

It is time to end partisan advertising on the taxpayer's dime

By Sylvia Jones, MPP

Dufferin-Caledon

I am sure you have seen and heard the Ontario government's taxpayer funded advertisements on social media and on radio promoting their latest hydro plan. The Liberals are trying to cover up their mistakes on the hydro file for purely partisan gain in the hope that you will forget about the skyrocketing hydro prices they created.

To be clear, advertising about their hydro scheme does not provide the public anything but a vanity project for the Liberal party. There is no program or application to sign up for, and there is no action that the advertisement tells you to take. These advertisements are about the improving Liberal party brand, not your hydro bill.

These advertisements are clearly partisan and nobody can stop them except Premier Wynne.

In 2015 the Wynne government watered down legislation and removed the oversight of the Auditor General to reject partisan advertisements. Without this government oversight the Wynne government has run advertisements on the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan at the cost of almost \$800,000. The Auditor General called these advertisements "self-congratulatory" and stated that they added no value to the public.

The Auditor General has also raised concern about a two year \$6 million advertising campaign, which the Auditor said "provided viewers with no useful information" and "could be seen as self-congratulatory and, in some cases, misleading." The Auditor General also stated that the recent hydro advertisements "convey a positive impression of the current government and it is more like a pat-on-the-back type of advertisement."

Under the old legislation they would not have been approved.

Unsurprisingly, the Wynne government chose not to advertise about firing hundreds of nurses, and it decided not to advertise about the 600 schools that are up for closure. Nor did they advertise the series of rate increases which have led to the hydro crisis. The government is using the lack of oversight they created to use taxpayer dollars to boost Liberal polling numbers.

That is why I introduced Bill 112 End the Public Funding of Partisan Government Advertising Act, 2017. Bill 112 restores the Auditor General's authority to review and approve all government advertising before the advertisements run.

If you would like to sign my petition calling on the government to restore the authority of the Auditor General, please visit my website www.sylviajonesmpp.ca.