Message

From: John Cannella [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=CD667C6D53774DD0A749783BB02AE89D-JOHN CANNEL]
Sent: 2017-03-29 6:12:16 AM
Subject: Today's News - Wednesday, March 29, 2017

Today's News

powered by:

Date: Wednesday, March 29, 2017
Edited by: John Cannella (John.Cannella@ieso.ca)

Contact Editor

IESO Mentions

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Group calls for province to cancel wind power project

Kingston Whig-Standard - Wed Mar 29 2017
Byline: Elliot Ferguson
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The group fighting a wind energy project on Amherst Island is calling for the Ontario government to cancel the contract with the company and called on the province's auditor general to look into the project. In a letter to the ...

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Ontario knew about strong opposition to privatizing Hydro One for more than a year, but did it anyway

Financial Post - Tue Mar 28 2017
Byline: Allison Jones, The Canadian Press

TORONTO - More than a year before Ontario's Liberal government announced in 2015 that it would partially privatize Hydro One, polling it commissioned showed strong opposition to the idea. That opposition has not waned in the ...

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thestar.com - Tue Mar 28 2017
Byline: Rob Ferguson

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thestar.com - Tue Mar 28 2017
Byline: Kristin Rushowy

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CBC.CA News - Tue Mar 28 2017, 7:50pm ET
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MOE responds to Hardeman's comments

Norwich Gazette - Wed Mar 29 2017
Byline: Bruce Chessell
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Oshawa This Week - Mon Mar 27 2017

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The Globe and Mail - Wed Mar 29 2017 **Page:** B2

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Trump tosses Obama's 'clean' energy plan, embraces coal; Trump tosses Obama's 'clean' energy plan, embraces coal

Canadian Press - Tue Mar 28 2017
Byline: Matthew Daly And Jill Colvin

WASHINGTON - Declaring "the start of a new era" in energy production, President Donald Trump signed an executive order Tuesday that he said would revive the coal industry and create jobs. The move makes good on his campaign pledge to unravel former ...

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Group calls for province to cancel wind power project

Kingston Whig-Standard - Wed Mar 29 2017
Byline: Elliot Ferguson
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The group fighting a wind energy project on Amherst Island is calling for the Ontario government to cancel the contract with the company and called on the province's auditor general to look into the project.

In a letter to the Ontario Minister of Energy Glenn Thibeault, the Association to Protect Amherst Island (APAI) called for the government to cancel the contract signed with Algonquin Power and Utilities Corporation's subsidiary Windlectric Inc. in February 2011.

The group also asked auditor general Bonnie Lysyk to look into why the contract has not been cancelled.

"It seems that Algonquin Power's heart has not been in this project. Perhaps this is not surprising, given the difficulty of developing the project on an island and with the very high capital expenditure of $3.9 million per megawatt," APAI president Michele Le Lay wrote in her letter to Thibeault.

"The contract with the Ontario Power Authority [now IESO] was signed in February 2011. Here we are, six years later, and all to show on the island is a start on the island dock that will be necessary to transport all construction material to the island."

The Amherst Island wind project was the subject of a lengthy Environmental Review Tribunal hearing.

Cancelling the project would save Ontario about $500 million, APAI argued, and get the province out of an expensive contract.

The contract, signed in 2011, will pay Windlectric $135 per megawatt hour of electricity the project produces. APAI argued that amount will rise to about $140 per megwatt hour and during the 20 years the total cost of electricity from the project will be between $420 million nd $660 million.

Building the project on an island also raises the project's construction costs, Le Lay noted in her letter.

APAI's request to Lysyk centres on "a financial investigation on why the Ontario government refuses to terminate an expired wind turbine contract and agrees to pay for the next 20 years a wind company the highest rate ever for unneeded electricity."
elferguson@postmedia.com

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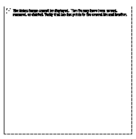

Ontario knew about strong opposition to privatizing Hydro One for more than a year, but did it anyway

Financial Post - Tue Mar 28 2017
Byline: Allison Jones, The Canadian Press

TORONTO - More than a year before Ontario's Liberal government announced in 2015 that it would partially privatize Hydro One, polling it commissioned showed strong opposition to the idea.

