: gmcnaughton@guelphmercurytribune.com
Reach: 11700

On Wednesday, **Guelph** councillors are faced with a tough decision: keep the city-owned **Guelph Hydro** just the way it is, or go forward with a merger with one of **North** America's largest municipally-owned ...

Accounting difference leaves Ontario's deficit in question; The books are in the black, Liberals say, but watchdog is expecting $4B shortfall

Toronto Star - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Negative
Byline: Robert Benzie Toronto Star

Ad Value: $12,555
Reach: 361323 **Page:** A4

Ontario's fiscal watchdog warns the provincial budget is not balanced - due to a difference of opinion over accounting that was first raised by the auditor general last year. The Financial Accountability Officer (FAO) said Monday that there will be ...

Ontario in red?; Liberals on track for $4B deficit in 2017-18: Watchdog

Toronto Sun - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral
Byline: Shawn Jeffords

Ad Value: $4,480
Reach: 171076 **Page:** A4

Ontario's fiscal watchdog says the Liberal government will run a deficit this fiscal year, despite claims it has balanced the budget. In a new report Monday, the Financial Accountability Office said the Liberals will run a $4 billion deficit in ...

Watchdog says province won't balance budget, despite claims otherwise | CTV Kitchener News

kitchener.ctvnews.ca - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral
Permalink

Ontario's financial watchdog says the Liberal government will run a deficit this fiscal year, siding with the auditor general in a dispute over accounting practices the province has used to declare its books balanced.

PCs ask OPP to probe expenses

Toronto Sun - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Negative
Ad Value: $3,428
Reach: 171076 **Page:** A4

The Progressive Conservatives have asked the Ontario Provincial Police to investigate millions in ineligible expenses - including scuba gear and raccoon traps - filed by nine power generators in the province. Auditor General ...

Only fix for Ont. deficit: Raise taxes or spend less

Stratford Beacon-Herald - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral
Byline: David Reevely

Ad Value: $458
Reach: 10143 **Page:** A5

Ontario is facing years of worsening deficits because none of the major parties has a plan to make the province's spending line up with its income, says the government's Financial Accountability Office. "To the extent the ...

Don't eat that, Elmer

Shoreline Beacon - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral
Byline: Merriam Jim

Ad Value: $322
Reach: 3769 **Page:** A9

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne put her finger on her government's greatest weakness recently. The premier's spin on Conservative Patrick Brown's platform for the next June's election, described the Opposition leader's promise to cut $12 ...

No More Liberals

Toronto Sun - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Negative
Byline: J. Kirk

Ad Value: $1,154
Reach: 171076 **Page:** A14

With the provincial election coming in June I am sure I speak for many who hope to not see another Liberal government in this province. Since the Wynne government took office, we've been lied to and lost billions of our hard-earned dollars to their ...

Changing a regime for change's sake

Toronto Star - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Negative
Byline: Martin Regg Cohn

Ad Value: $26,870
Reach: 361323 **Page:** A6

Change that's not scary. That's the subliminal message emanating from Patrick Brown's Progressive Conservatives as they push out a new campaign platform officially called "People's Guarantee." Guaranteed not to rattle you. Underpinning the ...

Eagleson acclaimed Bruce County Warden

Shoreline Beacon - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral
Ad Value: $527
Reach: 3769 **Page:** A12

Arran-Elderslie Mayor Paul Eagleson was acclaimed warden of Bruce County at the Dec. 7 inaugural County council session. Eagleson, who was warden 1995, said it was a honour not only to sit at the head of county council but to be acclaimed by ...

Costly shocks to the system courtesy of provincial Liberals

Cambridge Times - Fri Dec 8 2017
Tone: Negative
Ad Value: $95
Reach: 45920 **Page:** 1

It's not difficult to find problems with the provincial Liberal government's handling of the **power** portfolio, from sky-high **electricity** costs and politically motivated (very expensive) **gas**-plant cancellations to a ...

Carbon pricing can't stand alone; Is shifting to a carbon tax smart policy, or just politics? Cohn, Dec. 9

Toronto Star - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Positive
Ad Value: $6,413
Reach: 361323 **Page:** A14

Is shifting to a carbon tax smart policy, or just politics? Cohn, Dec. 9 To be clear, carbon fee and dividend, or revenue-neutral carbon tax, is a well-established and well-known approach to pricing carbon. In order to be effective at rapidly ...

Canadian companies undermine federal coal plan

Toronto Sun - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Negative
Ad Value: $1,065
Reach: 171076 **Page:** A5

Canada's national pension fund manager is among a group of **Canadian** companies that are undermining the federal government's international anti-coal alliance by investing in new coal **power** plants overseas, an environmental ...

Canadian finance firms bet on coal rebound; Several companies investing in new plants overseas as Ottawa pushes phase-out

Toronto Star - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral
Byline: Mia Rabson The Canadian Press

Ad Value: $18,400
Reach: 361323 **Page:** GT8

Canada's national pension fund manager is among a group of **Canadian** companies that are undermining the federal government's international anti-coal alliance by investing in new coal **power** plants overseas, an environmental ...

PCs call for criminal investigation into ineligible expenses by power generators | CTV Toronto News

toronto.ctvnews.ca - Mon Dec 11 2017
Tone: Neutral
Permalink

The Progressive Conservatives have asked the Ontario Provincial Police to investigate millions in ineligible expenses -- including scuba gear and raccoon traps -- filed by nine power generators in the province.

Trade tribunal's ruling could derail future of LNG in B.C. - The Globe and Mail

www.theglobeandmail.com - Mon Dec 11 2017
Tone: Neutral
Permalink

Paul Crawford noted on Monday, December 11, 2017
Energy East is mentioned.

