Ministry of Energy Top Issues - September 8, 2016

From: "Kourakos, Georgina (ENERGY)" <georgina.kourakos@ontario.ca>
To: "@ENERGY-All" <energy.all@msgov.gov.on.ca>
Date: Thu, 08 Sep 2016 07:02:47 -0400

Good morning,

Here's what's making news:

- Relief coming from soaring hydro bills, Wynne says - Toronto Star
- Premier Kathleen Wynne calls Ontario hydro rates an 'urgent issue' for her government - Globalnews.ca
- Wynne signals hydro relief is coming for consumers - thespec.com
- Kathleen Wynne says high cost of hydro is concern across province - CBC.CA News
- Soaring hydro costs driving families into poverty - Carleton Place Almonte Canadian Gazette
- Hydro rates too high – The Barrie Examiner
- Chamber wants this cap-and-trade business out in the open - TimminsToday.com
- NDP Energy Critic Comments on Toronto Man's Lawsuit Against Hydro One – CKPR
- Thibeault 'celebrates' city solar projects - Sudbury Star
- Energy Initiatives Across The Province Include Solar Panels For Two Facilities In Sudbury – MCTV
- Enwin uses drone to inspect lines, infrastructure remotely - Windsor Star
- Alberta the new coal-burning canary: Steward - thestar.com

Relief coming from soaring hydro bills, Wynne says; Energy Minister Thibeault to examine methods to help residents 'bear the costs'
Toronto Star
Thu Sep 8 2016
Page: A4
Section: News
Byline: Robert Benzie Toronto Star

Premier Kathleen Wynne is signalling that some kind of relief is coming for electricity ratepayers zapped by soaring hydro bills this hot summer.

Wynne told reporters Wednesday she was getting that message from homeowners and tenants across the province even before the governing Liberals lost Thursday's Scarborough-Rouge River byelection.

"We heard concerns at the doors in Scarborough-Rouge River, and, quite frankly, those concerns are things that we now have to take to heart and we have to use them to inform our actions going forward," she said, referring to the victory by Progressive Conservative Raymond Cho.

"One of the things that we heard most consistently was hydro rates. I heard about electricity rates in the north. It is not something that is isolated in one riding in Toronto. This is a concern across the province. I recognize that."

Wynne said she has instructed Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault, who was appointed in June, to examine "ways to help people bear the costs in their day-to-day lives."

"It's an urgent issue for the minister of energy," the premier said, admitting there has been "a cost associated with" government investments in electricity infrastructure that are being borne by ratepayers.

"We have had to make upgrades. We had to make the investments that we made to have a reliable energy system, electricity system in this province," she said.

"We understand that we need to take that into account and come up with increasing or further mitigations. We haven't done enough … there's more that we have to do," said Wynne, who did not elaborate on the details.

Beyond rebates to consumers paid from the provincial treasury, it is unclear what Queen's Park can do to offset bills that will be even larger than expected due to the reliance on air-conditioners during a scorching summer.

The independent Ontario Energy Board sets electricity rates, not the government, and the Liberals maintain that the sale of most of Hydro One to fund transportation infrastructure won't affect bills.

In fact, the government has argued a privatized transmission utility might be a more efficient company that could pass on savings to consumers, although both the Tories and the New Democrats strongly dispute that.

The Liberals point out that Thibeault, a former NDP MP and Sudbury United Way official, is well-versed on the concerns of northerners and low-income Ontarians.

But the rookie cabinet minister will have his work cut out for him devising some kind of "mitigation" scheme to help the vast swath of ratepayers alarmed by the size of their bills.

The means-tested Ontario Electricity Support Program already provides monthly credits ranging from $30 to $75 depending upon location and the number of people in the home.

Families with after-tax household incomes of $52,000 or less can apply for the OESP.

Under former premier Dalton McGuinty, the Liberals in 2010 instituted the Ontario Clean Energy Benefit, a 10 per cent discount on hydro bills to compensate for the cost of wind and solar power subsidies.