That opposition has not waned in the years since, with a large majority of respondents consistently saying they're against the sale in polling conducted from early 2014 to the present and examined by The Canadian Press.

Pollara conducted research at the government's behest in January and February of 2014 asking people for their thoughts on selling Hydro One, the LCBO, Ontario Power Generation, Ontario Lottery and Gaming, and even eHealth.

The general response: Don't do it.

Related

Looking to lower Ontario power rates? Start with Pickering, where $550 million will be wastefully spent (business.financialpost.com)

Ontario cuts hydro bills by 17%, but ultimately it will cost ratepayers $1.4 billion a year more (business.financialpost.com)

"Most Ontarians would not support the provincial government selling a controlling interest in any of the five Crown corporations tested," the research said. "Approximately one half oppose any sale at all, while a further 17 to 27 per cent would only support the sale of a minority of shares."

Just 25 per cent of respondents supported selling Hydro One. Slightly more were in favour of selling the LCBO, with 30 per cent support, while about 20 per cent of people said they were in favour of selling the other three Crown agencies.

A spokeswoman for the premier said eHealth will not be sold.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath said it's "frightening" that it was apparently ever considered. On Hydro One, she said it's not too late to halt further sales, before more than the current 30 per cent is privatized.

"It's pretty disturbing when even their polling shows that people are completely against the selloff of assets, particularly Hydro One, and she still turns around and ignores that and goes ahead and sells it," Horwath said.

Darren Calabrese/The Canadian Press

The pollsters tested messaging with the respondents, finding that while some arguments resonated - such as "the sale would generate a lot of money for health care or balance the budget" - more than 50 per cent of people were still against any sale.

One month after the government received the polling it announced a panel to review assets, and one year after that, in April 2015, announced its plan to sell up to 60 per cent of Hydro One.

In the interim, the government had taken another crack at asset sale polling, with Pollara asking 1,202 Ontarians if Hydro One should be owned by the government. Three-quarters said yes, though most also said it was worthwhile to do a review.

After the Hydro One sale formed a centrepiece of the government's budget, 63 per cent of respondents were opposed - most of them "strongly" opposed, polling found.

Expanding beer sales to grocery stores, however, got a 76-per-cent thumbs up. More people were aware of the beer retailing changes than the Hydro One sale or the budget itself, the polling found.

Premier Kathleen Wynne said last week that the partial sale was important for the $4 billion it's expected to net for infrastructure spending.

"It absolutely is necessary and it's partly why you're seeing the economic growth that we're seeing in Ontario," she said. "It's extremely important to the economy of this province and to municipalities that we continue that investment so that's what we're going to do."

Hydro One's 15-per-cent initial public offering came in November 2015 and a further 15-per-cent tranche was sold in April 2016.

But still, the polling remained highly unfavourable.

The most polling data from October 2016 shows 69 per cent of respondents oppose the sale - 54 per cent "strongly" and 15 per cent "somewhat."

Deputy Progressive Conservative leader Steve Clark said it's "disappointing" the government didn't listen to its own polling.

The Canadian Press

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Five Hydro One executives shared $11 million in compensation

thestar.com - Tue Mar 28 2017
Byline: Rob Ferguson

The five-member executive team at Hydro One shared more than $11 million in compensation last year, a number the Progressive Conservatives are calling "astronomical."

But the utility points out that the executives cut costs by more than $25 million.

The salary details were released in the partially privatized company's annual information form, detailing $4.84 million in cash and incentives last year for chief executive officer (www.thestar.com) Mayo Schmidt.

In total, the top five executives hired from companies such as Maple Leaf Foods, Westjet and Pacific Gas & Electric shared more than $11 million. Schmidt's base salary was unchanged at $850,000.

"At a time when Ontario ratepayers are hurting, this kind of compensation is not only undeserving, it's a slap in the face," said Conservative MPP Todd Smith, his party's energy critic.

"In a year where tens of thousands of Hydro One customers were disconnected and hundreds of thousands were found to be in arrears because of uncontrolled hydro prices, executive salaries…hit astronomical new highs."

