

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Government advertising nearly doubles before the election year

It is almost impossible to avoid them ? those hydro ads telling you how the Liberals have fixed the hydro crisis.

These radio and online ads are paid for by your tax dollars. They are literally the government spending your money to convince you that their years of hydro mismanagement are now fixed by a short-term, Band-Aid solution that will cost up to \$93 billion, according to Ontario's independent Financial Accountability Officer.

The attempt of the government to spend your tax dollars to save their electoral fortunes is only on the rise. In fact, last year witnessed an approximately 66 per cent increase in government spending on government advertising from just more than \$30 million to \$50 million. This increase comes after the government gutted government advertising rules, watering down the Auditor General's powers to reject ads that serve to promote the Wynne Liberal government. The increase also comes just before the provincial election. Coincidence? I think not.

The Auditor General has commented on the current hydro ads, saying that ?under the previous legislation, it would likely not have passed because it does convey a positive impression of the current government and it's more like a pat-on-the-back type of advertisement.?

Another example is that the government spent \$8.1 million promoting the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP), including during the federal election campaign, and following the cancelation of the ORPP, the government spent nearly \$800,000 on radio ads promoting the federal CPP.

Not all government advertising is bad. In fact the Progressive Conservative Party has been advocating for the government to spend its advertising dollars raising awareness about the growing fentanyl crisis. There are numerous important and pressing issues that the government could be spending your tax dollars on rather than ads seeking to boost their electoral fortunes.

More than a year ago, the government changed the fundraising rules after the Toronto Star revealed that cabinet ministers had secret annual party targets of up to \$500,000 apiece. The government was pressured into changing the law, because Ontarians know that it is wrong for the government to use its place in power and your money to benefit the Liberal Party. The government changed the rules on fundraising, and it is time for the government to restore auditor general oversight of government advertising.

Unfortunately, the Liberals voted down my Private Member's Bill, End the Public Funding of Partisan Government Advertising Act, 2017. However, PC leader Patrick Brown has committed a Conservative government to restoring Auditor General oversight over government advertising. It is time for the government to do the right thing and also make a commitment to non-partisan government advertising.

Visit my website www.sylviajonesmpp.ca and sign the petition in support of restoring oversight of government advertising