That costly five-year program, while politically successful because it helped McGuinty win the 2011 election, was criticized by conservationists because the more energy a consumer used the more he or she saved.

Premier Kathleen Wynne calls Ontario hydro rates an 'urgent issue' for her government
Globalnews.ca
2016-09-07
Byline: Andrew Russell National Online Reporter

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne says rising hydro bills are an "urgent issue" across the province, marking an about-face for the Liberal government who had previously downplayed rising energy costs for rural residents.

Wynne said in the Scarborough-Rouge River byelection the most consistent issue her government heard from Ontarians was the rising cost of electricity bills.

"It's not something that is isolated to one riding in Toronto. It's a concern across the province and I recognize that," Wynne told reporters Wednesday. "I've heard those concerns and those concerns will become part of our considerations as we go."

She called the matter an "urgent issue" for the Minister of Energy Glenn Thibeault.

"We had to make the investments that we made to have the reliable electricity system in the province," Wynne said. "I recognize that there's a cost associated with them and I recognized that before the byelection and I've said we understand that we need to take that into account and come up with increasing or further mitigations."

Francesca Dobbyn, executive director of the United Way of Bruce County said she was "thrilled" the premier had "finally heard that enough is enough."

"It's about time somebody recognized the crisis going on, not just here in rural Ontario but across Ontario where people are struggling with these extremely high utility bills," she said.

"There's definitely a big issue going on in our community and it's become an urgent issue and it's definitely a crisis."

Dobbyn said she wanted to see the provincial government engage with the charitable sector and ask what they and the community needs to resolve the issue across the province.

“They need to engage with those of us that are on the ground with these issues, rather than just making decisions and listening to the for-profit companies that have the ear of the politicians,” she said, adding that increasing the Ontario Energy Support Program up from $30 would go a long way in helping consumers.

“Double it. Just immediately flat out anybody who qualifies — double it. … Put a moratorium on disconnection right now. Just stop until we get an idea of what needs to happen and just slow this down and talk to us.”

The change in rhetoric from the Wynne government follows extensive reporting by Global News on the skyrocketing electricity rates and the financial toll it’s having on rural residents in Ontario that many have described as a crisis.

When Global News spoke with Thibeault in July, he was reluctant to say energy costs had reached a crisis point, instead urging residents to conserve more.

“I think it’s important for people to understand there’s a cost associated with getting the power from the generating station,” said Thibeault. “Every time someone turns on the light switch, or plugs something in, there’s a cost associated with that.”

Numbers released last month by the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) showed 567,000 Ontario electricity customer accounts were in arrears by end of 2015, owing $172.5 million, a significant increased from the 472,620 customers who owed roughly $108 million in 2013.

Earlier this week, the Progressive Conservatives scored a shocking upset earlier this week in the Scarborough-Rouge River byelection. City councillor Raymond Cho won the riding, defeating the Liberals in a seat they have held since it was created in 1999.

After the stunning defeat, Premier Wynne admitted rising hydro rates are becoming a political issue she cannot ignore.

“We heard at the door that hydro rates are increasingly challenging for people,” she wrote. “I understand, as do my ministers, that the government needs to focus on helping people with their everyday expenses.”

Jacques Bourbeau and Adam Miller contributed to this report

Wynne signals hydro relief is coming for consumers
thespec.com
Section: News
2016-09-07
Byline:
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“We have had to make upgrades. We had to make the investments that we made to have a reliable energy system, electricity system in this province,” she said.

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Kathleen Wynne says high cost of hydro is concern across province
CBC.CA News
Wed Sep 7 2016, 8:22pm ET
Section: Toronto
Byline: CBC News

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne says high electricity rates are a concern across the province and the government may need to do more to help people struggling to pay their bills.

“This is a concern across the province, and I recognize that,” Wynne told reporters at Queen’s Park on Wednesday.?

Wynne said residents in northern Ontario and in Scarborough-Rouge River have told her they are feeling the pinch from high hydro rates.

“So this is not something that is isolated in one riding in Toronto,” she said.