Canada just can't seem to get out of our own way when it comes to major infrastructure projects and responsible resource development. Political leaders and bureaucrats keep tripping us up with red tape, questionable decisions, higher taxes and ...

Clippings Summary

Full Articles

Proposed Union Gas utility merger with Enbridge would create 'virtual monopoly,' says analyst - Windsor - CBC News

www.cbc.ca - Mon Dec 11 2017
Tone: Neutral

Energy analyst Dan McTeague is concerned a proposed merger of the Union Gas and Enbridge natural gas systems in Ontario would create a "virtual monopoly."

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Industry's message to the Ontario government: Help! Your power prices are killing us!

Financial Post - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Negative
Byline: Special to Financial Post
Reach: 607500

Expensive industrial **electricity** prices in **Ontario** are killing our industry's competitiveness. Does a funeral for **Ontario** industry seem premature? Perhaps. But ask the steelworker who was downsized, the miner whose ore is now mined offshore or the autoworker who is concerned about future investment in his or her plant. They might disagree.

The **Ontario** government's Long-Term **Energy Plan** was released a few weeks ago. It states that **Ontario**'s industrial **electricity rates** are lower than the average price in the Great Lakes region. This is simply not correct. Pricing data do not support the statement. In fact, they contradict it. But saying so waves away a difficult problem. It is easier to deny something than to deal with it.

The provincial government's **Fair Hydro Plan**, rolled out earlier this year, is intended to reduce **electricity** bills for residential customers by 25 per cent. Unfortunately, almost none of it applies to large industrial customers, who continue to watch their bills increase and their competitiveness and ability to attract capital decrease. An industrial **Fair Hydro Plan** would help to preserve and create jobs and would grow the economy.

Between 2012 and 2016, **Ontario**'s cost of industrial **power** increased between 30 and 40 per cent. We pay more for **electricity** than they do in Quebec, Manitoba, New York or Texas - in some cases, more than twice as much.

Paying twice as much for **electricity** makes it hard to compete. Many large **Ontario** industrial firms operate in a global market where their product is a commodity: the price they get paid for their product is determined by the world market. They can't pass a higher cost along because the market simply won't pay for it - buyers will get it from someone else who has lower costs. Maybe some people consider that to be the industry's problem. They might think intellectual capital and a knowledge-based economy are the way of the 21st century. They don't realize that Ontario industry is, in fact, very much high-tech.

But another problem is how industries in Ontario are supposed to attract much-needed capital investment to their facilities. Consider this: if you were a board member of an electricity-intensive industrial operation that had facilities in Ontario and the U.S., where would you invest your next upgrades or new facilities? Both offer good supply chains. Both have strong labour forces. But one charges twice what the other does for power. And when that investment money goes south, the jobs go with it. Every at-risk industry has upstream suppliers, downstream customers, and retail applications, all of which will be impacted. Industry reaches pretty far through the Ontario economy - far enough that its absence will touch everyone in the province.

Ontarians need to spare a thought for how to better position our large industrials for success, including through additional programs targeted at addressing industrial electricity prices. That's not a silver bullet: it's just short-term assistance. Longer-term fixes mean repairing the electricity market, but that is years off. Ontario's large industrial electricity pricing problem is at a critical point and requires prompt action now.

Colin Anderson is president of the Association of Major Power Consumers in Ontario.

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Conservatives ask OPP to investigate ineligible expenses by power generators | CTV News

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Lindsay hospital uses extra funds to pay hydro

Kawartha Lakes This Week - Mon Dec 11 2017
Tone: Negative
Ad Value: $39
Reach: 29544 **Page:** 1

LINDSAY - The Canadian Taxpayers Federation is hoping to shine the light on the extent of how high energy bills affect communities by focusing on hospitals.

The Stop High Energy Bills campaign is part of a more than year-long campaign by the not-for-profit citizen's advocacy group dedicated to lower taxes, less waste and accountable government. Recently, the group released documents showing electricity cost increases for hospitals including Ross Memorial Hospital (RMH) in Lindsay.

The documents show the hospital's hydro have increased considerably over the past five years growing from $680,314 in 2012-13 to $966,032 in 2016-17; an increase of 42 per cent.

"How is Ross Memorial Hospital expected to manage their budget when **electricity** bills have rising dramatically every year?" asked the foundation's **Ontario** director, Christine Van Geyn. "The more the hospital has to spend keeping their lights on, the fewer resources they have for patients."

Ross Memorial president and CEO Dr. Bert Lauwers noted part of the answer is simple - take advantage of available programs and be forward-thinking.

On Nov. 27, the government announced it would be spending $64 million this year to improve **energy** efficiency in hospitals.

"The recent announcement of the Hospital **Energy** Efficiency Program will help make the Ross Memorial more **energy** efficient. We were grateful to receive $730,000 to replace an HVAC chiller and the south-facing curtain wall and windows on the east wing, which was built in the 1960s," explained Dr. Lauwers. "This investment will make us both greener and increase our **energy** efficiency."

Dr. Lauwers went on to say that, in developing its annual budget, the hospital considers all expenses, including **hydro**.

"In recent years, **hydro** costs have increased. RMH has implemented a number of green initiatives to be more **energy** efficient and to help offset rising costs and to reduce our **carbon footprint**," continued Dr. Lauwers.

While Van Geyn appreciates the boost in funding, noting it shows the government is responding to the federation's campaign, spending more money on **energy** efficiency programs won't solve the problem.

"We know from the data that many hospitals face increased bills even as they use less **electricity**. Encouraging hospitals to save **electricity** is important, but we already know it won't solve the problem. We need structural change," concluded Van Geyn.

