John Bozzo

From:	John Bozzo
Sent:	January 3, 2018 8:58 AM
To:	##Clippings_Distribution_List
Subject:	Morning News Summary - Wed. Jan. 3, 2018

Good morning,

The highlight today is continuing coverage of the OEB's OPG's 2017-2021 payment amounts decision. The Decision is quoted throughout both the Toronto Star and Globe stories. The Globe story had some criticism from Colin Anderson, President of Association of Major Power Producers in Ontario, with respect to the OEB's decision to approve all the funds OPG asked for regarding Darlington Unit 2 refurbishment and Pickering Extended Operations.

The Toronto Star: OPG must cut $500M over next 5 years from nuclear operations budget, energy regular orders

- The Ontario Energy Board ordered the Ontario Power Generation to cut the "excessive" costs associated with pensions and benefits from its nuclear business' administration, operations and maintenance budget.
- Article lists the cuts made in the Decision.
- "The OEB finds that OPG's overall pension and benefits costs are clearly excessive ... there is voluminous evidence demonstrating that the costs of these programs are well above market," the OEB report said. "It would not be reasonable, in the OEB's view, to require ratepayers to pay these excessive costs."
- "OPG is reviewing the decision in detail," the company said in a statement, adding that it will submit a draft rate order to implement the OEB's decision by Jan. 17.
- While the final impact will be determined in early 2018, OPG estimated that its application would cost the average ratepayer an additional 65 cents a month over the five-year-period.
    - The OEB also notes that the impact of the rate increase would not immediately be felt by consumers because of the Liberal government's 25 per cent cut to hydro bills.

The Globe and Mail: Ontario power utility told to cut nuclear budget by $500-million

- Ontario's government-owned power utility has come under renewed fire for its generous compensation practices, with the province's regulator slashing $500-million from the Crown corporation's budget for nuclear operations over the next five years.
- "We are reviewing the decision in detail," OPG spokesman Neal Kelly said Tuesday.
- Both the Auditor-General and Mr. Leech recommended that OPG pay $1 in pension contributions for every $1 paid by its employees – as is the norm for other provincial employees.
    - "The pension issue has been part of every OPG hearing" since it came under OEB jurisdiction, said Brady Yauch, executive director of the Consumer Policy Institute, which intervened in the rate application. "It's been viewed as wildly generous."
- Major industrial customers said the OEB decision is an indication of business as usual in the power sector, where sharply higher prices have put competitive pressures on big electricity users. The OEB decision appeared to lock in plans for refurbishments of OPG's nuclear reactor fleet.
    - The company "pretty much got everything it wanted" on the financing plan for the major nuclear projects, said Colin Anderson, president of the Association of Major Power Consumers in Ontario.

Other Stories

Norwhich Gazette: Pre-paid hydro plan morally repugnant (re-post of the same editorial from a few weeks ago, full piece below)

- Editorial is about Hydro One's distribution application.
- OEB is mentioned: Hydro One's submission to the Ontario Energy Board, seeking regulatory approval for its "collection enhancements" plan, buried on Page 2,038 of a 2,076-page document, doesn't specify it will be voluntary.
  - Author says that the OEB should reject this proposal.

Stoney Creek News: Hydro bills can be pricey during the holidays (full story below, opinion piece by NDP MPP, Paul Miller)

- Outlines Ontario's hydro prices.
- Says, "It was only a week or two ago that the Ontario Energy Board ordered Hydro One to lower its most recently planned transmission rate increase of 4.8 per cent for 2018. However, as the provincial government and public lose full control over Hydro One, intense rate hikes of this nature could become a reality."
- Calls for a plan that is going to "work, that will benefit all Ontarians in the long run and protect one of our province's most valuable resources."
- Says that the provincial government needs to return Hydro One to public ownership. This, along with other measures would reduce hydro prices by as much as 30 per cent.

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Morning News Clippings

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Date: Wednesday, January 3, 2018
Edited by: Tara Brautigam (Tara.Brautigam@oeb.ca)

Contact Editor

Clippings Summary

News - 9 Results

OPG must cut $500M over next 5 years from nuclear operations budget, energy regular orders

The Toronto Star - Tue Jan 2 2018
Tone: Neutral
Permalink

The Ontario Energy Board ordered the Ontario Power Generation to cut the "excessive" costs associated with pensions and benefits from its nuclear business ' administration, operations and maintenance budget.