Wynne called the issue “urgent” for Ontario Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault. She said the province may need to make changes to its Ontario Energy Support Program, which is intended to provide monthly bill payment support to low income residents.

“What I know is, we haven’t done enough.” she said. “Quite frankly, those concerns are things that we now have to take to heart and we have to use them to inform our actions going forward.”

Wynne, however, defended provincial investments in hydro infrastructure, saying the upgrades to the system were necessary.

“We had to make upgrades to have a reliable electricity system in the province. We have made those investments. And I recognize there is a cost associated with them.”

Raymond Cho, who ran for the Progressive Conservatives, beat Liberal candidate Piragal Thiru in the Scarborough-Rouge River byelection last week. The Liberals had held that riding since 1999.

Electricity rates are set by the province and they have been increasing steadily as the Ontario government invests in cleaner energy.

Soaring hydro costs driving families into poverty
Carleton Place Almonte Canadian Gazette
Thu Sep 8 2016
Page: A15
Section: News
Byline: Jeff Maguire
Source: Carleton Place Almonte Canadian Gazette

When people ask if you are “into green energy ” it is nice to be able to hold up your hand.

I have no issues with working to eliminate coal-fired electrical generation or reducing our dependency on nuclear energy which, despite a record of success, still scares many of us.

Going green is fine. But not at any price! And right now Ontario is in the midst of a growing electricity crisis. We have the power, that’s not the issue. The problem is the soaring cost of delivering electricity to customers, especially those who are unfortunate enough to live in lightly populated, rural areas.

The Liberal government of Premier Kathleen Wynne refuses to term the current situation “a crisis.” But for thousands of rural Ontarians who are struggling to pay their electricity bills it is a catastrophe.

Some of the tales of woe we’re hearing on a daily basis are truly pitiable.

Three weeks ago I read about a man in Bruce County, near Lake Huron, who after suffering a serious heart attack told family and friends it would be better if he died instead of surviving.

His reasoning is that the medical equipment he is now required to use regularly runs on electricity. It is driving up his family’s already ridiculous hydro bill.

The man’s family have turned to social agencies, including the United Way of Bruce County, in an effort to find the funds to meet their financial commitment.

Ironically Bruce County is home to one of Ontario’s largest power generating facilities. The Bruce Power nuclear generating station provides more than 30 per cent of this province’s electricity. But in these circumstances the Bruce plant does little to reduce the cost of power for nearby residents. Instead they are forced to pay high delivery charges to Hydro One to cover the cost of transporting electricity to their rural community. That despite the fact some are living in the shadow of the biggest power generating facility in the province.

The reality is that cutting electricity usage isn’t the answer. Ontarians are regularly bombarded with advertising urging us to reduce our energy consumption. Smart meters were introduced in a further effort to make us reconsider our primetime use of hydro and instead wash our clothes or run the dishwasher during off peak hours.

Clearly that’s a smoke screen. Because no matter how much people in rural Ontario cut their energy consumption - many have resorted to living in only two or three rooms in their homes - their hydro bills continue to soar. On top of that they are threatened with disconnection if they don’t pay these ridiculously high amounts.

Yes, if you are one of the growing numbers of people in this province who are struggling to pay their electrical bills this is definitely a crisis.

Still, despite the growing mountain of evidence that thousands can’t pay skyrocketing electricity bills, recently installed provincial Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault and his fellow ministers have failed to properly respond to public pleas. Few answers I enjoy watching Global TV Toronto and they’ve done a very good job of pursuing this important subject, pointing out the obvious and also delving into some of the sad individual stories involved.

Admittedly Thibeault has inherited the worst job in cabinet. He did agree to an interview with Global in July which I watched with interest. However he leaned very heavily on the “I just inherited the file and I’m not up to speed ” excuse which, at that time, was reasonable I suppose. But why agree to an interview when you can’t provide any answers ? Global TV recently revealed the findings of an in-depth investigation they conducted with respect to high electricity bills. A month after telling the network he didn't yet have answers to the questions posed, Thibeault refused a request for a follow-up interview.