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Decision Day: Councillors to vote on possible Guelph Hydro merger Wednesday

GuelphMercury.com - Mon Dec 11 2017
Tone: Positive
Byline: gmcnaughton@guelphmercurytribune.com
Reach: 11700

On Wednesday, **Guelph** councillors are faced with a tough decision: keep the city-owned **Guelph Hydro** just the way it is, or go forward with a merger with one of **North** America's largest municipally-owned **utilities**.

The prospective merger with Alectra, which has a reach stretching from St. Catharines to Hamilton to Mississauga to Barrie, has been a process months in the making.

Earlier this year, council gave the go-ahead to a committee to explore the options for **Guelph Hydro**'s future - sell, merge or status quo. The five-member strategies and options committee (SOC) was the one that put Alectra's name on the board.

"In terms of the value that they'll bring to this community, they're very advanced in terms of innovation, green **energy** types of project; the types of things our customers are going to want to look at more seriously in the years to come," Jane Armstrong, chair of Guelph Hydro's board, tells the Mercury Tribune.

"They're the kinds of things, on a very small scale, we're looking at, but we don't have the balance sheet or the strength to be able to do that on our own."

Derrick Thomson, the city's chief administrative officer and the SOC's chair, adds that with Alectra's size comes a larger bank account, and with that comes a larger chance to invest in Guelph's hydro.

"They certainly have a track record and the balance sheet to be able to fund that type of investment," he says.

"From a growth standpoint, Alectra has the ability because of the growth they're going to experience in the different municipalities to help build a really strong utility."

Thomson adds that, following public consultations, three things were identified as being the most important for Guelph Hydro's customers when it came to finding a merger partner: rates, jobs and money coming back into the community. And with Alectra, Thomson says, all of those boxes are checked.

Paying the bills

According to a report being presented to councillors at Wednesday's meeting is that a merger would save people some money on their hydro bills over the next decade, with scheduled distribution rate increases in 2021 and 2026 being skipped.

Armstrong says this is because the Ontario Energy Board, should it approve the merger, allows newly merged utilities to sit out these types of rate bumps for up to a decade.

"After that, then the rates are rebased from that point," she says.

"There is an agreement that rates wouldn't be rebased until such time that if there's any difference between rates in one municipality or another, they won't be harmonized until such the differences are immaterial."

Thomson adds that if the merger did not go ahead, Guelph Hydro customers could expect to see distribution rate increases of about five to 10 per cent each time.

However, Alectra currently charges more for numerous services than Guelph Hydro, or charges for services that Guelph Hydro does not. For example, Alectra charges $30 plus Measurement Canada fees for a meter dispute charge, while Guelph Hydro charges $10 plus fees. As well, Guelph Hydro charges $50 for a disconnect or reconnect at the pole for non-payment during business hours. The same service through Alectra costs $185.

Alectra also charges for account history statements, income tax letters and easement letters, among other services, at $15 each. There are no fees listed by Guelph Hydro for these services.

In an email to the Mercury Tribune, Stacey Hare, an online communications specialist for the city, says that Guelph and Rockwood ratepayers could be saved from having to pay these fees post-merger.

"The Ontario Energy Board has allowed communities involved in the previous Alectra merger to continue operating as separate rate zones, and we expect the same would be true for Guelph," she states.

"For example, if Guelph Hydro either doesn't charge for certain services or charges less than Alectra, then Guelph's rates would continue to apply to Guelph and Rockwood customers."

Collecting paycheques

With a merger with Alectra, the number of hydro workers in the city is expected to go down. According to the staff report recommending the merger, 70 of the 130 people currently employed by Guelph Hydro would stay on board in the city. Of the remaining 60, half would be asked to relocate within Alectra's network, while the others "are expected to be addressed through attrition, voluntary retirement or voluntary separation whenever possible."

Thomson points out that these job reductions are not going to happen right away.

"If council makes the decision (to go ahead with the merger) on the 13th, it doesn't mean on the 14th that people are losing their jobs," he says.

"People, understandably, don't understand that point. This is going to be a two-to-three-year process, and lots of things happen in two-to-three years. "

The report states that relocations would start in 2019, after the Ontario Energy Board gives a thumbs up to the merger. The majority of relocations would come between 2020 and 2022.

Thomson adds that, with Alectra expected to grow its market share, new positions could become available due to that growth.

Armstrong says it has not been discussed at this time whether employees already with Alectra would be brought to Guelph as part of the merger.

Future of a new utility

While Alectra is a large company - the second largest municipally-owned utility company in North America, in fact, standing behind only the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power - Thomson says residents should not fear of a large corporation with only profits in mind taking over.

"It's 97-per-cent owned and held by municipalities, just like Guelph. Just like our council, they have councils. They clearly … didn't want to be privatized either, and they formed what is really a municipal co-operative," he says.

"The likelihood of it ever being privatized is slim, both from the shareholder agreement and the municipal ownership and the tax disincentives to go private."

Alectra was created following the merger of Mississauga's Enersource; Markham, Barrie and Vaughan's PowerStream; and Hamilton and St. Catharines' Horizon. That merger was done in order to purchase Hydro One Brampton from the Ontario government, which brought the province more than $600 million in revenue.

Some were taken by surprise when news of a possible merger with Alectra first broke in October. Since then, there have been numerous social media posts calling for a public vote on whether to go ahead with the merger.

Thomson says that based on what would likely be low voter turnout and the role councillors currently play, that would not be the best route to go.

"The last municipal election we had, only 45 per cent of the entire electorate voted. Typically a referendum would not work for this type of an issue," he says.

"The constituents elect members of council to make these types of decisions for them. We've hired professional accounting people, profession legal people that have provided fair and reasonable reports. So we've provided councillors with all of the right information for them to be able to make a decision."

