

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

EDITORIAL

Trust but verify

There is no doubt the Hamilton Waterfront Trust has overseen a dramatic transformation of the city's harbourfront, creating a praiseworthy people place.

Using the initial \$6.3-million seed money that came from a lawsuit by the City of Hamilton against the former Hamilton Harbour Commission, the arms-length organization has managed to create a destination for the public. There are the tour boats, a skating rink, a waterfront trail trolley, and it leases property to businesses such as Williams Fresh Café.

But over the years, serious questions have been raised about how the Waterfront Trust has handled its finances and its business practices.

As of 2015, the trust lost money seven years in a row, estimated to be about \$2.5 million from 2007 to 2014. In the same year councillors reluctantly agreed to a \$137,500 bailout of the agency.

Now, there are more troubling financial issues that deserve further scrutiny of the organization and how it's operating these various responsibilities on behalf of the city.

For instance, the trust had unpaid taxes of about \$325,000 from 2016 and 2017 to the city from two of its properties, the former Discovery Centre building and the now shuttered Sarcoa restaurant. A portion of the taxes, about \$175,000 had been paid in July, according to city officials.

In addition, it was recently revealed the trust had lost its charitable status that had been granted by the Canadian Revenue Agency, which means it can no longer issue tax receipts.

Compounding the concerns is the fact that the trust is locked in a \$15-million legal battle with Sarcoa that started in late 2015 after the city prohibited the restaurant from playing amplified music on its patio. The restaurant has now been closed.

In response to these questionable actions, the trust and its two council appointees, Ward 2's Jason Farr and Ward 6's Tom Jackson, have tried to deflect questions, blaming the media for questioning the trust's actions, and essentially telling people there is nothing here to look at.

The core issue is can the organization be trusted to oversee further development on the waterfront since it is project managing the design of public spaces on piers 5 to 7?

Over the years the trust has operated under the public's radar, and in some respects without the proper scrutiny by the city. Some civic politicians have stated the public should trust the agency because of its past successes.

However, what needs to happen is for the city and its politicians to trust, but verify the trust is fulfilling its mandate in the public interest.

YOU VISIT THE BEAUTY OF THE LOCAL WATERFALLS!
NOW GET A THRILL,
DRIVE THE RED HILL!



Column

Briles wasn't an unknown, unknown

Gordon Cameron

GROUP MANAGING EDITOR



Years ago, then American secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld was roundly mocked for talking about “unknown, unknowns,” when answering a question about the lack of evidence that the government of Iraq had provided weapons of mass destruction to terrorists. While he was wrong about the weapons, he was correct that in life there are things that we don't know we don't know and consequently can't adequately prepare for them.

However, the majority of what life throws at you doesn't come straight out of left field and if you find yourself surprised by it then you're either totally oblivious or willfully blind.

I can't say for sure which case applies to the Ticats brain trust, but if they honestly thought that hiring disgraced ex-Baylor University head coach Art Briles wouldn't cause the massive negative reaction that it did, then

they have their heads firmly... in the sand.

In spite of taking Baylor, traditionally one of the worst teams in major U.S. college football, to back-to-back conference championships and tutoring Heisman Trophy winner Robert Griffin III, the school fired Briles for his handling of a massive sexual assault scandal involving several of his players. The *Wall Street Journal* has reported that 17 women say they were raped by 19 different football players during Briles' tenure at the school.

What happened at Baylor was horrific, and in this era of heightened awareness about sexual assault it strains credibility to hear Ticats CEO Scott Mitchell telling Fan590 that the team: “...underestimated the tsunami of negativity that was going to happen.”

This was not an unknown, unknown.

First of all, Briles was only fired in May 2016 so the story is still fresh in everyone's mind. There are still cases going through the courts (although none involve Briles) related to the scandal. Even if Mitchell believed that Ticat fans wouldn't know the name, all it takes is a quick Google search to reveal Briles' troubled history.

Secondly, there was a recent furore over the

fact that Briles' son Kendal — the offensive coordinator at Florida Atlantic University — and the school's head coach Lane Kiffin even asked Briles for his opinion on the team's offense. When you're so toxic that you can't even give away your expertise to your own son, that should be a huge red flag in any hiring process.

I do understand why the Ticats were interested in hiring Briles. He is a great coach who runs an entertaining and high-scoring brand of offence. He's so good in fact that if it weren't for his past off-the-field actions his agent wouldn't even be returning Hamilton's calls.

However, there are things in life bigger than football, even when you're 0-8. I think the fans and the city demonstrated loud and clear that they'd rather go 0-18 than welcome Briles into the family.

Ultimately team management made the right decision to withdraw the job offer, but the problems caused by hiring Briles for the team and the league should have been a known, known.

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

Do you trust the Waterfront Trust to manage the transformation of piers 5 to 7?

