Ministry of Energy Top Issues - May 16, 2016

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Date: Tue, 16 May 2017 07:00:43 -0400

Good morning,

Here's what's making news:

- NDP, PCs to reject hydro cuts bill; Opposition leaders criticize Liberal legislation for only providing short term relief -- Toronto Star, pg. A8
- Electricity policy is falling behind the energy revolution; Governments have yet to reckon decisively with the framework required to optimize renewable energy and storage and distribution services – The Globe and Mail, pg. B4
- Hydro hurting Northern Ontario businesses: NDP
- Panel examining role of National Energy Board delivers report today; NEB overhaul report expected today
- Energy minister says numbers weren't final
- Hydro Bills Set to Decrease By the End of the Month -- CKVR
- Huron Bruce MPP Wants Hydro Debt Retirement Charge Taken Off Business Bills
- Liberals' hydro bill plan is 'truly disgusting,' Ontario NDP to vote against legislation
- Legislation For Lower Hydro Bills Introduced
- Municipalities 'need tools to do their job': PC Patrick Brown
- Proposed National Energy Board reforms will be a red-tape nightmare
- Ministers failing Northern Ontario
- Northern 'basics' not being addressed - Horwath -- The Timmins Daily Press, pg. A3

NDP, PCs to reject hydro cuts bill; Opposition leaders criticize Liberal legislation for only providing short term relief

Toronto Star

Tue May 16 2017

Page: A8

Section: News

Byline: Rob Ferguson

The NDP and Progressive Conservatives are banding together in a bid to stop legislation paving the way for a 25-per-cent hydro rate cut, saying the Liberal government plan is too expensive.

Both parties said Monday they would vote against the bill because the $25 billion in interest costs over the next 30 years is, in NDP Leader Andrea Horwath's words, "truly disgusting."

"It's a shell game, it's a farce," said Conservative Leader Patrick Brown, whose party revealed confidential cabinet documents last week showing prices rising sharply again in the next five to 10 years and beyond.

"We can never support a plan that's going to result in more debt and higher hydro rates."

While the Liberals intend to use their majority to pass the bill before the Legislature rises for its summer recess on June 1, Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault accused the opposition parties of standing in the way of rate relief for homeowners, farmers and small businesses.

"There are significant savings happening for families," he told reporters.

The legislation, introduced last Thursday, would enable the final chunk of the 25-per-cent rate cut, cut delivery charges for rural customers and expand the Ontario Electricity Support Program to cover more low-income seniors with a 50-per-cent increase in subsidies, for example.

"They're not supporting that," Thibeault said of the opposition parties.

Horwath accused the Liberals, who are hoping to improve their fortunes in the polls with a year until the next election campaign, of trying to buy people's votes with their own money and disguise further rate increases.

"People know, one way or another, they would pay the price," Horwath said, describing the Liberal plan as "relief for a couple of years, then, boom!"

The first part of the 25 per cent, an 8-per-cent instant rebate of the provincial portion of the HST, is already in place, having taken effect in January. The second part, a 9-per-cent reduction imposed by the price-setting Ontario Energy Board, kicked in May 1.

The final 8 per cent would take effect after the legislation is passed, giving the energy board 15 days to order the reduction in rates.

Thibeault said the government is aiming to have the full 25 per cent in place by July 1.

“It technically could be sooner … I can’t pre-judge how we’re going to get this legislation through the house.”

Thibeault tabled the legislation last Thursday to set up the borrowing of billions to amortize the cost of improvements to the hydro system over the last decade - including the closure of coal-fired plants and a shift to more expensive renewable energy - over the next 30 years to give people a break on rates now. The government has compared it to extending a mortgage to have lower payments.

Both the NDP and Progressive Conservatives have charged the Liberal plan does nothing to lower the structural causes of high electricity prices.

Horwath said she’s not worried about the government painting her New Democrats as opposed to the rate cut, saying, “The Liberals can play whatever political games they want.”

The energy minister has dismissed the leaked cabinet documents, obtained by the Conservatives and first reported here, as “outdated” and denied the government plans to raise hydro rates 10.5 per cent in 2028, when average monthly bills are forecast to hit $215.’

When both Thibeault and Premier Kathleen Wynne said their plan wasn’t based on those documents, Brown challenged the Liberals to show “a new document with rates going down.”

The energy minister said more detailed forecasts on rates will come in a few months with the release of the government’s long-term energy plan, as officials work to cut more and more costs in the electricity system.