Guelph councillors are expected to vote on whether to proceed with a merger at a special meeting of council Dec. 13. The meeting, which features more than 30 people offering public delegations as of press time, gets underway at 6:30 p.m. at city hall.

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Accounting difference leaves Ontario's deficit in question; The books are in the black, Liberals say, but watchdog is expecting $4B shortfall

Toronto Star - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Negative
Byline: Robert Benzie Toronto Star

Ad Value: $12,555
Reach: 361323 **Page:** A4

Ontario's fiscal watchdog warns the provincial budget is not balanced - due to a difference of opinion over accounting that was first raised by the auditor general last year.

The Financial Accountability Officer (FAO) said Monday that there will be a $4-billion deficit in 2017-18 even though the Liberals maintain the books are in the black.

J. David Wake said the government's "decision not to adopt the auditor general's accounting recommendations has contributed to a significant and growing gap between the fiscal outcomes projected by the FAO and the province."

At issue is whether approximately $11 billion in the government co-sponsored Ontario Public Service Employees' Union Pension Plan and the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan can be counted toward the bottom line at Queen's Park.

Auditor general Bonnie Lysyk and her predecessors booked the holdings as an asset starting in 2002, but she changed her mind last year.

The government appointed Tricia O'Malley, chair of the Canadian Actuarial Standards Oversight Council, to lead a blue-ribbon panel to study the accounting change.

O'Malley - along with Murray Gold, of Koskie Minsky LLP, Uros Karadzic of Ernst and Young and Paul Martin, a controller with the New Brunswick government and former partner at Grant Thornton LLP - concluded the Liberals' accounting was sound.

But Lysyk said she is not changing her mind. Her argument is bolstered by Wake's fall update.

The FAO also backed the auditor general in questioning the complex mechanism the government has developed to bankroll the 25-per-cent electricity rate cut.

Because of the actuarial tussle, "it is becoming more difficult for legislators and the public to assess the government's fiscal projections."

Even though the economy is growing at a pace ahead of the Canadian average, the accounting adjustment left the FAO projecting shortfalls of $7.1 billion in 2018-19, $7.8 billion in 2019-20, $9 billion in 2020-21, and $9.8 billion in 2021-22.

"The FAO is projecting very strong growth for the Ontario economy in 2017," Wake wrote in his 28-page report. However, that will be more than offset by increased spending, leading to the deficits, he warned. That could lead to

Ontario's net debt eclipsing the $400-billion mark in the next four years.

Premier Kathleen Wynne said the government will stick with accounting practices that include the pension assets.

"I want to thank the FAO for his report. He … confirmed that under the accounting presentation that we've been using for the last 16 years, the budget is balanced, and in fact, there's a small surplus for 2017-18," Wynne told the House. "So the report actually shows that our plan is working: The economy is growing, our unemployment rate is the lowest it has been in 17 years, and more than 843,000 net new jobs have been created since the recession."

Progressive Conservative MPP Vic Fedeli said the findings were "a blistering indictment" of the Liberal government and urged voters to opt for his party in the June 7 election.

"The PC plan is different from the Liberal plan. (We) will find two cents on every dollar through eliminating waste this government doesn't even believe exists. The premier says savings are impossible," Fedeli said. Wynne countered that electing the Tories would mean $12 billion "out of health care and education and services in this province."

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath, for her part, expressed concern.

"The most important lesson from the FAO is, once again, him saying … that the Liberal borrowing scheme that they put forward is not in the best interest of the people of Ontario," Horwath said.

"It's really clear that the FAO has identified a really big problem here."

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Ontario in red?; Liberals on track for $4B deficit in 2017-18: Watchdog

Toronto Sun - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral
Byline: Shawn Jeffords

Ad Value: $4,480
Reach: 171076 **Page:** A4

Ontario's fiscal watchdog says the Liberal government will run a deficit this fiscal year, despite claims it has balanced the budget.

In a new report Monday, the Financial Accountability Office said the Liberals will run a $4 billion deficit in 2017-18, and will continue to be in the red over the next few years.

More moderate growth in revenues and the increasing fiscal impact of the province's Fair Hydro Plan, which cuts electricity rates by 25%, will take their toll on Ontario's books the report notes.

It also says a long-simmering accounting dispute between the Liberal government and Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk over how to count two public sector pension plans on the ledger is contributing to uncertainty.

"We've been very consistent that because of a number of factors we think the deficit will re-emerge," said FAO chief economist David West. "Now, with this accounting debate it will become more significant."

The Liberals presented a balanced budget in the spring, a year ahead of the provincial election, and have promised to keep the books in balance through the next couple of years.

The FAO, however, projects the government's budget deficit will grow to $9.8 billion in 2021-22.

"The government is out borrowing this money," **West** said. "This current year they're going to borrow $23 billion in the markets. That's going to rise to $45 billion in the coming years."

The FAO also said the government's new **hydro** **plan** will add $3.2 billion to the budget deficit by 2021-2022.

Last year Lysyk questioned the province's decision to include a pair of **public** pensions - the **Ontario** **Public** **Service** Employee's Union Pension **Plan** and the **Ontario** Teacher's Pension **Plan** - as assets on its balance sheet.

The FAO said that since the government has not adopted the auditor's recommended accounting for both the pension assets, and with the addition of the **Fair** **Hydro** **Plan**, it is becoming more difficult for legislators to assess the government's fiscal projections.

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Watchdog says province won't balance budget, despite claims otherwise | CTV Kitchener News

kitchener.ctvnews.ca - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral

Ontario's financial watchdog says the Liberal government will run a deficit this fiscal year, siding with the auditor general in a dispute over accounting practices the province has used to declare its books balanced.

