

Ministry of Energy

Office of the Minister

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**OCT - 4 2016**

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Mr. Normand Roberge
Councillor
Mr. Leo Malette
Councillor
Municipality of West Nipissing
101–225 Holditch Street
Sturgeon Falls ON P2B 1T1

Dear Mr. Roberge and Mr. Malette:

It was a pleasure meeting with you at this year's Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Annual Conference in Windsor.

Every year, the AMO conference provides an important opportunity to meet with municipal leaders and learn about the energy issues in their communities. This open dialogue is especially important as the government moves ahead with developing its next Long-Term Energy Plan (LTEP). I appreciated learning first-hand about energy-related priorities in your community. Thank you for an open and productive discussion.

Electricity Prices

Ontario is committed to making everyday life easier, which includes helping households and businesses manage the costs of electricity. Further to the September 12, 2016 Throne Speech, the government has introduced legislation that, if passed, would rebate an amount equal to the provincial portion of the HST on residential, farm and small business bills as of January 1, 2017. This rebate would amount to annual savings of about \$130 for the average household. Eligible rural ratepayers would receive additional relief, resulting in average savings of about \$540 per year.

Relief for larger businesses would come through plans to expand the Industrial Conservation Initiative to more than one thousand additional commercial, institutional and industrial customers. This incentive program will help eligible businesses reduce electricity bills by up to one-third and improve their competitiveness, while providing a benefit to the electricity system.

Ontario also has several initiatives in place that are helping consumers to manage rising energy prices.

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Rate mitigation programs for residential consumers include:

- The Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP), which took effect on January 1, 2016, provides an ongoing rate reduction directly on the bills of low-income electricity consumers who have applied and meet the eligibility requirements. The OESP credit amount for qualified customers is based on household income and household size. Monthly credits range from \$30 to \$50. Customers with unique electricity requirements could be eligible for a higher level of assistance. More information is available at www.ontarioelectricitysupport.ca.
- Eliminating the Debt Retirement Charge (DRC) for residential customers on January 1, 2016, saving a typical residential electricity ratepayer about \$65 per year. The DRC will be removed from Commercial and Industrial bills starting April 1, 2018.
- The Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit (OEPTC), which provides low- to moderate-income individuals and families with relief on the sales tax they pay on energy and with their property taxes. Since July 2012, the OEPTC is paid monthly as part of the Ontario Trillium Benefit delivered through the income tax system. For the 2016 benefit year, qualifying individuals and families could receive a maximum benefit of \$1,008 per year, and qualifying seniors could receive a maximum benefit of up to \$1,148. Individuals can apply for this credit by completing the Ontario Benefits Application for the Ontario Trillium Benefit and the Ontario Senior Homeowners' Property Tax Grant, which is part of the personal income tax and benefit return.
- The Northern Ontario Energy Credit (NOEC), which continues to provide assistance to low- to moderate-income individuals and families living in Northern Ontario who can be exposed to higher energy costs due to more severe winters and heavier reliance on more expensive home heating fuels. The NOEC is paid monthly as part of the Ontario Trillium Benefit and is delivered through the income tax system. For the 2016 benefit year, qualifying individuals received up to \$146 annually and families (including single parents) received up to \$224 annually.
- The Save on Energy for Home Conservation Program provides rebates to help offset the cost of purchasing and installing new heating and cooling equipment in the home and electricity-saving measures like LED lighting, ENERGY STAR certified ceiling fans, baseboard programmable thermostats, clotheslines and advanced power bars.

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The Ontario Energy Board (OEB) has also implemented a province-wide strategy through the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program that includes access to financial assistance, special rules and conservation programs to help qualifying low-income consumers in critical financial need. This strategy includes:

- Emergency financial assistance in the form of grants, applied directly to qualified consumers' electricity and/or natural gas bills.
- Special, more flexible customer service rules implemented by electricity and gas utilities to help qualified low-income consumers through difficult situations.
- Energy conservation programs to help qualified Ontario homeowners, tenants and social housing providers improve energy efficiency.