According to the leaked documents, after rates fall this year, they will rise by no more than 2 per cent in the four following years before starting to rise at a rate of 6.5 per cent annually.

Horwath has promised to cut hydro rates between 17 and 30 per cent if she wins the June 7, 2018, provincial election.

The Conservatives have not unveiled a plan for hydro costs.

“The party opposite has no idea what to do with the energy file,” Thibeault shot at Brown during question period.

The Conservatives are having a pre-election policy convention in November.

Electricity policy is falling behind the energy revolution; Governments have yet to reckon decisively with the framework required to optimize renewable energy and storage and distribution services

The Globe and Mail
Tue May 16 2017
Page: B4
Section: Report on Business
Byline: MARK WINFIELD

Professor of environmental studies at York University

The large-scale electrification of transportation and other energy-based services is widely seen as an important element of efforts to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions produced by the combustion of fossil fuels. Major reductions in those emissions will be essential to meeting the requirements of the Paris Agreement on climate change, which the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has termed "dangerous."

The focus on electrification has emerged at a time of three major technological revolutions in the electricity industry.

Over the past decade, we have witnessed dramatic declines in the costs of renewable-energy technologies, particularly wind, solar photovoltaic (PV) and thermal technologies, while the performance of these technologies has been improving.

Similar developments have been occurring around energystorage technologies. Batteries, mechanical systems such as compressed air and flywheels, as well thermal and gas-based technologies have seen significant breakthroughs in cost and technological performance.

Finally, the emergence of "smart" electricity grids, through the digitization of communications and control systems, has the potential to lead to more adaptive and resilient electricity systems. Such systems will be better able to co-ordinate and integrate smaller-scale and geographically distributed energygeneration and storage technologies into reliable, grid-scale resources.

These three developments have the potential to make energy systems more environmentally and economically sustainable than is currently the case. They will be able to make better use of renewable low-carbon energy sources, be more reliable and resilient through the greater use of distributed and technologically diverse energy sources, have greater ability to adapt to changing circumstances and needs and have the potential to offer greater control to consumers.

While the technological elements needed to realize this potential are coming together rapidly, the required policy and institutional arrangements are evolving much more slowly. The full attainment of the sustainable-energy potential of these developments will require new business models for utilities, and the recognition of new types of actors and service providers in energy markets and systems.

A key focus of discussions in the United States and Europe around these developments has been the issue of aggregation services. This involves the coordination and integration of distributed energy production and storage resources, such as rooftop solar-PV systems, household or commercial-building scale energy-storage systems, such as Tesla Powerwalls, and electric vehicles with substantial battery storage capacity, into useful resources at the local, regional and national levels.

There are several dimensions to the creation of these sorts of “virtual power plants.” Information and communications technologies are needed to monitor, control and co-ordinate distributed resources. Technological developments in these areas are moving rapidly. The questions of who will provide these integration and co-ordination services, and how they will be paid to provide them, are emerging as significant challenges. Except for limited purposes such as peakdemand shaving, distributed resource-aggregation functions fall outside of the current rules for electricity systems in North America and Europe.

There are generally no structures for the offering of bundles of services as energy suppliers, managing and co-ordinating cumulative output of distributed generation and storage when more electricity is needed, conservation and demand management resources, reducing grid demand by relying on distributed generating and storage capacity and ancillary services such as grid-frequency regulation.

The issue of the role of aggregation services is now moving to the forefront of the future design of electricity markets and systems. A paper issued by the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) just before the arrival of the Trump administration proposed that aggregators of distributed generation and storage resources be treated as a new form of actor in electricity markets, with appropriate mechanisms to pay for their services. Similar proposals are being discussed in Germany as part of that country's Energiewende or energy transition.

Here in Canada, Ontario's local hydro companies (also known as local distribution companies or LDCs), have proposed that they be permitted to function as "fully integrated network orchestrators" in relation to these kinds of activities, something which the current electricitymarket rules in Ontario do not fully enable them to do. Some of Ontario's LDCs have been in the forefront of efforts to integrate and co-ordinate householdlevel renewable-energy generation and energy-storage technologies.

A technological revolution in energy systems is now under way. How governments respond to these developments will have a major impact on the shape of future energy systems, and their role in enabling us to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Research for this article was conducted as part of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)-funded Network on Storage Technology (NEST) project.

