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BY E-MAIL & REGULAR MAIL

Mr. Patrick Monahan
Deputy Attorney General
Ministry of the Attorney General
720 Bay Street
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Dear Mr. Deputy Attorney General:

RE: Proposal to Reconfigure Global Adjustment Charges

You have asked for my opinion on the degree of constitutional risk if the government were to reconfigure the Global Adjustment Charge to residential and small business users so as to pay down the debt over 30 years instead of the current 20 year period. The 20 year period was designed to coincide with the duration of current contracts between ISEO and the relevant electrical generation companies. The 30 year period is the assumed useful life of 30 years of the relevant electricity generating equipment.

To the extent either the 1 to 20 year consumer group or the 20-30 year consumer group is subsidizing one or other, there will be a mismatch between the cost of facilities and those whom the facilities benefit, which may attract a constitutional challenge on the basis that the Global Adjustment has become a tax rather than a regulatory charge.

The degree of constitutional risk, in my opinion, is in direct proportion to the extent the government is **not** able to show a proper match between the cost of providing facilities for electricity generation and the group of consumers who benefit year to year from electricity generated by those facilities.

The legal principles applicable to regulatory charges are quite straight-forward (although there is not much jurisprudence in the area). The hurdle for the government in any constitutional challenge will be to assemble credible expert evidence to demonstrate that (1) indeed the relevant electricity generating facilities *do* have a useful life of 30 years or more, subject to maintenance and refurbishment costs, and (2) that the allocation of the Global Adjustment aligns, to the extent practicable, with the costs and benefits of the electricity generators and avoids cross-subsidization of current consumers by future consumers.

In terms of Risk Assessment, I understand the government has not yet obtained an expert opinion from outside experts on the expected economic lifetime of the electrical generators now subject to the Global Assessment. I suspect there may be difficulty in obtaining such a comprehensive opinion from credible experts for the reasons discussed below. On that basis, I would assess the current proposal as **moderately high risk,** defined as being an outcome difficult to predict because there are good arguments on both sides, but in the end the Supreme Court of Canada would be more likely than not to find *against* constitutional validity.

If the government were able to assemble the necessary expert evidence, of course, the risk would be re-assessed at a lower level, but how much lower depends on the quality of the expert evidence and the extent to which the Global Adjustment is shifted, i.e. reduced to current consumers at the expense of the back end (20 to 30 year) consumers, who are assumed to be still benefitting from the current generating equipment.

Overview

The Global Adjustment Charge reflects all of the fixed costs, including capital costs, of Ontario's electrical generation facilities subject to 20 year contracts[1], as well as the premium paid to renewal energy producers and the cost of conservation programs (such as subsidies to small scale manufactures to replace inefficient equipment with more efficient equipment). In 2016, the Global Adjustment Charge, allocated in different amounts to different classes of consumer, stood at $12.3 billion dollars.

Much of the Global Adjustment was necessitated by substantial capital investment promoted by the Province with financial incentives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and decarbonize and modernize Ontario's electricity infrastructure.

The Global Adjustment paid by consumers is a regulatory charge. Residential and small business users [class B consumers] pay the Global Adjustment based on the volume of electricity they use each month. One of the requirements of a valid regulatory charge (as opposed to a tax) is that the person paying the charge either benefits from the facilities that are subject to the regulatory scheme or they create the need for (and benefit from) those facilities in the future.

[1] Most generators in Ontario are on 20 year contracts. Assets with longer operating lives are provided longer term contracts in recognition of their extended benefit. These longer term assets are not part of the current proposal.

The Ministry of Energy is concerned that the present allocation of the Global Adjustment over 20 years is "*front*-end loaded" in that the consumers in the initial 20 year period are paying upfront for facilities that will still be utilized to provide electricity to consumers in the 20-30 period who will, to that extent, get a free ride. There is an equal and opposite concern that by shifting costs to the 20-30 year customers, the government may in reality be disproportionality *back*-end loading the Global Adjustment with the effect that the 20-30 year users will be subsidizing the 1-20 year users.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Energy anticipates a constitutional challenge based on the shifting of a portion of the existing Global Adjustment charges from current users to the 20-30 year group.