Ontario power utility told to cut nuclear budget by $500-million; Ontario Power Generation says it is still considering the Ontario Energy Board decision, which came Friday and was described as the largest rate application ever submitted to the board

theglobeandmail.com - Tue Jan 2 2018, 8:56pm ET
Tone: Neutral
Byline: SHAWN McCARTHY
Reach: 1188000

Ontario's government-owned **power** **utility** has come under renewed fire for its generous compensation practices, with the province's **regulator** slashing $500-million from the Crown corporation's budget for nuclear ...

Pre-paid hydro plan morally repugnant

Norwich Gazette - Wed Jan 3 2018
Tone: Negative
Ad Value: $158
Reach: 1080 **Page:** A4

The Wynne government's assurance that a proposal by privately controlled **Hydro** **One** to install pre-paid **electricity** meters for people who are behind in their payments will be voluntary warrants suspicion. ...

Flipping the switch on customer service; Hydro One says it is changing how it does business to better serve its customers

Ingersoll Times - Wed Jan 3 2018
Tone: Neutral
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Ad Value: $221
Reach: 1318 **Page:** A7

Hydro **One** brass were in the area recently in an effort to overhaul the public's negative perception of the provincial **utility** giant. "We're here to do business and focus on the **customer** and community ...

Deep freeze offers only cold comfort for natural gas producing firms

The Timmins Daily Press - Wed Jan 3 2018
Tone: Neutral
Byline: Dan Healing

Ad Value: $433
Reach: 9196 **Page:** A7

The cold snap that continues to blanket many parts of **North** America is driving shortterm **natural** **gas** prices higher but they remain far below historic highs and the trend is unlikely to significantly affect either ...

A 'very, very short lived' rally: Alberta natural gas prices soar 72% as wells freeze, cutting off supplies

Financial Post - Tue Jan 2 2018
Tone: Negative
Byline: Geoffrey Morgan
Reach: 607500

CALGARY - The deep freeze currently chilling most of **North** America is providing a boost to beleaguered **natural** **gas** producers, but analysts believe the colder temperatures would need to last for months for prices to ...

Hydro bills can be pricey during the holidays

Stoney Creek News - Tue Jan 2 2018
Tone: Positive
Ad Value: $40
Reach: 31639 **Page:** 1

It's been a wonderful holiday season. Our community of Hamilton East and Stoney Creek really does come alive this time of year. Whether I was out at one of the many events being hosted in our area or at home celebrating with family and friends, ...

Wynne robs Peter to pay Paul

Toronto Sun - Wed Jan 3 2018
Tone: Neutral
Ad Value: $1,721
Reach: 171076 **Page:** A14

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne's re-election strategy for June 7 is best summed up by the cynical observation of George Bernard Shaw that, "A government that robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul." With one ...

Road safety remains number one priority

Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake) - Wed Jan 3 2018
Tone: Negative
Ad Value: $472
Reach: 3014 **Page:** A1 / Front

The new year has begun the same way it ended, with many northerners worried about the condition and safety of our roads. That is the first point in Timiskaming-Cochrane John Vanthof's year-end **review** for 2017. "Consistent and reliable ...

Clippings Summary

Full Articles

OPG must cut $500M over next 5 years from nuclear operations budget, energy regular orders

The Toronto Star - Tue Jan 2 2018
Tone: Neutral

The Ontario Energy Board ordered the Ontario Power Generation to cut the â€œexcessiveâ€ costs associated with pensions and benefits from its nuclear businessâ€™ administration, operations and maintenance budget.

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Ontario power utility told to cut nuclear budget by $500-million; Ontario Power Generation says it is still considering the Ontario Energy Board decision, which came Friday and was described as the largest rate application ever submitted to the board

theglobeandmail.com · Tue Jan 2 2018, 8:56pm ET
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Ontario's government-owned power utility has come under renewed fire for its generous compensation practices, with the province's regulator slashing $500-million from the Crown corporation's budget for nuclear operations over the next five years.

Ontario Power Generation (OPG) says it is still considering the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) decision, which came Friday and was described as the largest rate application ever submitted to the board. The ruling can be appealed to the province's divisional court. "We are reviewing the decision in detail," OPG spokesman Neal Kelly said Tuesday.