Surely after a month the minister would have brought himself up to speed ? What better opportunity to boost his government's sagging fortunes then by providing some answers to the mounting questions about this alarming situ-ation ? The obvious lack of any accountability doesn't give me much faith in the Wynne government who have yet to dem-onstrate a solid commitment to finding ways to stem rising electricity costs.

On the other hand they are quick to financially back green initiatives such as wind and solar despite the fact those installations cost a massive amount of money to install while generating a paltry return on investment. They simply don't add enough electricity to the grid to make them practical. Not at this stage.

We all know what a mess the previous McGuinty government made of the plan to introduce gas-fired power to Ontario. Yet to me that is still an option worth pursuing. Gasfired plants are providing lots of electricity south of the border. For example the glitzy and impressive 'Strip'in Las Vegas is heavily fed by power generated using natural gas. In the case of Nevada my information is that the plants themselves are located in desert areas, away from heavily populated centres such as Vegas and Reno.

In Ontario wind turbines and solar panels are popping up in people's backyards and many of those affected are angry. That is especially true relative to turbines which many communities are fighting furiously due to fears the giant towers contribute to human health problems. In some cases turbines have been installed willy-nilly with little thought for their impact on the landscape or nearby residents.

All this in the cause of promoting green energy which the government hopes will make them look modern and progressive. But at what cost to taxpayers ? Still, the matter at hand is high electricity bills and something dramatic clearly needs to be done to help rectify this.

Why, exactly, have delivery charges risen so sharply under the stewardship of this government ? Even a cursory look at the so-called "Sunshine List " issued to tell us who in government or government-related jobs are making more than $100,000 annually is revealing. Hydro employees comprise a huge share of those at the very top of the list. Management costs costs related to operating So, has high management this ? Looking at the combined Hydro One played a part in cost of all those six-figure price of running the organi-incomes makes it clear the The money has to come from zation has also skyrocketed.

somewhere. It's impossible not to believe that we, the public, are supporting this out of control system! I have no problem with hydro employees making a decent wage. But why so many on the sunshine list ? Snowballing management costs have to be playing some part in all of this.

In Manitoba the average monthly bill for rural hydro users is $88. Cross the border into Ontario and the average is fast approaching $300 a month.

While researching this column I was given access to the bills of friends who live in rural Lanark County. The July electrical bill for one couple was $319.48. They have no family at home and due to the rising cost of hydro they rarely use their central air conditioning in summer. Yet their bill continues to rise.

Another couple we know, who have two children at home, were also billed in excess of $300 in July. And they live in a newer "energy efficient home."

By comparison our July bill here in Carleton Place was $167.96. That despite the fact our hydro use was down three points from the same period last year.

I haven't even touched on the worst examples. In some cases rural people are facing thousands of dollars in electrical costs and they simply don't have the income to pay. The situation is so bad for some families that officials in some jurisdictions worry this is evolving from an affordability issue to one of public health and safety. For example, in the midst of the hottest summer in recent memory in Ontario many residents, including the elderly, couldn't afford to run air conditioners that make the environment in their homes and apartments liveable.

There are even reports some people have suffered mental health breakdowns and sought treatment because they're so stressed about out of control hydro bills.

Yes Madame Premier and Mr.

Energy Minister, this is a fullblown, four-alarm crisis for huge numbers of Ontarians! At this point I believe the focus should shift from energy saving, which clearly isn't the answer, to finding cheaper ways to produce and deliver electricity. Why not purchase more power from other jurisdictions if it is available at less cost ? Neighbouring Quebec doesn't have the energy crisis Ontario does and it also has an abundance of power sources. This government also needs to cut soaring hydro management costs.

At present many people are being forced to curtail spending on other things that are vital for the mental and physical well-being of themselves and their children in favour of hoarding money to try and keep the hydro on.

That is simply unacceptable in a supposedly modern and progressive society! If you have a comment or question for Jeff Maguire he can be reached by email at : jeffrey. maguire @rogers. com .