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PCs ask OPP to probe expenses

Toronto Sun - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Negative
Ad Value: $3,428
Reach: 171076 **Page:** A4

The Progressive Conservatives have asked the **Ontario** Provincial Police to investigate millions in ineligible expenses - including scuba gear and raccoon traps - filed by nine **power** generators in the province.

Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk reported last week that the generators claimed up to $260 million in ineligible costs between 2006 and 2015, under a program designed to pay **power** generators for fuel, maintenance and operating costs when the system operator puts them on standby to supply **energy**.

The **Independent** **Electricity** System Operator says it's closer to $200 million, and that $168 million has been repaid.

Progressive Conservative Todd Smith has now written to the OPP to ask them to investigate, saying the abuses were so egregious that a second look by law enforcement is prudent.

"I have serious concerns about what appeared to be a broad and systemic abuse of the **energy** system and ultimately, the hard-earned money of **ratepayers**," Smith wrote to Commissioner Vince Hawkes.

The OPP received the letter Monday morning, but a spokeswoman said it was too early to say what they will do.

Smith noted that his party previously asked a legislative committee to study the IESO's accounting and record retention practices as well as contract management, following an earlier auditor general report on the accounting surrounding the Liberal government's plan to cut hydro bills by 25%.

That request was denied by the Liberaldominated committee.

"We thought about all of the different ways that we could try and provide some transparency here, but in spite of all of our efforts and trying to get the justice committee to look into it and being stonewalled by the Liberals at committee, this was really the only other alternative we had," Smith said.

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said both he and the IESO take the matter seriously, which is why the IESO investigated, recouped $168 million of inappropriate costs and is changing the system.

"What we're talking about here is an older program that has been adjusted to make sure that this won't happen again," he said.

Both the Tories and the NDP have also called on the IESO to release the names of the nine power generators. The IESO has said that rules around commercial sensitivity prevent it from publishing those names.

One of the nine generators is Goreway Power Station in Brampton, Ont., which has repaid nearly all of the $100 million it was found to have "gamed" the system out of, but the names of most of the generators have not been made public.

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Only fix for Ont. deficit: Raise taxes or spend less

The Beacon Herald

Stratford Beacon-Herald - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral
Byline: David Reevely

Ad Value: $458
Reach: 10143 **Page:** A5

Ontario is facing years of worsening deficits because none of the major parties has a plan to make the province's spending line up with its income, says the government's Financial Accountability Office.

"To the extent the government delays making those adjustments today, the adjustments will become more difficult in the future, and you're shifting it to future generations and to young people," said David West, the office's chief economist, releasing the agency's latest economic and fiscal outlook Monday morning.

The Liberals under Premier Kathleen Wynne have put a lot of their political capital into a promise to balance the provincial budget this year, and they've done it, but it won't last, according to the watchdog's numbers.

The Liberals are selling assets, getting a big bubble of federal infrastructure money, selling carbonmarket permits and booking the last year of revenues from a debtretirement charge for the electricity system they're pledging to scrap. The province's strengthening economy will mean equalization payments that shrink after this year. The government is scrapping the debtretirement charge on electricity bills.

The Liberals want to run the numbers in a way that makes them look good and they're not obviously wrong, but all the government's independent officers with anything to say about it - the auditor general, the financial accountability officer - say what they're doing is not OK.

Next year, using accounting **rules** on the politician-friendly "easy" setting, we'll run a deficit of $1.9 billion. In 2022, the deficit will be $3.7 billion, the FAO says.

If we run the numbers the hard way, the deficit by 2022 is $9.8 billion.

There's no magic solution to this.

The government can raise taxes and fees or it can cut spending.

"Raising tax **rates** could impact economic growth, while program restraint would place **greater** stress on (limited budgets)," **West** said.

This is happening in pretty good times. The Liberals are projecting a strong economy during the next few years and **West** and the FAO don't disagree. They're all expecting Ontarians to be well employed and the economy to grow.

Finance Minister Charles Sousa liked that part, saying, "The FAO confirms that **Ontario**'s economy is growing and he expects this growth to continue."

But, the minister went on, "(W)e know that even though our economy is growing, not everyone is benefitting from this growth. That's why we're creating fairness and opportunity by raising the minimum wage, making university and college tuition free and making prescription drugs free for young people."

Nobody ever says three years from now we'll be in a recession that'll rip through the government's books like a wildfire. Those always arrive unexpectedly, as far as the forecasters are concerned, which makes the assumption that we'll overspend even in good times even more worrying. This is when you pay debt off, not take on more.

More broadly, **Ontario** can't go on indefinitely with a government that's at war with the legislature's designated experts over billions of dollars in assets and debts the government might have, or not.

The Progressive Conservatives are a little deeper in this muck than even the Liberals are. They brandish the auditor general and budget watchdog reports and accuse the Liberals of cooking the books, and yet they're using the Liberals'numbers as the foundation for their own fiscal **plan**.

The last time a new party took **power** in **Ontario**, when the Liberals defeated the Tories in 2003, we had a similar situation: the Liberals used the Tory numbers to build their own **plan**. Then, they got into office and proclaimed their horror at the $5.6-billion deficit lurking on the desk.

Under any but the very most optimistic projections, whoever wins June's election is in for a similar reality check. What they're going to do about it should be a central campaign question. dreevely@postmedia.com

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Don't eat that, Elmer

Shoreline Beacon - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral
Byline: Merriam Jim

Ad Value: $322
Reach: 3769 **Page:** A9

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne put her finger on her government's greatest weakness recently.

The premier's spin on Conservative Patrick Brown's platform for the next June's election, described the Opposition leader's promise to cut $12 billion from the provincial budget as "ridiculous."

Therein lies the issue.