The judges can be expected to be aware of the difficult political problem of high energy costs in Ontario, and will therefore take a careful look at the government's evidence in support of the re-allocation of the Global Adjustment.

The Elements of a Proper Regulatory Scheme

In *Westbank First Nation vs. British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority*, 1999 [3 SCR] 134 at para. 30, the Supreme Court of Canada grappled with the distinction between a tax, a user fee and a regulatory charge. This was said to depend on:

> ...whether the levy's primary purpose is, in pith and substance; (1) to tax, i.e. to raise revenue for general purposes; (2) to finance or constitute a regulatory scheme i.e. to be a regulatory charge or to be ancillary or adhesive to a regulatory scheme; or (3) to charge for services directly rendered i.e. to be a user fee

In a regulatory scheme, as stated, the regulator is expected to align costs and benefits. While this can rarely be done with precision, and the courts will defer to some extent to the regulator's attempt to approximate a "smoothing out" of the allocation of the costs associated with the regulatory scheme, nevertheless a court would have to be satisfied that the regulator is attempting in good faith to match the cost of facilities with the class of consumers who will benefit from the generation capacity of those facilities, or whose energy needs have required their creation. As Gonthier J. stated in *Westbank* at para. 28:

> **Finally, the individual subject to the regulatory charge will usually either benefit from the regulation, or cause the need for the regulation:** *Magnet*, supra at page 459. In *Allard*, supra, the gravel trucks caused the need for the repair to the roads; in *Ontario Home Builders*, supra, the developers and the new homeowners caused the need for the new schools. In both cases, the individuals being charged also benefited from the regulation. (emphasis added)

A levy will be held to be **a regulatory charge** where there is:

(i) A complete, complex and detailed code of regulation;

(ii) A regulatory purpose which seeks to affect some behaviour;

(iii) The presence of actual or properly estimated costs of the regulation; and

(iv) A relationship between the person being regulated and the regulation, where the person being regulated either benefits from, or causes the need for, the regulation.

See: *620 Connaught Limited vs. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2008 SCC 7, 2008 1 SCR 132 While each of these four elements would have to be addressed in the evidence, the third and fourth elements can be expected to be the most contentious.

On the other hand, a levy will be held to be **a tax** if it is:

(i) Enforceable by law;

(ii) Imposed under the authority of the legislature;

(iii) Levied by a public body;

(iv) Intended for a public purpose; and

(v) Unconnected to any form of regulatory scheme.

Re: Eurig Estate, [1998] 2 SCR 565 at paras. 15 and 43. The anticipated constitutional challenge is expected to argue that the Global Adjustment imposed on the 20-30 year consumers is a direct tax beyond the legislative competence of the Province.

The Estimated Costs and Useful Life of the Generating Facilities

(i) "Smoothing" the Charges Over 30 Years

The Global Adjustment would be funded by loans. The OPG or OPG Trust would need to borrow an additional amount each year equivalent to the shortfall brought about by the reduction in the Global Adjustment charge to current consumers. If for example the OPG Trust were to borrow $2.2 billion dollars in the current year, and transfer that amount to ISEO, the need to impose a Global Adjustment for 2017 would be reduced by that amount, and the charge to the 2017 consumer would be lowered. However, the shortfall will have to be recouped from future consumers to repay the loan. In other words, the total debt shifted into the 20-30 year period would be increased by a like amount (plus accumulating interest). The court would require an explanation of how the debt is created, financed, and allocated year by year to year 30.

Of course the lower the amount of Global Adjustment allocated in the early years, the higher the borrowings that will have to be paid off in subsequent years and the greater the need to demonstrate that consumers in those later years will still benefit economically and proportionally from the current generating equipment.

In the figures I have been shown, the borrowings necessary to defray part of the Global Adjustment otherwise to be imposed on Ontario Consumers in years 1 to 20 would peak around the midpoint of the 30 year period and thereafter decline to zero.