Hydro rates too high
The Barrie Examiner
Thu Sep 8 2016
Page: A4
Section: Opinion
Byline: Ross Ayotte
Source: The Barrie Examiner

Ontario's Auditor General (AG) stated the province is overpaying by3.5 times for solar power and over-paying twice as much for wind power; as a result, we are over-paying $9.2 billion on 20-year wind and solar power contracts.

The AG also stated from 2006-2014 we paid $37 billion in 'global adjustment fees'to accommodate this failed experiment, but it gets worse. From 2014 to 2032, Ontarians will have paid an additional $133 billion more in global adjustment fees and yes, Premier Kathleen Wynne is defending her record and is staying the course to produce more so-called green energy.

The truth is Ontario is over-producing electricity to the point that the Independent Electricity System Operator predicts, between 2015-2020, this province will have over-produced enough excess power to fully supply hydro to Nova Scotia for five years -while paying wind and solar farms not to produce power.

Due to Liberal policies, there are 571 households eligible to receive the Ontario energy support program, which gets added on our hydro bill.

Also the Ontario Energy Board reports 566 homes were in arrears last year and 60 homes got disconnected, and yes, you can expect a nice rate increase on Nov. 1, 2016, thanks to Wynne.

Also38.6 % of our bill is a delivery charge,11.5 % of our bill is HST /GST and 3 % is our regulatory charge. Keep in mind Ontario is the only province in Canada to have the foregoing charges added to our power bill, which means53.1 % of our bill has nothing to do with how much hydro we use.

Then as mentioned above, our global adjustment fees are added to what we pay to produce hydro and the difference for what it is sold for and you no longer have to ask why we have the highest hydro rates in North America.

Ross Ayotte

Smiths Fall

Chamber wants this cap-and-trade business out in the open
TimminsToday.com
2016-09-07
NEWS RELEASE

TIMMINS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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In partnership with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Timmins Chamber is calling for the Ontario Energy Board to reverse its decision to fold cap-and-trade costs into the delivery line of customers' natural gas bills, a move that would effectively hide those costs.

In a letter collaboratively issued to Rosemarie Leclair, Chair and CEO of the Ontario Energy Board (OEB), the provincial Chamber network called upon the arm's-length organization to instead separate the cost of carbon emissions into their own line item on bills – an approach that's in use in other Canadian cap-and-trade regimes, such as those in British Columbia and Quebec.

By instead choosing to blend those potential costs of the proposed provincial climate change plan into the generic delivery charge, consumers and businesses alike will be unable to determine what the real cost of emissions may be, said Chris Bender, president of the Timmins Chamber.

"If the provincial government plans to move ahead with a cap-and-trade regime that will have a definite financial impact on business, it must provide the ability to determine where it is working and where it is not," said Bender.

"The inability to see the direct cost of their fossil fuel usage prevents businesses from being able to manage and reduce that usage. If the goal of the proposed cap-and-trade program is to encourage a reduction in emissions, it is incumbent on the OEB to be as transparent as possible about the associated costs."

The letter issued to the OEB also raises questions about some of the other uncertainties raised by the decision to blend cap-and-trade costs into the delivery charge.

In particular, it is unclear about how the province will continue to ensure the tax exempt status of certain fossil fuel users, such as farmers and First Nations communities, when the cap-and-trade cost is rolled into the delivery charges on the purchase of gasoline, diesel, propane, and natural gas.

In previous communications with the provincial government, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) and the Timmins Chamber were informed that the decision to determine the handling of cap-and-trade-related costs on consumer bills is the sole purview of the OEB.

While its mandate is determined by the Ontario government, the OEB is an arm's-length agency which is neutral and independent from the government.

"Our chambers believe that the transparency of the cap and trade program is an essential component of driving changes in customer behavior, which is fundamental to achieving the government's emission reduction objectives," said Allan O'Dette, CEO and president of the OCC, in the letter. "All natural gas customers need to see the cost of carbon allowances clearly identified on their bills to make informed decisions in respect of that price signal. We would therefore respectfully request that the OEB reverse this decision in the interest of successfully moving the cap and trade program forward."