OPG, which provides 40 per cent of the province's power, still managed to score some major victories with its application. The regulator agreed with its plan to begin charging consumers in 2020 for the $12.8-billion refurbishment of reactors at the Darlington Nuclear Generating Station and to spend $292-million between 2017 and 2020 on technical assessments of its proposal to rebuild reactors at the aging Pickering plant.

However, the OEB's three-person panel ordered OPG to cut $500-million from the $16.8-billion five-year budget it submitted to cover its nuclear operations. It disallowed some proposed costs for compensation and forced OPG to absorb a portion of cost escalations for some nuclear work.

OPG had estimated that its proposed revenue plan would add 65 cents a month to the average homeowner's electricity bill.

Soaring electricity costs have been a major political headache in Ontario, and Premier Kathleen Wynne tried to ease the pressure last year by ordering a 25-per-cent reduction in hydro bills for homeowners.

The OEB decision will allow the utility to "smooth" the cost recovery for its reactor projects, adding more than $1-billion to the burden on future ratepayers.

OPG has faced continuing criticism for its generous compensation, which was slammed in a provincial auditor-general's report four years ago. After it was released, two vice-presidents and the chief financial officer were fired. A subsequent report by former pension executive Jim Leech warned that pensions at OPG and other provincial power companies were overly generous and could require higher electricity prices to meet the liabilities.

The Crown corporation "had made some positive steps towards controlling its overall compensation costs," the regulatory panel concluded in its ruling . But it added that the compensation as proposed by OPG was still too high by as much as $50-million a year.

Both the Auditor-General and Mr. Leech recommended that OPG pay $1 in pension contributions for every $1 paid by its employees - as is the norm for other provincial employees. OPG said its contribution rate was 3 to 1 in 2015 and was expected to fall to 2 to 1 last year. However, some critics said the company had left some significant payments out of its calculations and that the real rate was more like 4 to 1.

"The pension issue has been part of every OPG hearing" since it came under OEB jurisdiction, said Brady Yauch, executive director of the Consumer Policy Institute, which intervened in the rate application. "It's been viewed as wildly generous."

Mr. Yauch noted OPG also fared poorly in assessments of its project management in a key division and that the OEB demanded the company conduct an independent audit to determine whether it is getting full value for its contracts.

Major industrial customers said the **OEB** decision is an indication of business as usual in the **power** sector, where sharply higher prices have put competitive pressures on big **electricity** users. The **OEB** decision appeared to lock in plans for refurbishments of **OPG**'s nuclear reactor fleet. The company "pretty much got everything it wanted" on the financing **plan** for the major nuclear projects, said Colin Anderson, president of the Association of Major **Power** Consumers in **Ontario**.

Follow this link to view this story on globeandmail.com: **Ontario** **power** **utility** told to cut nuclear budget by $500-million (www.theglobeandmail.com)

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Pre-paid hydro plan morally repugnant

Norwich Gazette - Wed Jan 3 2018
Tone: Negative
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The Wynne government's assurance that a proposal by privately controlled **Hydro** One to install pre-paid **electricity** meters for people who are behind in their payments will be voluntary warrants suspicion.

Hydro One's submission to the **Ontario Energy Board**, seeking regulatory approval for its "collection enhancements" **plan**, buried on Page 2,038 of a 2,076-page document, doesn't specify it will be voluntary.

It argues the increasing number of customers in default because of the rising cost of **electricity** justifies installing prepaid meters as a way of "minimizing **Hydro** One Network's financial risk."

Energy Minister **Glenn Thibeault** has said **Hydro** One has assured him the program will be a voluntary method for its customers to control their **electricity** consumption, and in any event may not be approved.

This came after New Democrat MPP Peter Tabuns said the **plan** is designed to target the poor.

It's not surprising **Hydro** One wants to minimize non-payment for its services.

But the idea senior citizens living on fixed incomes could be forced into paying in advance for **electricity** after the Liberal government's mismanagement drove **electricity** prices in **Ontario** to the highest level in the country, is both morally repugnant and indefensible.

The fear is that people unable to pay their bills in advance will have their **power** cut off - a frightening prospect as we enter into winter - despite **Hydro** One's insistence that won't happen.