Panel examining role of National Energy Board delivers report today; NEB overhaul report expected today

Canadian Press
Mon May 15 2017
Section: National,Prairies/BC
Byline: Mia Rabson

OTTAWA - The question of whether the federal cabinet should be able to override National Energy Board decisions is expected to be addressed today in a report on the future of the regulator.

The five-member panel studying the structure, role and mandate of the NEB is to hand in its report to Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr today.

The review fulfills part of a ministerial mandate letter Prime Minister Justin Trudeau gave to Carr. The letter asked Carr to "modernize the National Energy Board to ensure that its composition reflects regional views and has sufficient expertise in fields such as environmental science, community development and indigenous traditional knowledge.”

Carr was unavailable to discuss the overhaul ahead of today’s release. Last fall, when he appointed the panel he said his message to them was simple: “Go recommend the best regulator in the world.”

The former Conservative government passed legislation in 2012 that allowed cabinet to approve projects that the NEB said should be rejected. Before the legislation, the NEB only forwarded proposals to cabinet that the board recommended be approved.

Lesley Matthews, a consultant on regulatory strategies in the energy industry and former employee at Kinder Morgan Canada, said in a commentary for the C.D. Howe Institute, that the government should not be able to overturn an NEB decision, except through the courts.

“What’s the point of going through this process of having people present evidence and having the decision made on evidence if it can just be made on non-evidence,” Matthews told The Canadian Press.

She said at the same time the government must create an energy policy framework for the country that would serve as the guidebook to the NEB as to whether a particular project fits Canada‘s vision or not.

The panel report will also likely address how to limit conflicts of interest among National Energy Board members or panellists enlisted to review a specific project. A perceived conflict of interest derailed the review process for the Energy East pipeline project last year after some of the appointees met privately with former Quebec Premier Jean Charest, who was lobbying on behalf of TransCanada Corp., the company proposing the project.

Matthews said the government and NEB should even review whether the board’s headquarters should be in Calgary, where its position alongside most of the headquarters of the companies it regulates may be perceived as troublesome.

Erin Flanagan, program director of federal policy for the environmental group the Pembina Institute, said her organization wants the NEB to give up its role as the environmental assessor of projects to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency.

Flanagan said the NEB and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission are the only two national bodies that still do their own environmental assessments.

Flanagan also wants fewer restrictions on who can appear before the board during a project review. There used to be no real limits on who could be heard but the 2012 changes to the National Energy Board Act limited participants to those directly affected or with clear expertise on the matter.

The National Energy Board has a mandate to regulate the construction and operation of fossil fuel pipelines and power lines that cross provincial or international borders, as well as the imports and exports of natural gas, the export of oil and electricity and oil and gas exploration. It makes recommendations to the Natural Resources minister.

It is an arm's length, quasi-judicial tribunal, which reports to Parliament via the minister.

Hydro hurting Northern Ontario businesses: NDP

The Sudbury Star
2017-05-16
During question period on Monday, NDP MPP John Vanthof told Premier Kathleen Wynne to stop hurting small businesses in Northern Ontario that are buckling under soaring hydro bills.

Thanks to leaked documents from the Liberal cabinet, people in Ontario now know the Wynne hydro plan will actually cause hydro bills to soar, the NDP charged.

"Camping is a big part of the culture in the north, and one of the beautiful places to take your trailer is the River Valley Park," Vanthof, the MPP for Timiskaming-Cochrane, said. "Tony DeBoer and his family have operated the park for many years, but they are being squeezed by the costs of hydro. Their hydro bill went up by $2,400 in 2016, for the same amount of power. Why has your government ignored the plight of struggling small business owners like Tony?"

The May 24 weekend, sometimes referred to as the May Run weekend, is one of the most anticipated rites of passages in Northern Ontario. River Valley Park is a place where northern families have come for years to relax and enjoy nature in a quiet country way.

"They are also struggling to pay their own bills, and camping at the park is getting harder and harder for them," Vanthof said. "So how much is their hydro, and Tony's power bills, going to go up as a result of your government's hydro borrowing scheme?"

Energy minister says numbers weren't final

Toronto Sun
Tue May 16 2017
Page: A5
Section: News
Byline: Shawn Jeffords

Four days after a bombshell cabinet document was leaked, Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault was still trying to explain on Monday why numbers in the report were wrong.