With Hydro One no longer subject to salary disclosure on the province's annual "sunshine list (www.thestar.com) " of public sector workers earning more than $100,000 - due out later this week - Smith said taxpayers now have no way of knowing how big the "millionaire's club" at the company has become.

Salaries of a publicly traded company's top five executives must be made public under Ontario securities laws.

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault defended the pay packages and the partial privatization of Hydro One, in which the government has sold 30 per cent of its shares with another 30 per cent to go. The sale is aimed at raising $9 billion to fund transit, other infrastructure and reduce hydro system debt.

"It's a publicly traded company now so the shareholders in this will have to judge where they see the CEO taking the company," Thibeault told reporters.

"They are a better-run company….they're really focusing on customer service."

Ontarians who have been "scraping by" to pay their hydro bills will get relief this summer when the bulk of a promised 25 per cent rate cut (www.thestar.com) kicks in, Thibeault said.

The province has already waived its 8 per cent share of the HST on electricity bills, which took effect in January.

In the information form, Hydro One said Schmidt made "significant progress" to making the utility more customer-oriented, saving $1.8 million on billing improvements, answering 78 per cent of customer calls within 30 seconds and reducing overdue billings by 21 per cent or $31 million.

"Eighty per cent of our CEO's compensation is contingent on meeting aggressive and very specific performance targets," Hydro One said in a statement.

"To date, the new leadership team has reduced costs within the company by far more than their salaries and they are committed to continuing to find savings for our customers."

The Conservatives and New Democrats kept up the pressure on the government over its radio ads on the promised 25 per cent rate cut, which will cost $25 billion in interest payments over the next three decades.

Opposition parties maintain the ads are inappropriate because legislation on the rate cut has not yet been introduced - let alone voted on - by MPPs.

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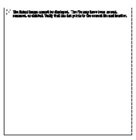

NDP plan would cut hydro bills by 30 per cent, says Andrea Horwath

thestar.com - Tue Mar 28 2017
Byline: Kristin Rushowy

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath made a pitch for her party's hydro plan (www.thestar.com) , saying it's the only solution that addresses Ontarians concerns while also cutting their bills by up to one-third.

Her motion - debated at Queen's Park on Tuesday - urges the government to return Hydro One back to public ownership, ends pricing based on usage at different times of the day for those who want to opt out, and also slashes delivery costs that have hit rural users the hardest.

"Too many families are near the breaking point," Horwath said at a news conference. "Many are cutting things out of their monthly budget to cope with sky-high hydro bills - some are even being forced into what has become known as the 'heat-or-eat' decision.

"We've heard from individuals who haven't got enough left over for food after paying the hydro bill. We've heard from seniors whose pension cheques are being eaten up by hydro bills. Enough is enough - so let's do something about it."

However, Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault called the NDP motion "both short on details and long on hollow promises … Many of her party's proposals rely on a vague and yet-to-be-determined 'expert panel' that will be convened in the future, as well as pie-in-the-sky negotiations with the federal government."

Buying back $4 billion in Hydro One shares is costly, he added, and "will not take one cent off electricity bills. What it will do is send billions to the stock market instead of making much needed infrastructure investments in communities across Ontario."

The Liberals have come under fire for their decision to sell off shares of Hydro One as well as for rising rates, and recently announced it will cut them by 25 per cent (www.thestar.com) .

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OPG plans spring maintenance and outage at unit in Clarington

Clarington This Week - Tue Mar 28 2017

CLARINGTON - Ontario Power Generation is doing some major maintenance on one of its Darlington units this spring, to make sure everything is running smoothly when electricity demand in Ontario heats up this summer.

OPG has started a $141.7 million planned maintenance and inspection outage on Darlington Nuclear Unit 1.

More than 15,000 tasks will be completed in order to ensure the unit is back producing power when electricity needs spike in the summer.

"The Darlington units produce enough electricity to power about two million homes or a city the size of Toronto every day," says Brian Duncan, senior vice-president of Darlington Nuclear.

Last October, OPG began a $12.8 billion investment in the Darlington nuclear station.