Its insistence is small comfort given the **utility**'s appallingly bad and incompetent history of billing customers, as identified by former **Ontario** ombudsman Andre Marin in the era before Premier Kathleen Wynne sold off the province's control of **Hydro** One to the private sector - a move that put the **utility** beyond the scrutiny of the ombudsman.

Marin reported on thousands of complaints from **Hydro** One customers. Many were over-billed and had their bank accounts raided to pay for **electricity** they never used. They were then refused reimbursement by the **utility**, which said it would only apply over-billed amounts to future **hydro** bills.

For that reason alone, the **OEB** should reject this proposal.

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Flipping the switch on customer service; Hydro One says it is changing how it does business to better serve its customers

Ingersoll Times · Wed Jan 3 2018
Tone: Neutral
Byline: Heather Rivers

Ad Value: $221
Reach: 1318 **Page:** A7

Hydro One brass were in the area recently in an effort to overhaul the public's negative perception of the provincial utility giant.

"We're here to do business and focus on the customer and community growth," explained Ferio Pugliese, executive vice president of customer care and corporate affairs. "We want to let people know Hydro One is a different company and we're changing the way we do business. We're highly focused on being customer-centric and focusing on the customer."

The visit was part of the Get Local program, where Hydro One representatives go out and talk with members of the community.

"As people come and get the facts, they find that we can help them," he said.

Pugliese spoke at a Woodstock Chamber of Commerce event Nov. 27 that drew local business leaders, a representative from the city's economic department and Warden David Mayberry.

"Our main concerns are that people understand the system and how costs are generated and what Hydro One is doing in the future," Pugliese said.

Pugliese said he is trying to educate the public and repair the utility's relationship with their customers.

"There are still a lot of misconceptions," he said. "People still think we are a generation business but we are a transmission and distribution company. We only represent 37 per cent of your bill on average."

Pugliese also fielded concerns over a Hydro One application for a rate increase of 2.9 per cent that is up for approval in 2018.

"The bulk of that is due to a decline in load," he said. "If the load goes down we still have to pay for the infrastructure."

One of the main reasons people and businesses are using less hydro is due to energy conservation efforts, he said.

Hydro One also requires new infrastructure to replace aging poles, wires, insulators and transformers.

The utility recently opened several customer service offices across the province including one located at 727 Exeter Road in London.

Visit www.HydroOne. com/GetLocal for more information.

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Deep freeze offers only cold comfort for natural gas producing firms

The Timmins Daily Press · Wed Jan 3 2018
Tone: Neutral
Byline: Dan Healing

Ad Value: $433
Reach: 9196 **Page:** A7

The cold snap that continues to blanket many parts of **North** America is driving shortterm **natural gas** prices higher but they remain far below historic highs and the trend is unlikely to significantly affect either **Canadian** **consumer** bills or producer profits.

Cold weather typically increases demand for the home heating fuel, which draws down storage levels and pushes prices higher.

"Most of the companies purchasing **gas** ... will manage their **gas** supply. They will purchase forward (contracts) and store **gas**," said Gerry Goobie, a principal with Calgary-based consulting company **Gas** Processing Management Inc., on Tuesday.

"The fact that prices go up, yes, that will ultimately get passed through to some consumers but it's not like you're going to see some monster spike."

In a report on Tuesday, GMP FirstEnergy commodity analyst Martin King said the cold has prompted a modest price increase for U.S. delivered **gas** but that is unlikely to last long enough to help western **Canadian** producers.

"If the current cold event only lasts a few weeks, then **natural gas** prices are likely to come under negative pressures once again as there is more than enough **gas** on hand, along with growth in domestic supplies, to deal with just a few weeks of cold weather," he wrote.

He said the current **North** American **gas** surplus has limited the recent rally in price to about US$3 per million British thermal units (BTU), noting similar weather events in previous years would likely have pushed prices up over US$4 or US$5 per million BTU.

"With supplies still on the rise and looking for more, the market will pause for now near the US$3 per million BTU range and could quickly lose altitude if weather forecasts begin to warm up," he said.

King said extreme cold weather in the last week of December in Western Canada froze **gas** well equipment on numerous wells, causing **gas** production outages of as much as two billion cubic feet per day.

That resulted in some short-term spikes in spot prices for **gas** sold in the Alberta market.

The U.S. **Energy** Information Administration reported Tuesday that average benchmark U.S. **natural gas** prices declined in 2017 due to warmer weather and higher-thanaverage inventory levels after ending 2016 at the highest point in two years.