The cabinet records, released to media last Thursday by the Progressive Conservatives, show that hydro rates will soar by more than 50% after the Liberal plan to cap annual increases ends in 2022.

Initially, Thibeault said he could not verify the contents of the memo. Later Thursday, in a statement he acknowledged the figures were part of a draft of earlier plans as the Liberals developed the hydro rate cut.

On Monday, Thibeault wouldn't say how the figures in the cabinet document differ from those in the plan now before MPPs.

"We still don't have those final numbers completed," he said. "It's the long-term energy plan that actually dictates where those numbers are going to go."

Thibeault said the real figures on hydro price projections will be released in the government's Long-term Energy Plan, expected later this summer.

"The documents that you saw last week were one iteration of many cabinet documents that were talking about projections," he said.

Hydro Bills Set to Decrease By the End of the Month

Source: CKVR

May 15, 2017 6:12 PM

Anchor: You should receive a welcome surprise on your hydro bill at the end of the month. The government has introduced double-digit discounts on your hydro bills and it going to start showing up within weeks. CTV's Paul Bliss has more from Queen's Park.

Reporter: We're in what's called shoulder season in the electricity sector. Bills generally lower because of the moderate temperatures, but you will likely feel a bit better about your hydro bill at the end of this month. Here's why. Bills were reduced 8 per cent January 1st. They dropped another 9 per cent as of May 1st, and they will go down an additional 8 per cent or more by July 1st, likely starting in mid-June. The Energy Minister says he hopes his government's Fair Hydro Plan legislation will pass within weeks.

Glenn Thibeault, Ontario Energy Minister: So the day you turn your light on and it's 25 per cent less.

Reporter: The coming reductions are likely hard to imagine for most Ontarians, especially after the oppressive hydro bills we all got last summer.

Andrea Horwath, Ontario NDP Leader: I’m disgusted by Kathleen Wynne's priorities! Votes for herself, not affordability for families who are struggling.

Reporter: The PCs accuse the Liberals are selling the future because a leaked document shows bills will spike starting in five years.

Patrick Brown, Ontario PC Leader: People can't afford their hydro bills right now in Ontario and they put forward a plan that's going to have hydro rates go up 61 per cent! Mr. Speaker, it's unbelievable! When will this Premier actually act on solving the structural problems with hydro?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Our plan was built to reduce people's bills by 25 per cent across the province, Mr. Speaker, and keep those bills down in the immediate term, and in the midterm and the long-term, Mr. Speaker.

Reporter: This issue still a big problem for Kathleen Wynne and her government. The next election is just 13 months away.

Huron Bruce MPP Wants Hydro Debt Retirement Charge Taken Off Business Bills

Blackburnnews.com
2017-05-15
Byline: JANICE MACKAY

Huron Bruce MPP Lisa Thompson wants to see the Debt Retirement Charge removed from hydro bills for Ontario small businesses.

Thompson has tabled a bill to amend the Electricity Act,1998, after hearing small businesses are having a hard time affording their hydro.

Thompson says the Auditor General revealed in 2011 that the government had already collected enough money to pay off Hydro One’s $7.8 billion stranded debt.

And though the government removed the debt retirement charge from residential bills, businesses continue to pay it.

She says the Ontario Electricity Financial corporation reported the government collected $859 million from the debt retirement charge in 2015-16 alone.

“The government continues to collect thousands of dollars every month from businesses across the province under the pretense of repaying the debt retirement charge, meanwhile the reality is that it's simply for their own use," said Thompson. "Small businesses and the families that work hard to keep them running should not bear the burden of the Liberal's fiscal mismanagement."

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business says the debt retirement charges accounts for between 2 and 5% of Ontario businesses' hydro bills.

"We thank Lisa Thompson for listening and working to directly address one of our Ontario members' three key energy recommendations," said Julie Kwiecinski, Director of Provincial Affairs (Ontario) for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB). "Our 42,000 Ontario members representing all sectors have been struggling with crippling hydro costs for several years. We have been advocating for immediately removing the debt retirement charge from commercial hydro bills, as well as eliminating punitive time of use pricing, and making the Global Adjustment visible on all hydro bills."

"This is just another example of the Liberal government continuing to hurt small business in Ontario," said Thompson. "If passed, this bill would ease the pressures on Ontario small businesses who are feeling the burden of Liberal government mismanagement day in and day out."