NDP Energy Critic Comments on Toronto Man's Lawsuit Against Hydro One
Source: CKPR
Sep 7, 2016 6: 06 PM (5)

Anchor: A Hydro One customer in the Toronto area is hopping mad. He's been handed an electric bill totalling hundreds of dollars for his all-weather camp, even though the utility cut off his power for safety reasons. Now he is taking Hydro One to court.

Reporter: Kip Van Kempen could not believe what he saw on his bill from Hydro One.

Kip Van Kempen, Suing Hydro One: The smoke was coming out my ears.

Reporter: Power had been out at his all-seasons cottage for months following a storm. Hydro One crews actually cut his line themselves for safety reasons. So while his bills clearly show no electricity use, he was still hit with hundreds of dollars in delivery charges.

Van Kempen: If you're not providing it to the building because you snipped the wires to the building, you're not delivering it! How can you charge a delivery charge?

Reporter: NDP energy critic Peter Tabuns saw our story and says the electricity sector has become too complex and unfair for consumers.

Peter Tabuns, NDP Energy Critic: They see these big delivery charges, they don't know what they cover, and in his case he is not even getting the power delivered to him and he is still getting charged. I'm not surprised he's frustrated. I'm not surprised people across Ontario are frustrated.

Reporter: Tabuns says he fears that this is just the beginning, that the privatization of Hydro One is going to increase the number of problems customers experience. Van Kempen is putting his frustration into action. He is suing Hydro One for $7500 over the delivery charge when nothing was delivered.

Van Kempen: And finally I said I'm not going to argue with you guys any more. Tell it to the judge.

Reporter: But all bills clearly show the delivery charge consists of a fixed cost to maintain the grid, costs that are not tied to how much electricity you use. In a statement, Hydro One told us, "The Ontario Energy Board mandates a flat rate monthly delivery charge to customers as long as the distributor's equipment remains at the premises. The fixed charge is not payable if the customer requests electricity service to be cancelled." So, the only way not to have to pay the delivery charge is to cancel your account and have the smart metre removed. Otherwise, everyone has to pay.

Transcript captured directly from source. Some typographical errors or omissions are to be expected.

Thibeault 'celebrates' city solar projects
Sudbury Star
Thu Sep 8 2016
Page: A3
Section: News
Byline: Carol Mulligan
Source: The Sudbury Star

Ontario Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault visited Pioneer Manor on Wednesday morning to "celebrate" two new local projects he says will contribute to Ontario's supply of clean, emission-free energy.

Both Pioneer Manor, the cityowned long-term care home, and Gerry McCrory Countryside Sports Complex, have installed rooftop solar panels with funding from Ontario's Feed-in Tariff (FIT) program. When complete, each will create enough clean electricity to power about 30 homes.

The FIT program enables municipalities, the public sector, indigenous communities, co-operatives and companies to general clean, renewable energy and distribute it to the provincial electricity grid.

FIT was central to the province's plan to close coal-fired plants and with the goal of having 10,700 megawatts of wind, solar and bioenergy online by 2012, Sudbury Liberal MPP Thibeault in as release.

Pioneer Manor and Countryside Arena are helping to ensure Ontario leads North America in clean energy investment and the fight against climate change, said Thibeault. The two facilities have demonstrated that "small actions make a big difference as we move towards a clean energy future," said the MPP.

Greater Sudbury Mayor Brian Bigger said he's excited about the new installation of solar panel systems at the long-term care residence and the arena complex.

"These systems will not only allow us to produce clean and renewable energy. Combined, the new systems will allow us to generate revenue and the project will be self-funding," said Bigger in a written statement.

The two projects cost $1.8 million, with the money coming from the city's capital reserves, said city spokeswoman Shannon Dowling. The two will generate $237,830 per year, which will pay off the cost in nine years.

Both sites are generating energy for about 60 homes per year, said Dowling.