Ontario also has a number of measures in place to mitigate industrial electricity prices and help businesses manage the cost of electricity including the following:

- Industrial Conservation Initiative (ICI) lowers costs for eligible large consumers that reduce consumption during peak periods. The government is proposing to make an estimated 1,000 additional consumers eligible for the program. ICI consumers reduce their electricity rates by up to one-third.
- Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program (NIERP), where participants receive a rebate of two cents per kilowatt hour. On average, industrial electricity prices can be reduced by over 20 per cent through the program. In 2015, the Ontario government announced the commitment to an ongoing NIERP beyond March 2016. We appreciate your comments regarding the expansion of NIERP.
- Industrial Accelerator Program (IAP) provides financial incentives to eligible industrial, commercial and institutional customers that are directly or indirectly connected to the IESO transmission grid fast-track capital investment in major energy-efficiency projects.
- The Save on Energy for Business conservation program for commercial, institutional and industrial consumers offers a variety of financial incentives to businesses to increase energy efficiency and manage their bills. Incentives are available to a broad range of businesses, including institutional customers such as municipalities, for energy audits, retrofits, process and systems upgrades and small business lighting.
- Annual Demand Response Auctions are held by Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) for demand response capacity. Successful bidders (large businesses and industry) can receive payments to shift their consumption at times when the electricity system is stressed.

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For further information or assistance regarding the ICI program please contact Daniel Cayley at Daniel.Cayley@ontario.ca or call 416-325-7282. For information on IAP, please contact an IESO Business Manager at ia@ieso.ca.

Natural gas expansion

We recognize that access to natural gas is an important issue, especially for Ontario's Northern and rural communities. In the 2013 LTEP, the government committed to working with gas distributors and municipalities to pursue options to expand natural gas infrastructure to service more communities in rural and Northern Ontario.

Natural gas expansion can be expensive and may require large customer contributions to make it viable in more rural and remote communities, which poses a challenge for many communities. To assist with natural gas expansion, the Ministry of Infrastructure, with support from the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, is establishing two programs:

- a \$200-million Natural Gas Access Loan program to help communities partner with utilities to extend access to natural gas supplies; and
- a \$30-million Natural Gas Economic Development Grant to accelerate projects with clear economic development potential.

Gas distribution expansion in the province is overseen by the OEB and managed by the private sector gas distribution companies. Plans must be reviewed and approved by the OEB, which considers economic, environmental and social factors when evaluating pipeline expansion projects.

In January 2016, the OEB announced the launch of a generic review to explore regulatory flexibility to provide natural gas to unserved communities in Ontario. The hearing process was conducted over the spring and summer and the OEB's decision is expected to be released in the fall.

The OEB's review is an important step in examining prudent and appropriate approaches to gas expansion. I would like to reiterate that the government remains committed to supporting efforts to expand the delivery of natural gas within the province.

LTEP

I would also like to take this opportunity to ensure you are aware of the upcoming consultations on the province's next LTEP. The LTEP sets out the direction for Ontario's energy future that balances the principles of cost-effectiveness, reliability, clean energy, community and Indigenous engagement, and emphasis on conservation and demand management.

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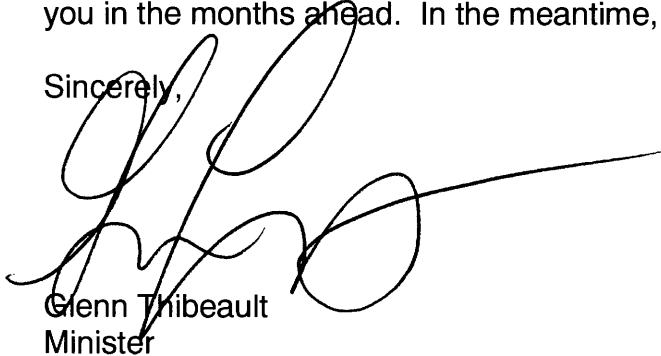
Developing the LTEP is a highly collaborative process, during which the Ministry of Energy works closely with its agencies, stakeholders and Indigenous communities. The ministry will follow the process outlined in the *Energy Statute Law Amendment Act*, which came into force on July 1, 2016. The act enshrines in legislation a long-term energy planning framework that is transparent, efficient and responsive to changing technology, policy and program needs.

LTEP consultations and Indigenous engagements are expected to take place in fall 2016. The consultations and engagements will be supported by an electricity technical report released by the IESO on Sept. 1, 2016, as well as a fuels sector technical report being prepared by an expert third party. Both of these documents will be made public prior to the start of LTEP consultations and Indigenous engagements.

The formal LTEP consultation process will include in-person sessions, online consultation tools and the opportunity for stakeholders to provide submissions through the Environmental Registry, an online database that allows Ontarians to participate in decisions that affect the environment. I encourage your participation as we move ahead with this important project.

Once again, thank you for meeting with me at AMO 2016. I look forward to working with you in the months ahead. In the meantime, please accept my best wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Glenn Thibeault', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Glenn Thibeault
Minister

c: Matt Whittington, Director of Policy, Minister's Office
Craig Ruttan, Policy Advisor, Minister's Office
David Foster, MPP Liaison, Minister's Office