The refurbishment of the first of four units will preserve about 3,000 jobs and provide 30 or more years of power.

More than 60 Ontario companies will be involved in the project and approximately 96 per cent of the project's suppliers are currently based in Ontario.

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Metrolinx scraps Eglinton Crosstown gas plant for 'innovative' battery solution

thestar.com - Tue Mar 28 2017
Byline: Ben Spurr

Residents of the Mount Dennis community are breathing easier after Metrolinx agreed to scrap plans to build a gas-fired power plant (www.thestar.com) in their neighbourhood.

At a news conference Tuesday at the future site of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT maintenance and storage facility, Ontario Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca and York-South Weston Liberal MPP Laura Albanese announced that Metrolinx would build a battery energy storage system instead.

The province says the facility, which is designed to provide supplementary power to the LRT, would increase reliability of the transit line, reduce its operating costs, and lower emissions.

"This is a dream. This is a 'pinch me' moment," said Rick Ciccarrelli, a member of the Mount Dennis Community Association who attended the announcement.

He said that he and other residents had been pushing back against the planned 18-megawatt gas plant plan since they learned in late 2015 that it was included in plans for the LRT facility on the old Kodak lands.

Ciccarrelli said he was concerned the emissions from the plant would have negatively affected nearby residents. The land where the plant was to be built, which is just north of Eglinton Ave. West and Weston Rd. at the western terminus of the LRT line, is close to single family homes and a pair of residential highrises.

"The immediate air shed is what we were concerned with. People have to breathe the air," said Ciccarrelli, who praised Albanese as well as local councillors Frances Nunziata and Frank Di Giorgio for helping pressure the government to bring about the change.

The gas-fired plant was supposed to be built by Crosslinx Transit Solutions, the consortium the province has contracted to build and maintain the line, and was expected to reduce energy costs by 40 per cent. But in the face of community opposition, Metrolinx had been discussing alternatives to the plant for at least a year.

Under the new plan, the battery energy storage facility would be connected to the existing hydro grid and be charged during off-peak periods when energy is cheap, such as overnight. The stored energy could then be used to supply energy to the Crosstown throughout the day. The batteries could also provide backup power in the event of an outage, which would be critical to removing trains from tunnels and providing ventilation during an emergency.

The province estimates the facility, which would also include a 90-kilowatt solar panel, could provide back-up power for up to four hours. Chris Tyrrell, Toronto Hydro chief customer care and conservation officer, said that power failures typically don't last that long.

Tyrell described the battery facility as a "very innovative, creative project" that met both the needs of the local residents and the transit project.

"This community wanted a different option, wanted a greener option," said Minister Del Duca, who represents the riding of Vaughan for the provincial Liberals.

"Today, I'm here to tell you that the Ontario government has heard you loud and clear ... We worked very hard, we worked very creatively, we went back to the drawing table and we came back with an environmentally sustainable solution."

Del Duca said the government has yet to procure the new storage facility, and while it's expected to reduce operating expenditures, he couldn't say how much it would cost to build. "I don't anticipate it will be more expensive than the original plan," he said.

The 19-kilometre Crosstown line is scheduled to open in 2021.

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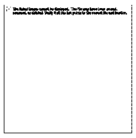

'This is a dream': Residents welcome Metrolinx decision to cancel gas plant in Mount Dennis

CBC.CA News - Tue Mar 28 2017, 7:50pm ET
Byline:CBC News

Mount Dennis residents are rejoicing, after learning that Metrolinx and the provincial government have cancelled plans for a gas-powered backup facility in their neighbourhood.

The gas plant was supposed to provide backup power to the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, which is currently under construction.

At a news conference Tuesday morning, Ontario Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca said the province was partnering with Toronto Hydro to build a more "environmentally sustainable" battery-powered energy storage system instead.

"This is a dream. This is a 'pinch me' moment, really," said Rick Ciccarelli, an executive member of the Mount Dennis Community Association.

Ciccarelli was one of the residents who fought against the gas-fired power plant since learning about it in late 2015. Locals worried it would produce emissions and contribute to poor air quality in the neighbourhood.