(ii) Impact of Projections of Potential Reductions in the Cost of Generating Electricity in years 1 to 20

The Ministry of Energy has projected electricity demand over the 30 year period. It is noted that if energy demand in Ontario is not as great in year 25 as predicted, there will be fewer consumers paying higher electricity bills than anticipated. Equally, of course, there could be developments (a drop in the price of natural gas for example) that will reduce the actual cost of generating electricity (as represented in the wholesale "spot" market). Such forecasts are inevitably somewhat speculative over this period. Such speculation is **not** relevant to the Global Adjustment analysis, in my opinion, because the Global Adjustment will be paid *in addition to* the cost of generation, whether the cost of generation is eventually shown to be higher or lower than anticipated. Declining costs would not affect the Global Adjustment levy, but would bring the overall burden on the consumer in year 25 below the currently anticipated level.

(iii) Useful Life of the Assets Financed by the General Adjustment

I am asked to assume that the bulk of the electricity generating assets have a useful life well beyond 20 years, but if (as expected) there is a challenge to the provincial re-allocation of the Global Adjustment, the Province will of course have to call expert evidence on that point.

It may be a very complicated calculus to address the relative useful lifetimes of different types of electrical generators including wind, solar and biomass. There seem to be a number of question marks in this respect. Renewable energy technology is advancing rapidly. Prices of solar panels, it seems, have dropped over 20% in the last year. How much will 25 year old wind turbine technology be worth in 2040? Who can say? Developers of solar and wind power are obliged to put in place a "decommissioning" plan backed up (at least in some cases) by a performance bond. It will have to be established that the decommissioning is not triggered at the conclusion of the 20 year FIT plan (and the use of the land then restored to landowners). Much of Ontario's renewable energy facilities may have little economic value to consumers in the 20-30 year period, even though still able to produce electricity inefficiently.

If the government fails to establish that the relevant electricity generating assets will continue to perform economically over the 30 year period, thereby failing to justify the imposition of an amortization of current equipment cost over the extended 30 year period, or if the Global Adjustment Charge is in the opinion of the Court disproportionality backend loaded in light of that declining benefit to future consumers, the Global Adjustment will not qualify as a regulatory charge.

(iv) Impact of Choosing Option 1 (Residential Bills Lowered 25%), Option 2 (20%) or Option 3 (18%)

The choice of option is significant because the greater the reduction of bills to current residential consumers, the greater the debt load pushed onto future consumers, and the more the Ministry's 30 year projections will attract judicial scrutiny. I expect the

Province's expert would have to concede that projections into the 20-30 year time frame are inherently speculative (as to the useful economic life of the current renewable energy technology for example).

The constitutional issue remains the same: can it be demonstrated that the Global Adjustment will match costs and benefits as closely as is practicable, and not operate as a cross-subsidy of present consumers, who are the source of considerable political pressure. Judges do, as we know, read newspapers. The more the debt load is pushed onto future consumers based on 20-30 year projections, the bigger the challenge to the Province's experts to satisfy a court that the reduction is based on sound economics and a realistic appraisal of the future value of the current electrical generation facilities. In short, the bigger the reduction in charges to current consumers, the greater the constitutional risk, in my opinion.

Conclusion

If it can be established that the underlying electricity generating assets have useful life-expectancies beyond the terms of their 20 year contracts, with the result that future consumers whose electricity needs require the existence of the electricity generating infrastructure put in place in the initial 1 to 20 year period, and who will benefit from the existence of that capacity, I believe a Court would, in those circumstances, conclude that the consumers in the 20 to 30 year period could constitutionally be required to share equitably and proportionately in the cost of financing the required assets.

The challenge, in my view, is not with establishing the legal principles. The problem will be to find leading experts to convincingly establish the necessary facts.

I would be glad to expand on this analysis or respond to any questions.

Yours truly,

Hon. Ian Binnie, C.C., Q.C.

IB/pc/kb