It noted that the U.S. began exporting more **gas** than it imported in 2017, reversing its nearly 60-year status as a net importer of **natural gas**, mainly from Canada.

In a forecast also released Tuesday, Moody's Investor Services predicted U.S. **natural gas** prices will remain in a band between US$2.50 and US$3.50 per million BTU in 2018 as the abundance of **gas** continues to limit increases.

Last week, Barclays reduced its **natural gas** price forecast for both 2018 and

2019 to an average of about US$2.75 per million BTU.

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NP

A 'very, very short lived' rally: Alberta natural gas prices soar 72% as wells freeze, cutting off supplies

Financial Post - Tue Jan 2 2018
Tone: Negative
Byline: Geoffrey Morgan
Reach: 607500

CALGARY - The deep freeze currently chilling most of **North** America is providing a boost to beleaguered **natural gas** producers, but analysts believe the colder temperatures would need to last for months for prices to improve further.

Between Christmas and New Year, AECO, Alberta's **natural gas** price benchmark soared 72 per cent from $2.50 per thousand cubic feet to $4.30 per mcf as "extreme cold" warnings were issued for the entire province - and throughout much of Canada - amid Arctic-like temperatures.

The drop in temperatures in Alberta was so severe that some **natural gas** wells were frozen shut - a phenomenon industry players call "freeze-offs" - which occur when the water and condensation in a well freezes on its way to the surface. The frozen wells helped limit **gas** supplies while demand surged.

"The jump we saw in prices, it was impressive to see, but it's very, very short lived," GMP FirstEnergy analyst Martin King said of the recent uptick in AECO spot prices.

Shares in Calgary-based **natural gas** producers with exposure to AECO also extended gains made over the last week, with Peyto Exploration and Development Corp. shares up more than 4 per cent by close on Tuesday to $15.70, Birchcliff **Energy** Ltd. rising 3 per cent to $4.54 and Tourmaline Oil Corp. rising just under 2.5 per cent to $23.37 per share.

King said **natural gas** storage levels in Alberta are still significantly higher than the same period last year, although increasing volumes of **gas** are being produced in Alberta and around **North** America, will eventually weigh on **natural gas** prices across the continent.

Natural gas prices are so bad in Alberta producers are having to pay customers to take it (business.financialpost.com)

Natural gas producers fume as TransCanada limits access to key pipeline (business.financialpost.com)

"It's going to take a lot of cold for many, many weeks to make a sizeable difference in storage levels to put in a better AECO pricing for at least the first half of this year," King said. "We are so over-stocked on **gas** right now, it's crazy."

The cold snap that blanketed Alberta over the last week has started to thaw, with temperatures in Calgary rising from -20 degrees C to -2 degrees C between Tuesday and Monday.

Bloomberg data showed American consumers burned a record-setting 143 billion cubic feet of **gas** on Monday - breaking the previous one-day record of 142 bcf set during the "Polar Vortex" of 2013 - as many parts of the U.S. experienced their coldest temperatures on record.

As they did in Alberta, **natural gas** prices around the U.S. rallied in recent weeks as more consumers burned **gas** to heat their houses. NYMEX **natural gas** prices surged 17 per cent, from $2.60 per mcf to $3.04 per mcf, over the weeks of December.

"**Canadian gas** prices are so low that any cold-caused demand increases have a material effect on the price - it's just a lower price to begin with," Auspice Capital president Tim Pickering said, adding that domestic **natural gas** prices are depressed relative to U.S. prices due to a lack of export infrastructure such as **natural gas** export plants.

U.S. **natural gas** prices have seen more sustainable rallies during the recent cold snap because producers in the States enjoy better export infrastructure due to LNG export terminals and their ability to pipe **natural gas** to Mexico, Pickering said.

At various points through the fall, Alberta **natural gas** prices collapsed into negative territory for the first time ever as a lack of pipeline space meant producers were not able to move their **gas** into storage.

Raymond James analyst Jeremy McCrea said he expected the differential between AECO prices and U.S. benchmark **natural gas** prices like Henry Hub would remain wide without more export capacity.

"Although the recent cold snap has been favourable to near-term spot prices, the underlying long-term view is there is increasing new **gas** coming on-stream from the Montney (in Alberta) and the Permian (in Texas) that show no sign of abating," McCrea said.