Energy Initiatives Across The Province Include Solar Panels For Two Facilities In Sudbury
Source: MCTV
Sep 7, 2016 6:07 PM (9)

Anchor: Two city owned facilities in Sudbury, a long-term care home and an arena are going green. Solar panels are being installed on the buildings and they will feed Ontario's electricity grid. It's all part of a partnership between the city and the province. Here is CTV's Alana Everson.

Reporter: These panels are harnessing the power of the sun. They sit on the rooftop of the Pioneer Manor, a city owned long-term care facility and the Gerry McCrory Countryside arena in Sudbury.

Glenn Thibeault, Ontario Minister Of Energy: Now we've got enough power coming from these two facilities to help power 60 homes. And so when you're powering 60 homes and if you look at how many times we are doing this across the province, that means we don't need to invest in more expensive, you know, power lines and power generating stations.

Reporter: The Mayor of Greater Sudbury, Brian Bigger, says the panels are a green investment.

Brian Bigger, Sudbury Mayor: It was an investment at $1.8 million and the return from both Countryside and Pioneer Manor will be exceeding $230,000 annually.

Reporter: Those revenues will be generated by feeding the Ontario electricity grid. And the city says the project will pay for itself in nine years. But the mayor is also stressing another benefit.

Bigger: It's also showing leadership in creation of renewal energy within our community and it’s something we support that has a council.

Reporter: Glenn Thibeault says renewable energy projects are planned for more public and private buildings right across the province.

Minister Thibeault: We are looking at hospitals, we are looking at arenas. We are making sure that, you know, even a micro fit program where people can put it on their homes if they so choose. Because renewable energy, using the sun, using wind, using water are ways we can continue to reduce, you know, our pollution, look after the environment, provide clean, reliable power, and make sure that it’s affordable.

Reporter: According to the provincial Liberals, energy initiatives like this are designed to cut down household Hydro rates over the long-term. Alana Everson, CTV News, Sudbury.

Transcript captured directly from source. Some typographical errors or omissions are to be expected.

Enwin uses drone to inspect lines, infrastructure remotely; Pilot project already proved its worth assessing tornado damage
Windsor Star
Thu Sep 8 2016
Page: A1 / Front
Section: News
Byline: Dave Battagello
Source: The Windsor Star

Enwin Utilities is among the first in Ontario to start using drones to conduct hydro-related inspections and address emergencies.

Transport Canada has given approval to the local utility company to start using the airborne camera device to check power lines and other electricity infrastructure.

Enwin demonstrated the drone in action Wednesday outside the Albert Weeks water treatment plant on the city’s east end.

“It is a great tool to have a flying camera that can get up quickly into spots we can’t get in to - tree filled or bushy areas,” said Jean Pepin, crane operator and recently certified drone pilot for Enwin. “It helps us in spotting things we were never able to see before. You can get a whole different angle and perspective.”

The drone a few weeks ago was quickly put into use to help assess the damage following the tornado in Windsor.

“You got a great overall view on how bad it was,” said Jim St. Louis, manager of distribution for Enwin. “You had poles and wires down, transformers down. You could get up close and see the total amount of damage.”

The new Enwin drone, which cost $3,000, will be used nearly every day, not only for emergencies, but routine maintenance checks, St. Louis said.

“We saw an opportunity to get this involved in our inspection program,” he said. “Rather than send two guys and bucket, you can send a pilot and a pickup truck that will give us photos and videos to keep on file.”

The drone has a range of up to two kilometres and can go up to 400 feet in the air, St. Louis said.

Enwin CEO Helga Reidel said the new drone will be “invaluable” for both the utility and the community.

“It’s great to have this new technology,” she said.

“I applaud the innovation of our team that came up with this. It looks like it will save us a lot of time and be much more efficient when you are talking about poles or lines that can be hard otherwise to get to.”

In upcoming weeks and months, if the drone proves to be a valuable tool, Reidel said Enwin will purchase additional units and get more staffcertified to pilot the machines.