NDP to vote against Liberal govt's hydro plan

Owen Sound Sun Times

Tue May 16 2017

Page: A2

Section: News

Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath says her party will vote against the Liberal government's plan to lower hydro bills, calling it a ploy to buy votes for the next provincial election.

Under legislation tabled last week, Ontarians will see lowered hydro bills for the next 10 years before paying higher costs for the following 20 years.

Horwath says Ontarians can't afford the plan.

She cited a Liberal cabinet document leaked to the Progressive Conservatives last week, which contains a projection that electricity bills will drop this year, rise slightly for four years while increases are limited to the rate of inflation, and then rise quickly after that.

Premier Kathleen Wynne says the figures in that document are out of date, but the government isn't ready to release updated numbers.

Horwath is accusing the government of hiding information from the public and is calling on the government to release all of its projections about how much the hydro plan will cost in the long run.

Horwath also says the government is giving the public no time to give feedback on the plan as it's attempting to get the legislation passed before the House rises for the summer.

"I think people knew that, one way or another, they'd pay the prices for Premier Wynne's latest move on hydro, but the costs Wynne is expecting us all to take on with this plan is truly disgusting," Horwath said.

The hydro legislation will lower time-of-use rates by removing from bills a portion of the global adjustment, a charge consumers pay for above-market rates to power producers. For the next 10 years, a new entity overseen by Ontario Power Generation will take on debt to pay that difference.

Then, the cost of paying back that debt with interest - which the government says will be up to $28 billion - will go back onto ratepayers'bills for the next 20 years as a "Clean Energy Adjustment."

Horwath acknowledged that the Liberal majority government can implement their plan, even with her party and the Progressive Conservatives opposed. - The Canadian Press

Legislation For Lower Hydro Bills Introduced:

Windsor Square

2017-05-15

Byline: ROBERT TUOMI

(TORONTO, ON) – Last Thursday, the Ontario government introduced legislation that will, if passed, lower electricity bills by 17 per cent on average for residential and small business customers. The 17 per cent includes previously announced rate cuts by the Ontario Energy Board, which took effect on May 1.

The 17 per cent does not include the 8% Ontario sales tax which was removed from electricity bills in January. The reduction was offset by tax increases of a combined equal amount. These increases, known as cap and trade taxes, were added to gasoline and natural gas purchases.

The proposed bill, known as the Fair Hydro Act, 2017, will also hold hydro rate increases over the next four years to no more than the rate of inflation. Currently the province's inflation rate is a little over 2 per cent.

If the province continues with 2% inflation, the impact of its 17% reduction will be severely eroded. In four years, the reduction will be less than 9%. On a related issue, the Ontario Energy Board is still contemplating whether or not to extend its temporary ban on the winter discontinuation of service to hydro customers who are late in paying their bills.

The ban has since been lifted and a review is now being conducted. However the OEB, in a May 1 letter to electrical distributors, has cautioned that it will expect them to be, "… customer focused in their approach to any pending disconnections of residential customers and to ensure that they must continue to follow the current rules."

The ban did not sit well with Windsor's electricity distributor EnWin , which is owned by the city.

EnWin publicly argued that taking away its ability to cut customers from electricity, even in the winter, would eliminate one of the methods it uses to collect the money it is owed.

The OEB's letter noted that the distributors are, "… strongly encouraged to work with customers facing disconnection to find solutions that achieve the best possible outcome for those customers, including providing information and payment options to maintain the customer's connection."

Municipalities 'need tools to do their job': PC Patrick Brown

Almaguin News

Mon May 15 2017

Page: 1

NORTH BAY - Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown says red tape is costing people much need wages.

“Nowhere do we see more red tape than in the dangerous species act,” said Brown speaking to the annual convention of the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM) in North Bay last week.

Such legislation, he said, sees “hard-working people sent home from their jobs” because of issues like “turtle crossing restrictions.”

Brown lashed out at the Liberal government for what he called “a lack of support for the forestry industry,” citing a decrease of 50 per cent of forestry jobs in the last decade, and for “taking the north for granted. Northern Ontario did not even have an opportunity to provide input on the mining legislation,” he said.

Speaking to the municipal leaders from across Northern Ontario, including those from Parry Sound and Nipissing Districts, Brown said the Liberal government only took action on Ontario Hydro bills after people in southern Ontario became vocal.

“When they realized it was going to affect their seats in Toronto, they suddenly woke up,” he said, but added that this “short-sighted approach hurts Northern Ontario more than southern Ontario. The cost to operate our hockey rinks, hospitals and community centres are affected when the hydro bills are going through the roof.”

