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To:	Rosemarie Leclair
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NDP Convention
The Ontario NDP held its first party convention since November 2014 in Toronto over the weekend, hosting 1,200 delegates. During her keynote speech on Saturday, NDP leader Andrea Horwath announced, if elected in 2018, she would create Canada's first universal Pharmacare plan in Ontario. Horwath said, like Tommy Douglas led by introducing Medicare to Saskatchewan, the Ontario NDP would lead the country in drug coverage, which she called "the next step towards building universal healthcare."
During her leadership review later that day, Horwath won support from 89 per cent of delegates, up from 77 per cent in 2014.

In her speech, Horwath laid out many of the other policy items a "bold and progressive" NDP government would implement if elected, including a $15 minimum wage, **buying back shares of Hydro One** and making it easier for workers to join a union. Horwath said that even though it is 14 months away from the next election, "this campaign is well underway" and stressed the NDP are "in this campaign to win."

Topics of conversation

The Ontario Energy Board announced beginning May 1, average households and small businesses will see their electricity bills drop by 17 per cent. The OEB's new off-peak rates will be 1.4 cents/KWh lower than if the Fair Hydro Plan had not been introduced; on-peak rates will be 2.8 cents/KWh.
• Energy Minister **Glenn Thibeault** called this "an important first step."

• (The projected 17 per cent decrease includes January's eight per cent provincial HST removal from bills).

News briefs – Governmental

Office of the Premier

Premier Kathleen Wynne, Finance Minister Charles Sousa and Housing Minister Chris Ballard released a 16-point plan for addressing housing affordability in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) region. The largest pillar of the plan is a 15 per cent foreign buyers' tax, which the government is calling a "Non-Resident Speculation Tax." The GGH region affected by the tax spans from Waterloo to Peterborough, and from Niagara's Lake Erie border to Lake Simcoe.

The tax came into effect immediately, but will be refunded to people who become permanent residents within four years or full-time students for at least two years. The tax will not apply to refugees or foreign companies that purchase multi-unit apartment buildings or agriculture land. Sousa said the foreign buyer's tax will be revenue neutral for the government because it will reinvest the tax revenues into affordable housing. The Fair Housing Plan also resolves to expand rent control to all rental units in Ontario, ending the post-1991 exemption. Rent increases will be limited to inflation, with a cap of 2.5 per cent per annum. Other protections for renters include the introduction of a "standard lease" for all landlord/tenant contracts, tightened provisions for "landlord's own use" evictions, and a requirement that elevators are repaired before an "above-guideline increase" is approved.

The province pledged $125 million over five years to encourage the construction of new apartment buildings by offering tax rebates to developers. In order to increase supply, the province will soon allow the City of Toronto to tax landlords of empty units, of which there are approximately 6,000 in the city. It will also allow municipalities to tax owners of vacant residential land that is sitting undeveloped. The government will also look into developing affordable housing on provincial-owned property owned, including the West Don Lands and 27 Grosvenor Street.

The government will also increase data gathering on real estate practices such as "double-ending" (when real estate agents represent both the buyer and the seller), speculative "paper-flipping" on new developments and fake bidding. There are no measures in the package that will end domestic speculative real estate investments. When asked why it took the province so long to tackle this issue, Premier Wynne said "the conditions have changed" now that the cost of housing and rent "are rising far faster than people's pay cheques." Sousa acknowledged "market forces will prevail" and said success does not necessarily mean a huge drop in housing prices.

NDP MPP Peter Tabuns accused the Liberals plan of being politically-motivated: "Their polling numbers are in the basement … They think this will work, so they're acting on it." PC MPP Ernie Hardeman said the province needs to focus on increasing supply. OREA CEO Tim Hudak said he is pleased the plan includes a commitment to "working with municipalities to remove the barriers to getting more new homes and listings on the market faster." He also welcomed a revisit of professional real estate standards.