"We made sure [government] understood that the community did not want this. We wanted something better," said Ciccarelli.

New system 'essentially batteries'

After hearing concerns from the community through local Liberal MPP Laura Albanese his government realized "there had to be a better way," Del Duca said.

"This community wanted a different option, wanted a greener option. We went back to the drawing table and we've come back with an environmentally sustainable solution."

The minister said the new system will decrease emissions, reduce costs and increase the line's reliability.

He said the new battery-powered system will be capable of providing electricity to the LRT for up to four hours during an outage.

"This is a win-win solution for this community and Ontario as a whole," said Del Duca.

The new system is "essentially batteries, with no emissions and no noise," said Chris Tyrell, executive vice-president and chief customer care and conservation officer for Toronto Hydro.

He said the system will generate and store energy during low-cost times, like at night, and use that energy during the day.

The new facility will be constructed in the same location as the proposed gas plant: the future site of the LRT maintenance and storage facility, near Ray Avenue and Weston Road.

Procurement still underway

Tyrell said he can't say how much the new system will cost, because he doesn't want to compromise the procurement process.

He said, however, that the new system will be less expensive than the previous plan.

Del Duca said procurement for the battery-powered system is expected to occur later in 2017.

The proposed gas-powered system was supposed to be constructed by the Crosslinx Transit Solutions consortium, which is delivering the Eglinton Crosstown project. The Ontario government says the Crosstown LRT will be finished by 2021. The 19-kilometre system will connect Mount Dennis in the west with Kennedy Station in the east.

With files from Linda Ward

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MOE responds to Hardeman's comments

Norwich Gazette - Wed Mar 29 2017
Byline: Bruce Chessell
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The Ministry of Energy (MOE) has responded to comments made by local Oxford MPP Ernie Hardeman.

Hardeman said he was unimpressed with the provincial Liberal governments proposed Fair Hydro Plan earlier this month, adding that it seemed the solution being proposed was to just defer costs for hydro to the future.

The proposed plan was introduced recently by the provincial liberal government and will give an average of five per cent off electricity bills for households, farms and small businesses.

In a statement provided to Postmedia, minister of energy Glenn Thibeault said the PCs have been eager to criticize the proposed hydro plan, but have no plan of their own or any ideas that would help lower electricity costs.

"While our plan provides substantial, wide-spread and long-lasting relief that will have an immediate impact on peoples'lives, MPP Hardeman and the PCs have yet to bring forward anything credible," Thibeault said. "One of their criticisms - halting the broadening of Hydro One - won't take one cent of electricity bills. And their push to rip up energy contracts would lead to increased rates, lawsuits and penalties."

Minister Thibeault also said through Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan this government is cutting electricity bills by 25 per cent on average for all families starting this summer, as well as about half a million farms and small businesses.

"It is the single largest rate reduction in the province's history, with rates also held to inflation for the next four years," he said. "Our plan is about real relief for Ontarians and a way to ensure greater fairness in our electricity system."

In an interview with Postmedia, Hardeman said that they have to look at the root cause as to why hydro prices are so high.

"One of the main ones is, of course, the Green Energy Act, which is putting a lot of the cost of the hydro that they're paying for and putting it into the global adjustment pot and trying to pay for it that way," Hardeman said. "If they don't look at how we got into this mess and solve that problem, obviously the mess is going to keep growing as time goes on."

According to the MOE, the Fair Hydro Plan will enhance low-income support (OESP) and some customers could see as much as a 40 to 50 per cent reduction in their electricity bill.

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Nuclear power is not cheaper than water power from Quebec, Ontario Clean Air Alliance says

Oshawa This Week - Mon Mar 27 2017

To the editor:

Re: 'Try to solve the most difficult problems, OPG CEO advises UOIT students', news, March 23

According to the president of Ontario Power Generation (OPG) Jeff Lyash, nuclear power, at 6.6 cents per kWh, is cheaper than water power from Quebec.

Not so.