“It’s really not that expensive,” she said. “If this technology proves to be useful we will do more.”
dbattagello@postmedia.com

Alberta the new coal-burning canary: Steward
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Byline: Gillian Steward(https://author.thestar.com/content/thestar/authors.steward_gillian.html)

Alberta is planning to phase out all its coal-fired electricity plants by 2030.

Now the federal government has confirmed (www.cbc.ca) it wants other provinces to do the same thing.

This is a big turnaround, for sure.

Alberta was never considered a leader when it came to carbon reduction strategies before Premier Rachel Notley and her NDP government were elected just over a year ago.

But now Justin Trudeau’s Liberals are using Alberta’s climate change action plan as a model for other provinces that still burn coal to produce electricity - namely Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick - and intend to keep doing so until the 2040s.

Trudeau needs those provinces to drastically reduce their use of coal for firing up electricity generators much sooner than that if the federal government is to reach its stated goal of reducing Canada‘s greenhouse gas emissions by 30 per cent under 2005 levels by 2030.

He is obviously counting on the notion that if Alberta, formerly known as a “laggard” when it came to climate change policies, is taking steps to eliminate all coal-fired electricity in just under 15 years (www.alberta.ca) so can the other provinces.

That’s because Alberta is Canada‘s most coal intense province: it produces more coal pollution than all other Canadian provinces combined. Fifty-five per cent of Alberta’s electricity comes from 18 coal-fired generators. Twelve of those generating plants are slated to be decommissioned by 2020 because federal regulations require that coal plants not go beyond a 50-year life span. Six plants are being decommissioned earlier than their owner/operators had anticipated.

Needless to say, those companies are not happy about the Alberta government’s coal phase-out. Unlike other provinces Alberta never established a crown corporation to provide electricity to Albertans. Instead, the job was turned over to the private sector.

Saskatchewan (www.saskpower.com) is in the number two spot after Alberta when it comes to coal: 50 per cent of its electricity is generated by coal, which in turn accounts for 70 per cent of its green house gas emissions.

Nova Scotia depends on coal for 56 per cent of its electricity but aims to eliminate it all by 2040; New Brunswick 20 per cent.

Ontario is, of course, the darling of those who want to get rid of the carbon and pollution emitted by coal plants. It did away with all its plants in 2014.

Saskatchewan premier Brad Wall has already made it known that Trudeau’s schemes to reduce green house gases emissions do not sit well with him. He has even threatened a court challenge if the federal government imposes any carbon reduction strategies on his province.

Wall’s steadfast opposition could scupper any hopes that Trudeau has of reaching a national consensus on a plan to reach emission reduction targets and satisfy the terms of the Paris Agreement on Climate

Change.

This will no doubt be made even clearer when Trudeau meets with his provincial counterparts in October to try and hammer out an agreement that he can then take to the United Nations Climate Summit in Morocco in November.

Perhaps he already realizes that he is not going to get an agreement, especially when it comes to an accelerated timeline for eliminating coal-fired electricity.

So he is holding up the Alberta model in hopes it will shame other provinces into action.

But while there is no question that burning coal dumps huge amounts of carbon into the atmosphere and causes pollution that can be a health hazard, coal is cheap and plentiful.

Albertans are already facing the prospect of higher electricity prices because the government has simply pledged to do away with coal-fired generation. No coal plants have actually been shut down yet but neither are there firm plans to replace coal with reasonably priced renewables.

Trudeau is going to have to come up with an answer, or maybe some money, if he expects people in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia or New Brunswick to quit their coal habit with no reassurance that they won’t be paying more to keep the lights on.

Gillian Steward is a Calgary writer and former managing editor of the Calgary Herald. Her column appears every other week. gsteward@telus.net(mailto:gsteward@telus.net)
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Illustration: Atco's Shearness coal-fired plant in Alberta will be shuttered or converted to natural gas by 2030 if Premier Rachel Notley has her way. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is using Alberta's climate change action plan as a model for other provinces that still burn coal to produce electricity - namely Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick - and intend to keep doing so until the 2040s, writes Gillian Steward.