Pointing at the councillors and mayors in the auditorium, Brown said, “You have to wear that. These costs are in your budgets.”

And it wasn’t just mounting bills that Brown brought to the municipal leaders’ attention.

“Under the Liberal government, 600 Ontario schools have been closed,” he said. “When a school is taken out of community, you rip the heart out of that community.”

Brown said school closures were “the best recipe to depopulate a municipality. When you’re trying to bring in new employers or businesses, it hurts your pitch if there’s no place for their children to go to school.”

Stressing that “municipalities need the tools to do their job,” Brown said he repeatedly hears the same concerns from municipalities but the government doesn't respond.

"It's like the movie Groundhog Day," he said. "I hear the same concerns every year, but they don't get acted upon. The Liberal government must recognize that a prosperous Northern Ontario means a prosperous province of Ontario."

Over 200 delegates attended the convention held May 10-12 at Nipissing University, which looked at specific concerns for Northern Ontario communities.

Through keynote speakers and workshops, the municipal leaders were given an opportunity to "take tangible tools back to their communities," said FONOM president Al Spacek, mayor of Kapuskasing.

With sessions planned to provide for interaction with a variety of provincial ministers, party leaders and senior bureaucrats, Spacek hoped the message would become clear that when it comes to Northern Ontario, "one size does not fit all."

Proposed National Energy Board reforms will be a red-tape nightmare

Financial Post
Mon May 15 2017
Section: Energy
Byline: Claudia Cattaneo

A panel of experts charged with modernizing the National Energy Board has recommended sweeping changes to the way major pipelines are approved in Canada, including getting the federal cabinet to determine if a project is in the national interest before regulators follow up with a more technical review. At the same time, the panel wants to expand the role of indigenous communities, move some leadership jobs to Ottawa from Calgary and establish an independent energy information agency.

By recommending changes to so many aspects of Canada's approval process and expanding the circle of people who have a say, the panel offers much to many.

But the recommendations are also a red-tape maker's dream. The reforms are so vast and propose to fix so many unresolved issues they would make an already-onerous regulatory process even more daunting. Meanwhile, the upside is uncertain . Most likely, those who are opposed to pipelines will continue to oppose them, regardless of how they are approved .

On Monday, after months of public input, the five-member panel handed its 100-page report to Jim Carr, Canada's minister of natural resources, suggesting ways to improve the structure, role and mandate of the Calgary-based NEB, with the goal of restoring "public trust," and so that it performs as a regulator, not a policy-maker.

Its recommendations include replacing the NEB with a Canadian Energy Transmission Commission that would be governed by a board of directors based in Ottawa; requiring major projects to undergo a one-year review by the federal cabinet to ensure they are in the national interest before an additional two-year environmental and more technical review by the commission jointly with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency.

"Before going too far down the road of considering a new project, cabinet must decide if, at a high level, that project is in the national interest, (followed by a detailed project review covering the full range of issues)," the panel says. "At this stage, "yes" means yes, subject to further regulatory approval after a detailed project review," and "no" means "NO."

So "yes" would still be a maybe, since the second review would also have the authority to approve or deny major projects.

Canadian PressNatural Resources Minister Jim Carr heard today that the existing energy board has the impossible task of both regulating growth of the energy industry and meeting climate change goals.

The two-step process means reviews would take three years instead of 15 months. In practice, reviews have taken a lot longer than 15 months, which raises questions about whether three years actually means a lot longer.

The panel recommends to "radically increase the scale and scope of its stakeholder engagement," to improve the relationship with landowners, and to create a new, Ottawa-based Canadian Energy Information Agency.

It also recommends a much-expanded role for aboriginal people to ensure their treaty rights are taken into account.

“We see ourselves situated at the beginning of a new era in the industry and evolution of Canada , an era where Indigenous peoples will, at long last, assume their rightful place at the table of Confederation as leaders, knowledge keepers, and most importantly, as equals, bringing to bear distinct and valuable experiences and wisdom,” the panel says.

But that’s not all. The federal government would play a central role to coordinate a Canadian Energy Strategy, in partnership with aboriginal people, provinces and territories, so that “a proposed energy infrastructure project aligns with Canada ‘s big picture goals for economic, social and environmental progress.”