McCrea said analysts widely expect AECO prices to average $2 per mcf over the course of 2018.

Financial Post

gmorgan@nationalpost.com

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Hydro bills can be pricey during the holidays

Stoney Creek News - Tue Jan 2 2018
Tone: Positive
Ad Value: $40
Reach: 31639 **Page:** 1

It's been a wonderful holiday season. Our community of Hamilton East and Stoney Creek really does come alive this time of year. Whether I was out at one of the many events being hosted in our area or at home celebrating with family and friends, one really must be appreciative that we live in such a wonderful place.

One of the things I always notice this time of year is the Christmas lights. I'm always fascinated to see what creative designs some of us come up with. However, like with many other aspects of the holiday season, the bill to keep those Christmas lights going can be expensive. Whether it's the lights, the stove to cook the big turkey, the heater, or the car start plug-in, our **hydro** bill over the holiday season often spikes.

Over the past few years our **hydro** prices during the holidays, and all times of year for that matter, have started to climb much higher relative to what they used to be. This is in large part due to the increased privatization of the provincially operated **Hydro** One **Corporation** which provides **power** to **utility** companies across the province, including Horizon **Utilities** **Corporation**, in our area.

The sale of **Hydro** One in exchange for immediate payout might appear to be a great **plan** on the surface, but there are going to be real problems that arise from this decision down the line. To start, the revenue stream that **Hydro** One provided to the provincial government is going to be significantly slashed. Over the next few years, the payout gained from this sale will be peanuts compared to what that 60 per cent ownership is worth in annual revenue.

Arguably, just as terrible will be the government's loss of control over **Hydro** One. With "profit over people" in mind for **Ontario**'s ever privatizing **hydro** **corporation**, it will only be a matter of time before outages become more common and **hydro** **rates** continue to skyrocket. Early signs of these trends are already becoming evident.

It was only a week or two ago that the **Ontario Energy Board** ordered **Hydro** One to lower its most recently planned **transmission** **rate** increase of 4.8 per cent for 2018. However, as the provincial government and **public** lose full control over **Hydro** One, intense **rate** hikes of this nature could become a reality.

We need a **plan** that is going to work, that will benefit all Ontarians in the long run and protect one of our province's most valuable resources. As has been suggested by my fellow New Democrats, our provincial government needs to return **Hydro** One to **public** ownership. Through this **plan**, and other measures, we can reduce **hydro** prices by as much as 30 per cent. From the single apartment renter to a local business and even to a factory, all will benefit.

Hydro bills, especially at this time of year, are very pricey. However, with the right changes to our province's **hydro** provider, they sure don't have to be.

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Wynne robs Peter to pay Paul

Toronto Sun · Wed Jan 3 2018
Tone: Neutral
Ad Value: $1,721
Reach: 171076 **Page:** A14

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne's re-election strategy for June 7 is best summed up by the cynical observation of George Bernard Shaw that, "A government that robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul."

With one problem. That's that Wynne is actually robbing Peter to pay Peter because Peter and Paul are the same person.

Take Wynne's **Fair** **Hydro** **Plan** to cut our **hydro** bills by 25%.

Wynne's financing that with tens of billions of borrowed dollars.

But she's keeping them off the province's books, where taxpayers are responsible for paying them back, by putting them on **Ontario Power Generation**'s books, where **electricity** **ratepayers** are responsible for paying them back.

Never mind that the Auditor General of **Ontario** and the Financial Accountability Office of **Ontario** have both warned this fiscal sleight of hand is one way for Wynne to claim she's balanced the province's books this year, when the real deficit is $4 billion to $4.5 billion.

The other reality is taxpayers and **ratepayers** are the same people, since we all pay taxes and we all pay for **electricity**.

This underscores the simple reality that someone always has to pay for Wynne's electoral largesse.

Take her latest hike to the minimum wage. She just increased it from $11.60 to $14 per hour on Jan. 1, with a further $1 per hour hike coming Jan. 1, 2019.

That's a staggering 31.6% hike in 15 months, since Wynne increased the minimum wage from $11.40 an hour to $11.60 on Oct. 1, 2017.

It will result in a net loss of at least 50,000 jobs, hitting teenagers, young adults and new immigrants the hardest, according to the **independent**, non-partisan Financial Accountability Office of **Ontario**.