The weakness of Wynne's government and that of her predecessor Dalton McGuinty is their addiction to spending and debt.

The province's current debt is projected to be $312 billion this year, or roughly $22,000 for every man, woman and child in the province. It is expected to grow to $336 billion in 2019-2020.

When McGuinty was first elected premier in 2003, the debt was about $110 billion - that's a $200 billion increase in 14 years.

Brown's election platform says the savings could be found over three years -$6 billion from cancelling **Ontario**'s capand-trade program and another $6 billion from a value-for-money audit.

Cap and trade is a complex issue for another day, but a value-formoney audit might be the single best thing that has happened to **Ontario** in years.

Such an audit would help to find efficiencies across the entire provincial spectrum.

Not so, says the premier.

"In my experience efficiencies have always been code for cuts with Conservatives," Wynne told The **Canadian** Press.

In effect the premier is arguing that every single branch of government is working to maximum efficiency, as is every employee of the **public service**.

Well, don't eat that Elmer, that's bull feathers.

To be **fair**, Wynne says her government has done its own audit -a program spending **review**. It would be interesting to know what the **review** said about the billions spent on **gas** plant cancellations for political gain, on a bungled e-health initiative, on selling millions of dollars's worth of **power** to the U.S. each month at a loss. And so much more.

However, the premier claims that **review** is one of the reasons the province was able to eliminate the deficit and balance the budget last summer.

Again, don't eat that Elmer. The so-called balanced budget resulted from the one-time sale of **Hydro** One -a decision that will go down in history as Wynne's biggest boondoggle -and increasing the aforementioned debt.

We could all accomplish the same thing with our household budgets by using our credit cards to pay our expenses.

Every elementary school **student** in the province understands what Wynne seems to ignore; all that debt has to be paid back someday.

Another revealing comment about the Liberal view of debt came at budget time from Charles Sousa, Minister of Finance.

He said the net debt in the province is improving and the Liberals are borrowing $30 billion less than they had anticipated.

In the alternate universe where this government seems to operate, apparently borrowing less is good news.

Deb Matthews, Deputy Premier, said Brown's cuts will come from health care and education, because they take the lion's share of Ontario's budget.

Perhaps she was arguing that the way the health care bureaucracy has ballooned under this government can't be cut because all the pencil pushers are critical to frontline care in the province.

Or that the willy-nilly closing of rural schools is efficient, instead of working with communities to find ways in which to make full use of them.

On a regular basis the province lectures the great unwashed about sensible use of debt. Perhaps those being lectured will have a reply at the ballot box.

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No More Liberals

Toronto Sun - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Negative
Byline: J. Kirk

Ad Value: $1,154
Reach: 171076 **Page:** A14

With the provincial election coming in June I am sure I speak for many who hope to not see another Liberal government in this province. Since the Wynne government took office, we've been lied to and lost billions of our hard-earned dollars to their frivolous, unnecessary, disorganized and often hidden squandering at our expense. Not to mention their sense of entitlement, to spending money on bonuses, such as a total payout of $4.4 million to the CEO of Hydro One, and their own advertisements on radio and TV about how well they think they are doing. Their self-entitlement is mind boggling. In this next election, we don't need broken promises or "stretch goals". We need a government that will not remind us of how the last government has wronged us - we already know that. We need a government that is going to hold true to its word on the promises it presents and that doesn't tell us it is going to do something it can't possibly do. The Liberals have left a terrible financial mess. The next government would be best to promise something that is real and achievable.

We deserve that. We will have to realize that not much can be promised as there is a lot of damage to undo. Recovery of our economy is paramount. Put our money back in our pockets.

J. KIRK ALLISTON

(The Liberals? Never)

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Changing a regime for change's sake

Toronto Star - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Negative
Byline: Martin Regg Cohn

Ad Value: $26,870
Reach: 361323 **Page:** A6

Change that's not scary.

That's the subliminal message emanating from Patrick Brown's Progressive Conservatives as they push out a new campaign platform officially called "People's Guarantee." Guaranteed not to rattle you.

Underpinning the platform is a promise to deliver kinder, gentler, more reassuring regime change. And on the surface, it succeeds - by pledging to (more or less) stick with Liberal commitments on pharmacare, rent controls and minimum wages (albeit more slowly).

But there's a catch: Change that's not so scary - but definitely disruptive - on **climate** change.

It's getting a lot less coverage than other PC commitments, but Brown would rip up **Ontario**'s existing **cap and trade** program. The Tories would replace it with a carbon tax of their own - as required by a federal "backstop" law - that would end up pushing fuel prices significantly higher (albeit rebated via income tax cuts and child-care credits promised elsewhere in their platform).

Such a switch, from **cap and trade** to carbon tax, has never before been successfully attempted, as **Ontario**'s **independent** environmental commissioner, Dianne Saxe, pointed out to me in my weekend column. So why would Brown bother with an untried and unproven changeover at this stage of the game?

Change for change's sake.

Environmental experts have been debating the relative benefits of rival systems for a decade, which is one reason **Ontario** took so long to make up its own mind. Last year, after years of foot-dragging, the province finally followed the lead of California and Quebec by linking up with their tried-and-tested **cap and trade** system.

No loony-left idea, it had been shepherded by the state's then-governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger (a Republican) and Quebec's then-premier Jean Charest (like Brown, a former federal Tory). Why do Brown's Progressive Conservatives believe a system favoured by fellow right-wingers is so wrong-headed?

The PCs are ostensibly opposed to what the **Ontario** government does with money raised from carbon emitters. In their People's Guarantee platform, the Tories cheekily dub it the "Liberal **Cap-and-Trade** Slush Fund," brimming with billions of dollars paid by polluters.

