

EDITORIAL

The hydro mess

Hamilton Liberal MPP Ted McMeekin has an enduring political homily he likes to use: “When you mess up, fess up.”

The latest mess the Liberals have been “fessing up” is rising hydro rates and searching for ways to reduce them before the next election.

While all three parties can lay claim to messing up electricity rates, it's the Liberals who are now responsible for the problem. Blaming the Tories in 2003 for an aging electricity grid may have been prudent during a long-fought campaign, but at some point the Liberals have to take ownership of their own electricity stumbles.

In November 2007 the highest rate for households during peak hours was 8.7 cents per kilowatt/hour. Less than a decade later the highest rate is 18 cents per kWh, about a 107 per cent increase and roughly six times the rate of inflation.

It took a few significant byelection losses to finally slap the Liberals into action.

Last week the Liberals, in an orchestrated public relations campaign, promoted their proposed 25 per cent electricity rate cut that they say will reduce homeowners' electricity rate starting this summer. Hamilton residents could see slightly higher reductions with the added savings from the recently completed utility merger. Rural and northern customers are expected to see big rate cuts.

However, those rate reductions come at a price. To fund the savings, the Liberals move the social programs that help low income homeowners pay their hydro bills to the tax levy, at a cost of \$2.5 billion. In addition, the province will be stretching the debt repayment plan from 20 years to 30 years at a cost of about \$25 billion in interest costs. Liberals argued since the electrical assets will benefit people past 20 years, younger people should also pay for it.

The NDP's proposed hydro plan is also sketchy to say the least. It wants to spend billions to buy back Hydro One shares, it relies on asking the federal government to stop charging its five per cent portion of the HST on hydro bills, and it proposes to allow homeowners to opt out of time-of-use rates.

And the Progressive Conservatives under Patrick Brown haven't released their plan. This is the party that had previously championed privatizing, Hydro One.

The Liberals electricity plan is nothing more than an attempt to calm nervous homeowners as the 2018 election campaign looms in the distance. It's a Band-Aid solution to a very messy problem ongoing for years to determine how to provide efficient electrical power at a reasonable cost without bankrupting every household in the province.

THE CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP RACE SO FAR!



Column

A long walk, or a slow drive in the snow

Gordon Cameron

GROUP MANAGING EDITOR



As I sit down to write this week's column, the snow is softly, yet incessantly falling outside the windows of my temporary office. It's quite the beautiful and peaceful scene. Were it not for the fact that as soon as I'm done I'll be climbing into my car and heading for home, I'd say it was quite the lovely evening.

I'm no stranger to driving in the snow (five Alberta winters will either make you an expert or uninsurable) and I'm reasonably comfortable behind the wheel when the white stuff starts falling. The biggest key is to go slowly and safely. There's no need to rush. If the weather is really that bad, then you're likely not the only one who is going to be late.

There's something beautiful and almost surreal about driving a road you've been up and down a thousand times when it's in the midst of a heavy snowfall. You start to see things differently. The way the snow covers the bridges,

the lamp posts and the mailboxes seems to change their forms and gives them an altered look that's intriguing to behold. The light is different too. At night, the snow offers an iridescence through the dark. During the day, it brings everything into sharp relief — snow or not snow.

I'm also never so aware of fact that I'm in my own little bubble of glass and steel as when I'm driving in a snowstorm. The world outside is at once familiar, yet foreign, like piloting a submarine through a sunken city.

For all that beauty, being on the roads is fraught with danger. The actions of other drivers are never so important as they are in a blizzard. All it takes is one hot dog to be driving too quickly, following too closely or just not paying attention and it can cause serious, sometimes fatal, consequences. I'm always on high alert as I creep along the highway.

However, high alert doesn't mean anxious or nervous. If you find yourself stressed out at even the thought of motoring through the snow, then do yourself, and everyone else, a favour and stay home.

(I say that, but it used to irk me to no end when after battling the QEW, 427 and 401 for

over two hours to get to my office in Toronto, I'd be greeted with a stack of messages from reporters who, even though the TTC was running, “couldn't” get into work.)

Of course the best way to enjoy a snowstorm (other than snuggled up with someone you love in front of a roaring fire) is to do it on foot. I've had some of my best walks amidst the gently falling flakes. There's something about that setting that seems to focus my mind, corraling all the thoughts whizzing around in my head and replacing them with a peaceful, in-the-moment kind of state. I've realized many things walking in the snow. It's no wonder that the first prime minister Trudeau made so many momentous decisions during his sojourns in the snow.

The romance of it all aside, I find myself facing a dangerous and uncertain trip home. If the plows have been out then it might not take me too much longer than my normal 20 minute commute. Of course, if something's gone wrong then it might just be faster to walk.

That might not be so bad. A long walk in the snow just might be what the doctor ordered...

— Gordon Cameron is Group Managing Editor for Hamilton Community News.

Is it fair for the Liberals to blame previous governments for Ontario's hydro problems?
Have your say Vote online at www.hamiltonnews.com

Last week we asked:

Has the federal Liberal government done enough to help Canada's steel industry?

6% said Yes and **94%** said No