Last year Ontario signed a seven-year contract with Hydro Quebec to import clean and safe water power for only 5 cents per kWh. More importantly, OPG is seeking to raise its price of nuclear power to 16.5 cents per kWh to pay for extending the life of its high-cost Pickering Nuclear Station and to rebuild Darlington's aging nuclear reactors.

So there is no question which is the lower cost option for keeping our lights on, even if that answer may not square with OPG's interests.

Jack Gibbons

Chair, Ontario Clean Air Alliance

Toronto

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EDA

The Globe and Mail - Wed Mar 29 2017 **Page:** B2

The Board of Directors of the Electricity Distributors Association is pleased to announce the appointment of Vinay Sharma as Chair for its 2017-2018 term.

Mr. Sharma is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of London Hydro, which provides electricity to about 150,000 customers. Having joined the utility in 1998, Mr. Sharma assumed progressive leadership roles until he became the CEO in 2009.

Mr. Sharma's career and dedication to the electricity industry spans across decades since entering the industry at Saskatchewan Power Corporation. He also worked as a consulting engineer with Cambrian (now AMEC) and served as an assistant professor of electrical engineering at the University of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Sharma has a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering and is a Professional Engineer in the provinces of Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan.

He also holds a M.Sc. and Ph.D. from the University of Saskatchewan and an MBA from the University of Regina.

He is also a Chartered Director and a Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Engineering.

The Electricity Distributors Association is the trusted and vital source for advocacy, insight and information for Ontario's local electricity distributors - the municipally and privately owned companies that deliver essential electricity services to millions of homes, businesses and public institutions.

www.eda-on.ca

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'Batman' vs. the Province; Man says sky-high hydro costs have him living 'like a bat at nighttime'in effort to afford bill

Kingston Whig-Standard - Wed Mar 29 2017
Byline: Elliot Ferguson
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Michael Northcott does what he can to keep his electricity costs down.

A client of the Ontario Disability Support Program after injuring his back about a decade ago, Northcott lives in a 55-foot trailer on a property along Westport Road near Godfrey.

A big part of his cost cutting is trying to keep his power use to a minimum.

"I live like a bat at nighttime, OK," Northcott, 52, said. "I live in the darkness at night.

"You know those lamps that go on low, medium and high? I always have it on the second stage. I give it two taps. That's it."

But the electricity for that light, along with a couple of small space heaters, a computer and a television, still costs him more than $360 a month, a bill he said is to go up to about $425.

"That was with me unplugging everything from the walls," Northcott said. "I don't have a grow operation or anything."

And the sky-high electricity costs are made even worse by a billing error that saw Northcott first with a $1,500 credit, which he agreed to have put toward future bills, followed two months later by a bill that showed he owed $1,500.

Northcott said he has lived on the same property, across the road from his parents'house, for approximately 20 years.

Two years ago, he bought a new trailer. His cousin, an electrician, rewired it and Northcott paid $1,500 to have the underside insulated with spray foam in order to make it more energy efficient.

"I've done everything I can," he said.

After paying his electricity bill, Northcott has to pay his insurance, cellphone, telephone and television bills, and property taxes.

That leaves him with about $400 for everything else: food, gas and clothing.

"There isn't a whole lot of money left over," he said.

"Because of this here, I have absolutely no quality of life left," he said, pointing to his Ontario Hydro bill. "I don't know anybody who pays more than I do. None of my family do."

Despite what electricity consumers do to cut back their usage, the peak and off-peak rate system makes it next to impossible to save money through conservation, said Randy Hillier, the Conservative MPP for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington who is an outspoken critic of the provincial government's energy policy and, in particular, its impact on rural residents.

Hillier said the off-peak rates, meant to give consumers a cheaper option for electricity, are not really that useful.

"They are designed purposely for low rates when people can't use it, or the bulk of society can't use it," Hillier said.

"Unless you want to alter your lifestyle completely, and live like a bat only up at nighttime from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., you are not going to make changes, changes that will be noticeable."

Hillier said electricity prices are making it difficult for low income earners or people living on a fixed income to live independent and dignified lives.

"Public policy ought to be rewarding and incenting dignified, independent home ownership and living, not be contrary to it."

Electricity prices in Ontario have doubled in the past decade.