Brown claims that the money is being squandered by the Liberals on patronage pals and pet projects. In fact, the spending is being scrutinized by the environmental commissioner and is allocated to mundane projects such as rapid transit, **energy** retrofits and bike lanes.

The PC platform document complains that "the Liberals . . . only seem to care about the growing yet still small share of the population who take **public** transit." But even if Tories doubt the merits of funding bike lanes or mass transit, there is a simpler way for them to cut that "Liberal **Cap-and-Trade** Slush Fund" down to size.

Brown could simply **rebate** those **cap-and-trade** billions directly to taxpayers by making the system "revenue neutral" - just like his proposed carbon tax. In other words (and numbers), they could still take the money from polluters as the province does today, but without investing in supposedly suspect environmental measures - instead "using all the **cap-and-trade** revenues to finance tax cuts," as Jack Gibbons, head of the **Ontario** Clean Air Alliance, says.

The appeal of their alternative carbon tax, according to **Ontario**'s PCs, is that the money will go straight back to voters through tax cuts. But there is nothing necessarily neutral about carbon tax revenues, as B.C. has just demonstrated: That province's new NDP government has announced that proceeds from the carbon tax will now be invested in environmental projects to fight global warming - just like **Ontario**'s **cap-and-trade** regime.

So if the existing **Ontario** Liberal system can be made revenue neutral with a change in government and the proposed PC carbon tax can be switched to a so-called slush fund on a whim, why bother switching systems at all?

More to the point, given that many industries support a price on carbon as long as it is clear and certain, why create uncertainty by changing systems in mid-stream?

Comparing the rival systems this month, Dave Sawyer of EnviroEconomics noted that "on emission reductions, the **cap-and-trade** scenario outperforms the carbon tax scenario." All this back and forth comes at a cost because "the down side is this policy lurching will erode confidence and expectations in carbon pricing, which undermines the price signal."

It would also be costly to change midway through. Brown's platform has budgeted $1.5 billion for "transitioning away from **cap-and-trade** and into a carbon pricing system," noting that a PC government will "ensure that businesses are kept whole."

Cap and trade is so difficult to understand that it's hard to love, but it's commendably flexible. A carbon tax, simple as it sounds, can be unhelpfully rigid in a mixed economy like ours, the environmental commissioner says.

Oddly, Brown's Tories denounced a carbon tax for years, but have belatedly embraced it. Is this change for **climate** change's sake, or merely for the sake of regime change?

Martin Regg Cohn's political column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. mcohn@thestar.ca, Twitter: @reggcohn

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Eagleson acclaimed Bruce County Warden

Shoreline Beacon

Shoreline Beacon - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral
Ad Value: $527
Reach: 3769 **Page:** A12

Arran-Elderslie Mayor Paul Eagleson was acclaimed warden of Bruce County at the Dec. 7 inaugural County council session.

Eagleson, who was warden 1995, said it was a honour not only to sit at the head of county council but to be acclaimed by members of council.

Reflecting on his previous term of warden, he noted that while a lot has changed in the past 22 years, "the basic responsibilities of advocating for Bruce County the place and Bruce County the organization are still the same."

In his inaugural address Eagleson noted many of the county priorities for 2018 are set out in next year's spending estimates. His job, he said, will be to see them through to completion.

They include dealing with the McCurdy Bridge on the boundary of Arran-Elderslie and Brockton, and the Mill Creek Bridge in Port Elgin, advancing the SWIFT broadband project and initiating a new paramedic station in Saugeen Shores.

In addition to countywide initiatives contained in the annual business **plan**, Eagleson said he plans to continue to move a **natural gas** extension project forward for southern Bruce County.

The project is awaiting a decision by the **Ontario Energy Board** as to which supplier will get the **contract** to bring **natural gas** to Arran-Elderslie, **Huron**-Kinloss and Kincardine.

Eagleson is the 133rd person to hold the position of warden for Bruce County since the county was created in 1867.

Eagleson takes over from outgoing warden Huron-Kinloss Mayor Mitch Twolan, who held the warden's position for the past three years.

Twolan predicted the county's economic development partnership with Bruce Power, which has seen dozens of companies move to the area, will continue to be at the forefront of the county's growth.

"The most important thing, in my mind, that we can do is try to find economic development so people in our communities can go to work every day and have the quality of life to support their families," said Twolan. "That's the number one piece of advice that I give to Warden Eagleson."

Eagleson operates a funeral home in Tara, and a furniture store in Southampton.

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Costly shocks to the system courtesy of provincial Liberals

Cambridge Times - Fri Dec 8 2017
Tone: Negative
Ad Value: $95
Reach: 45920 **Page:** 1

It's not difficult to find problems with the provincial Liberal government's handling of the power portfolio, from sky-high electricity costs and politically motivated (very expensive) gas-plant cancellations to a variety of issues identified last week by Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk.

The common theme to it all is Ontario residents are forced to pay more than they should, be it through user fees or taxes. This needs to stop.

Here are just a few highlights - rather, lowlights - from Lysyk's annual report:

nine electricity generators claimed up to $260 million in ineligible costs - including staff car washes, carpet cleaning, landscaping and scuba gear, among others - between 2006 and 2016 (about two-thirds has been repaid);

a program to reduce energy use by large industrial operations during peak times has resulted in higher costs for residential and small business customers;

Independent Electricity System Operator has yet to implement repeated Ontario Energy Board recommendations that could save ratepayers $30 million per year.

On an somewhat related note, Lysyk took the Liberals to task regarding advertising she said could be seen as political, given the lead-up to next year's provincial election.