Once again, there is no free lunch. Somebody always has to pay, every time. That's indicated by the fact the Liberals inherited a $138.8 billion debt from the previous Progressive Conservative government in 2003-04, and have driven it up to $312 billion - or by almost 125% - in 2017-18.

To the point where **Ontario** is now the most indebted sub-sovereign (nonnational) borrower in the world.

And guess who's going to pay for that? Not Wynne.

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Road safety remains number one priority

Northern Daily News

Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake) - Wed Jan 3 2018
Tone: Negative
Ad Value: $472
Reach: 3014 **Page:** A1 / Front

The new year has begun the same way it ended, with many northerners worried about the condition and safety of our roads.

That is the first point in Timiskaming-Cochrane John Vanthof's year-end **review** for 2017.

"Consistent and reliable winter road maintenance for all classifications of highways in the **North** has been a significant and ongoing concern since I was first elected in 2011," he said. "Despite some changes made by government, it remains a number one priority.

Vanthof believes the problem stems back to the privatization of highway management by the previous Liberal government.

"Because highway management was privatized as a cost-saving measure, the structure of the maintenance contracts allows for road management decisions to be made by private companies, instead of Ministry of **Transportation** (MTO) staff," Vanthof said. "Although the MTO completes inspections and responds to complaints, their involvement begins after the issue of concern is identified. Typically, the MTO manages issues of concern by imposing fines or levies on the private company when standards are not met; however, this delayed reaction does not improve road safety during critical weather patterns. We will continue to push for improvement, and ultimately, a return to a system where the MTO actively manages our provincial roads. Safe road conditions should be the priority, not the profit on the bottom line."

Vanthof said the loss of passenger rail **service** also continues to be an issue throughout the Northeast. "Since the Liberal government cancelled the Northlander in 2012, Northerners have felt cut off from the rest of the province. Though the Wynne Government boasts about spending on transit in **Ontario**, they do not seem to have a problem leaving Northerners stranded."

Another issue of great concern to Northerners in particular is high **electricity** costs. Vanthof said the province's decision to lower **rates** is a band aid solution which will cost Ontarians in the long term.

"In June, the NDP announced a **hydro** **plan** that would drop **hydro** **rates** by 30%

in rural Ontario, by initiating a strategy that would regain control of Hydro One, make time-of-use metering optional and eliminate extra rural delivery charges. The Wynne government responded with its own plan, which basically reduces hydro rates for the short term; however, the cost will be reassigned to our hydro bills once the election is over in June 2018. 'The current Government's hydro plan is a temporary relief measure that will cost consumers far more in the long run. As the 2017 year begins to wind down, the NDP continues to lead the fight against the pay-before-use hydro metering program being proposed by Hydro One."

Vanthof said there also a number of issues to be tackled when it comes to health care.

"In rapidly growing areas, hospital overcrowding is at crisis levels; in the rural areas, just keeping the hospital doors open has become increasingly difficult. Hospital budgets have been stretched to the limit and shortfalls from financial neglect are becoming evident.

Here in the Northeast, there is an inability to provide a sustainable program to allow access to non -emergency patient transfers. While the cost of non-emergency transfers is absorbed in the overall budgets of large health centers, small rural hospitals cannot offset the need for service in their smaller budgets. As a result, this shortfall causes excruciating delays for the patients, especially the elderly."

Vanthof said the NDP will continue to advocate for increased long term care funding in 2018 in an effort to alleviate the situation.

Vanthof said the lack of mental health services in the North has "come to the breaking point," with insufficient mental health professionals and dedicated health care beds to meet the growing need for timely care.

"Far too many families are dealing with the tragic consequences of this healthcare service shortfall," he said.

One local issue that is truly emblematic of the challenges that we face in the North was the unannounced closure of the LCBO outlet in Larder Lake, a town whose economy is very dependent on tourism, Vanthof said.

"In other parts of Ontario, this type of closure of a government service would be unacceptable, especially since the next closest LCBO outlet is 30 kilometers away in Kirkland Lake. The residents and seasonal visitors have fought valiantly to re-instate the outlet store through rallies, social media and a letter-writing campaign. The community even produced a video, which was viewed by thousands online. Though the fight is not over yet, the lack of commitment by this Government to services in the North is staggering."

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