Have your say

Vote online at www.hamiltonnews.com

Last week we asked:

Should we remove all monuments to those who don't share all of our contemporary values?

7% said Yes and 93% said No

EDITORIAL

Up in smoke

The Ontario Liberals' plan to sell marijuana in government-operated stores may have provided some clarity on what has been a confusing strategy by the federal Liberals to legalize marijuana.

But controlling weed like the province controls alcohol creates more problems than answers to what has been a hands-off approach both levels of government have managed on the issue. The entire roll out of the legalization of marijuana by the federal government has been botched with governments unsure about a distribution network or enforcement strategy.

The idea the provincial Liberals have adopted is to open 40 shops, operated by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, when the federal government legalizes it July 1. The number of places will expand to 80 by 2019 and 150 by 2020. In addition, marijuana will be sold in plain packaging from behind the counter to people 19 and older.

By having the government control marijuana, the expectation is the elimination of the mushrooming of illegal dispensaries across the province, including in Hamilton.

Will it stop the marijuana black market? Questionable, since the government is actually stimulating demand while also restricting supply.

The idea of the government overseeing another one of our human vices is cringeworthy. Marijuana will become another glossy picture in a government advertisement. Already, we have governments selling us lottery tickets and alcohol, yet at the same time warning us that gambling and drinking are bad. After taking over marijuana, will governments' next focus be on prostitution and providing union-sanctioned sex.

And what about those illegal dispensaries? It seems that municipalities will yet again be left holding the baggie when it comes to enforcement.

Already, police and bylaw officials have taken a cautious approach when it comes to those dispensaries in what has been legal limbo prior to July 2018.

Currently, marijuana is only legally available if prescribed by a medical doctor and comes from one of the 58 producers licensed and inspected by Health Canada.

Taxpayers are already footing the bill for overburdened municipalities' responsibility to inspect and lay charges against what is an illegal operation, while neighbourhoods cry out for better enforcement.

Government-run marijuana stores is the latest example of a strategy to capitalize on the potential for needed revenue while leaving municipalities searching for clear-cut answers on how to battle what will be difficult enforcement questions in the battle against weed.



Column

Lasting change isn't about easy

Gordon Cameron

GROUP MANAGING EDITOR



Every once in a while you come across something so simple, yet so profound that it stops you in your tracks and in an instant crystallizes all your thoughts and feelings on a particular matter.

One of those moments came for me over the summer while listening to a podcast in the grocery store. The historian being interviewed quoted Adam Shatz in the London Review of Books who wrote: "... we have found it easier to hate than to persuade," when talking about the campaign to leave the European Union.

My normally busy mind went completely quiet as I understood how that phrase perfectly summed up our current political moment.

Politics provoke passions because actions taken by those in power shape the community and the world in which we all live. It doesn't matter if the decision-makers are popularly elected or self-appointed autocrats, if you dis-

agree with their world view you have the right, and in a democratic society I would argue the duty, to voice your dissent.

However, what has seemed to have changed are the tactics. Whereas once upon a time, the goal was to convert your opponents to your way of thinking through discussion and debate, now it seems to be about to getting them to acquiesce to your demands by any means necessary. The conversion no longer needs to be heartfelt, or even real, as long it ensures no opposition or questioning from the masses. Those who dare stray from the new orthodoxy are kept in line through the power of shame, ridicule and even hatred.

And that's where the problems become intractable. By choosing to ignore the fact that an individual's position may be rationally based in their own life experience and values and reducing them to a caricature, you dehumanize them. And when you stop seeing your ideological opponents as reasonable, thinking people then it's not just their opinions that no longer matter, but they themselves no longer matter.

That leads to a whole host of horrible outcomes. It makes it acceptable to minimize any

ill-effect your position will have on your opponents as their concerns are either wholly illegitimate or an unavoidable consequence of progress. It alienates a section of the population who then come to you as an enemy rather than someone with whom they just disagree.

And then the cycle continues.

There is no doubt that trying to persuade someone to change their mind can be hard, and take a long time. (Although there are many needed reforms that have had more than enough time for debate and discussion.) However, engaging with the other side has a much greater chance of creating the sort of broad-based consensus that underpins all stable societies. It can bring us together rather than driving us apart.

It's interesting to wonder if the Hillary Clinton or the anti-Brexit campaigns had spent time sincerely engaging with the sections of the population who were opposed to them if the outcome would have been different.

If nothing else, it almost certainly would have reduced the "us" vs. "them" animosity we're currently seeing.

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

Will the province's marijuana plan stop illegal sales?
Vote online at www.hamiltonnews.com

Have your say

Last week we asked:

Should Hamilton consider Commonwealth Games bid? ?

15% said We should at least study it, 73% said Definitely not and 11% said It should be Hamilton all the way