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Carbon pricing can't stand alone; Is shifting to a carbon tax smart policy, or just politics? Cohn, Dec. 9

Toronto Star - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Positive
Ad Value: $6,413
Reach: 361323 **Page:** A14

Is shifting to a carbon tax smart policy, or just politics? Cohn, Dec. 9

To be clear, carbon fee and dividend, or revenue-neutral carbon tax, is a well-established and well-known approach to pricing carbon.

In order to be effective at rapidly reducing carbon emissions, a carbon price has to be high and has to rise steeply - so quickly and steeply that returning revenues to citizens is the only way that it can be socially sustainable and just. In some approaches, the tax is fully revenue neutral; in others, a portion is retained for investment in infrastructure to support a rapid and just transition to a lower-impact way of life.

However, carbon pricing cannot stand alone: it needs to be supported by a responsible environmental **review** process; by the elimination of all subsidies to polluting industries; by trade policies such as border adjustments; and by investment in infrastructure that supports low-emissions **energy** production, **transportation** and healthy agriculture.

Carbon tax is not new and untested - it has been tried before, in both Australia and in B.C. It was effective in Australia at reducing emissions, before a change in government did away with it. In B.C., a (not quite revenue-neutral, approximately 73 per cent returned to taxpayers) carbon tax has also been effective in reducing emissions. But even if it were new, there is little reason to accept Martin Regg Cohn's assertion that this invalidates it - everything, including the industry-friendly **cap and trade**, is new before we try it, and in the urgency for **climate** justice, we need to engage fully in action, employing new and old, in reconnecting with each other and the planet, marshalling all our funds and energies for change.

Rebecca Weigand, **Toronto**

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Canadian companies undermine federal coal plan

Toronto Sun - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Negative
Ad Value: $1,065
Reach: 171076 **Page:** A5

Canada's national pension fund manager is among a group of **Canadian** companies that are undermining the federal government's international anti-coal alliance by investing in new coal **power** plants overseas, an environmental organization says.

Friends of the Earth Canada joined with Germany's Urgewald to release a report today looking at the top 100 private investors putting money down to expand **coal-fired electricity** - sometimes in places where there isn't any coal-generated **power** at the moment.

The report lists six **Canadian** financial companies among the top 100 investors in new coal plants in the world. Together, Sun Life, **Power Corporation**, Caisse de depot et placement du Quebec, Royal Bank of Canada, Manulife Financial and the Canada Pension **Plan** Investment Board have pledged $2.9 billion towards building new coal plants overseas.

Urgewald tracks coal plants around the world and reports there are 1,600 new plants in development in 62 nations, more than a dozen of which don't have any coalfired plants now.

While Environment Minister Catherine McKenna is claiming to be a global leader on phasing out the dirtiest of **electricity** sources, private investors are "undermining that commitment," says Friends of the Earth senior policy adviser John Bennett.

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Canadian finance firms bet on coal rebound; Several companies investing in new plants overseas as Ottawa pushes phase-out

Toronto Star - Tue Dec 12 2017
Tone: Neutral
Byline: Mia Rabson The Canadian Press

Ad Value: $18,400
Reach: 361323 **Page:** GT8

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Canada and the United Kingdom last month teamed up to launch the Powering Past Coal Alliance, trying to bring the rest of the world on side with a campaign pledge to phase out coal as a **power** source entirely by 2030 for the developed world and 2050 for everyone else.

Twenty national governments and at least seven subnational governments - five of them from Canada - signed onto the alliance last month. The hope is to grow the number to 50 by the time the United Nations 24th **climate** change conference takes place in November 2018.

McKenna will meet with leaders and officials from the alliance this week in Paris, where French President Emmanuel Macron is hosting a **climate** change meeting to mark the two year anniversary of the Paris **climate** change accord. This meeting is largely focused on international **climate** finance as the world tries to meet the goal to have $100 billion a year to invest in **climate** change mitigation and adaptation projects in the developing world by 2020.

The accord commits the world to keeping the average global temperature from rising more than 2 C over pre-industrial levels by the end of the century. To do that, scientists suggest global carbon emissions have to start dropping in less than three years, and the only way that is going to happen is by shutting down coal plants.

Coal is responsible for almost half of global carbon dioxide emissions.

McKenna's office did not respond to a request for comment.

Last week, McKenna was in China where she said she was talking about phasing out coal. While China is trying to cut its own coal use, it uses more coal to make **power** than the rest of the world combined. Hence, McKenna said it's currently impossible to expect China to commit to eliminating it.

McKenna said she wasn't planning to raise the issue of China investing in new plants outside its borders. Urgewald's data show Chinese-owned companies are behind about 140 new coal plants in development outside China.

Turns out **Canadian** money is also financing international coal plants, through private investors.

Dale Marshall, national program manager for Environmental Defence, said the Paris meeting this week has a lot of work to do trying to figure out how national governments can increase their commitments but also leverage more from the private sector.

Erin Flanagan, director of federal policy for the Pembina Institute, said Canada can do more to discourage Canadians from investing in coal and encourage investments in clean **energy**. That could include a national requirement for investment companies to include **climate** change risks when publishing decisions about investment opportunities.

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PCs call for criminal investigation into ineligible expenses by power generators | CTV Toronto News

toronto.ctvnews.ca - Mon Dec 11 2017
Tone: Neutral

The Progressive Conservatives have asked the Ontario Provincial Police to investigate millions in ineligible expenses -- including scuba gear and raccoon traps -- filed by nine power generators in the province.

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Trade tribunal’s ruling could derail future of LNG in B.C. - The Globe and Mail

www.theglobeandmail.com - Mon Dec 11 2017
Tone: Neutral

Canada just can't seem to get out of our own way when it comes to major infrastructure projects and responsible resource development. Political leaders and bureaucrats keep tripping us up with red tape, questionable decisions, higher taxes and costly self-inflicted mistakes.

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