Given the slow progress made on such energy strategy over the past decade - conflicting and changing views by aboriginals on resource development, the evolving climate change policy debate, conflicting views between provinces about the future of energy - the proposed reform could take years.

With the Canadian energy sector facing “increasingly difficult competitive headwinds” from the United States, where President Donald Trump is cutting red tape, re-imagining the regulatory process at the same time could mean even greater challenges, said Trevor McLeod, director of the Natural Resources Centre at the Canada West Foundation.

We see ourselves situated at the beginning of a new era in the industry and evolution of Canada

Still, McLeod said the report does a good job in many areas, including pushing political decisions upfront to improve regulatory certainty, increasing public engagement, and creating an independent energy information agency, which many believe is long overdue .

It also comes up with better recommendations than a parallel report on reforms to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, McLeod said. That report envisioned an expanded role for the agency on energy projects, which would threaten Canadian competitiveness even more, McLeod said.

For its part, the West Coast Environmental Law Association said the panel completely missed the mark on how projects such as oil pipelines should be assessed.

“The panel has effectively recommended replacing environmental assessments - our main tool for publicly and thoroughly evaluating the risks and benefits of proposals - with a politicized ‘national interest determination’ made without all the information about a project’s environmental implications,” staff counsel Anna Johnston said in a statement. “It is inconsistent with the recommendations by the expert panel appointed to review Canada ‘s environmental assessment process, and totally out of step with leading-edge thinking.”

Both panels envision a greater federal role in energy issues, which means a lesser role for provinces to determine the future of their economies. For Alberta and Calgary in particular, the heart of the oil and gas sector, the transfer of jobs and decision making to Ottawa means further loss in stature.

The irony is that all these reforms could be much ado about nothing, since both industry and the panel envision fewer major pipeline projects in the future. In that case, the panel recommends that the new commission apply its talents to facilitating interprovincial electricity transmission systems to take full advantage of new and emerging sources of renewable energy.

Northern 'basics'not being addressed - Horwath

The Timmins Daily Press
Tue May 16 2017
Page: A3
Section: News
Byline: Jennifer Hamilton-Mccharles
Source: Postmedia Network

It was the second warning in the same vein in less than 24 hours.

Northern Ontario is being ignored.

NDP leader Andrea Horwath was the second opposition leader to tell delegates at the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities conference at Nipissing University Thursday that communities north of Highway 400 are being forgotten.

Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown had his day on stage Wednesday where he told delegates Ontario‘s Liberal government has taken the North for granted and doesn’t understand the day-to-day concerns of Northerners.

”Ontario‘s success depends on the success of Northern Ontario,” Horwath said.

“We understand what is happening across Northern Ontario and we wish our government would as well. So many families, businesses and individuals are being pushed to the breaking point,” she said.

“Many municipalities are struggling to keep arenas and community centres open. These places are the heart of towns and cities.”

Horwath blamed the high cost of hydro and massive cuts to health care workers.

“Electricity isn’t a luxury and shouldn’t be priced as one,” she said.

“NDP’s commitment would be to lower electricity rates by 30 per cent and end time of use pricing. Families can cook dinner at dinner time and not be penalized for it.”

Horwath also promised rural residents would pay the same delivery charges for hydro as urban residents.

“The first bill would be to return Hydro One back into public ownership.

Government is supposed to work for the people.”

Horwath also didn’t waste any time reminding the crowd of about 100 people that the Liberals’latest budget did nothing to fix the damage they did or rebuild Northern Ontario.

Horwath said there was no mention of the Northlander train, Ontario Northland Transportation Commission or the Ring of Fire in the spring budget.

“There was also no mention of stopping hospital cuts or school closures.

Our kids in Northern Ontario deserve so much better,” she said.

Horwath also took the opportunity to remind delegates about her party’s universal pharmacare plan.

“One in four Ontarians is forced to skip their medications or they split their pills because they can’t afford to fill their prescription,” she said.

“Municipalities and businesses are struggling to keep up with drug costs.”

She criticized the province’s commitment to health care.

Horwath told a story about an 80-year-old woman from Sudbury who spent a few days in the emergency room before transferring to a TV room for 20 days. She ended up spending a night in the shower room because of the lack of available beds.

“I also spoke to another woman from Brampton who suffered from internal bleeding and spent five days in a hospital bed in the hallway,” Horwath said.

“It’s absolutely unacceptable.

Nobody voted for that. The very basics are not taken care of.”