

Minister's Op Ed – for use in advance of LTEP consultations

A few months ago, I was fortunate to be appointed Ontario's Minister of Energy. I have used these first months to look at the energy sector and get a clear picture of where we are now, and where we have the potential to go.

Ontario's electricity and fuels sectors have many strengths and advantages, and Ontario is well served by a diverse range of energy supply and infrastructure. We've made changes over the past decade, including the investments to eliminate coal-fired electricity, to diversify our electricity supply with clean renewable energy, to introduce more renewable content in our transportation fuels and to upgrade our electricity grid infrastructure. We now have an electricity system that is 90% emissions free, reliable, flexible, and ready to serve Ontarians. Both the natural gas and the electricity sectors have strong conservation targets to encourage efficiency and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

We have an adequate supply of energy over the next decade to meet projected demand, as explained in the recently published Ontario Planning Outlook and Fuels Technical Report. Our existing base of generation assets and projects underway provide Ontario with a robust supply of electricity with no forecasted need for major new generation for the next decade. Similarly, we enjoy a strong supply of affordable natural gas to heat many of our homes and businesses, and well-developed transportation fuels infrastructure. We encourage all stakeholders and members of the public to review these reports that have been made available in advance of engagement sessions.

Our investments have led to increases in the price of electricity, and this is an issue important to me and to many households across the province. The Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario has reported that the average total home energy costs in Ontario are actually quite similar to other provinces; we pay less on average than in Alberta or the Maritimes, and more than British Columbia or Quebec. But I also recognize that such comparisons are not the whole story.

Our government understands that for some households, energy bills are a struggle every month. That is why we are improving affordability now through actions like our proposed 8% rebate on all residential electricity bills, and total bill reductions of about 20% for eligible rural customers.

The larger lesson is that the decisions we make about energy can have long-lasting implications. It is for this reason that we take public engagements seriously and have enshrined in legislation a robust engagement process to inform the Long-Term Energy Plan.

This year, we are visiting more communities than ever before, and offering more ways to participate in the energy planning process. There will be a public open house meeting in [community detail/date/time,] one of sixteen community sessions across the province. We are also conducting telephone town halls and an online survey, and requesting written submissions through the Environmental Registry. More information about all of these opportunities can be found on my ministry's website, Ontario.ca/energy.

We rely heavily on clean, affordable, reliable electricity, natural gas, and other fuels for our homes, our vehicles, our businesses, and our communities. This is why we are encouraging Ontarians to have their say, to help us craft a plan that will serve us all well for years to come.