In January, the Ontario government reduced the cost of electricity by about eight per cent by removing the provincial sales tax.

Earlier this month, the government announced a further rate reduction, which is expected to average out at about 17 per cent per household, by extending the amount of time the province will pay for building and refurbishing power plants. elferguson@postmedia.com

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New head of Energy Efficiency Alberta promises agency will have real impact; Energy efficiency head promises real impact from agency

Canadian Press - Tue Mar 28 2017
Byline: Bob Weber

EDMONTON - The newly appointed head of Alberta's first energy efficiency agency says it has enough resources to make a big difference.

"We can have real impact in terms of both job creation and energy efficiency, ensuring savings for businesses and households," Monica Curtis said Tuesday.

Energy Efficiency Alberta is funded by the province's carbon tax and is aimed at getting Albertans to use energy more wisely. Alberta joins all other provinces in having a government agency to promote and assist with wise energy consumption.

Curtis comes to the province from the Wisconsin-based Western Electricity Coordinating Council, which oversees power transmission in the western states as well as in Alberta and British Columbia.

Originally from Manitoba, Curtis has also worked for SaskPower as well as Alberta Agriculture and Edmonton-based utility Epcor back when it was called Edmonton Power.

She suggested that Alberta being the last province to inaugurate an energy efficiency program is an opportunity.

"There are great examples that the province of Alberta can borrow from and learn from all across North America," said Curtis, who pointed to programs in Nova Scotia, Manitoba and British Columbia as examples.

"Being able to draw on the experience those programs have to offer creates a really good foundation for Alberta to grow quickly from."

Her first job will be to oversee the implementation of three government programs already announced.

One involves handing out samples of energy-efficient products such as LED lights for homeowners to try.

A second program will allow consumers to apply for rebates when they buy energy-efficient appliances such as stoves, dishwashers and fridges. A third one is to provide businesses and non-profit organizations rebates on larger energy-efficient products such as boilers and heating and cooling systems.

Smaller-scale solar power programs are to follow later.

The province plans to spend $648 million in the next five years on energy-efficiency products and programs.

Curtis said it was the provincial government's climate-change policies that drew her back to Canada.

"It creates an environment where energy efficiency can really work together with other aspects of energy policy, whether it's oil and gas, solar, water, wind or saved energy."

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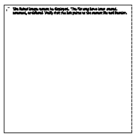

Trump tosses Obama's 'clean' energy plan, embraces coal; Trump tosses Obama's 'clean' energy plan, embraces coal

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Byline: Matthew Daly And Jill Colvin

WASHINGTON - Declaring "the start of a new era" in energy production, President Donald Trump signed an executive order Tuesday that he said would revive the coal industry and create jobs.

The move makes good on his campaign pledge to unravel former President Barack Obama's plan to curb global warming. The order seeks to suspend, rescind or flag for review more than a half-dozen measures in an effort to boost domestic energy production in the form of fossil fuels.

Environmental activists, including former Vice-President Al Gore, denounced the plan. But Trump said the effort would allow workers to "succeed on a level playing field for the first time in a long time."

"That is what this is all about: bringing back our jobs, bringing back our dreams and making America wealthy again," Trump said, during a ceremony at the Environmental Protection Agency headquarters, attended by a number of coal miners.

The order initiates a review of the Clean Power Plan, which restricts greenhouse gas emissions at coal-fired power plants. The regulation, which was the former president's signature effort to curb carbon emissions, has been the subject of long-running legal challenges by Republican-led states and those who profit from burning oil, coal and gas.

But just as Obama's climate efforts were often stymied by legal challenges, environmental groups are promising to fight Trump's pro-fossil fuel agenda in court.

Trump has called global warming a "hoax" invented by the Chinese, and has repeatedly criticized the power-plant rule as an attack on American workers and the struggling U.S. coal industry.

In addition to pulling back from the Clean Power Plan, the administration will also lift a 14-month-old moratorium on new coal leases on federal lands.

The Obama administration had imposed a three-year moratorium on new federal coal leases in January 2016, arguing that the $1 billion-a-year program must be modernized to ensure a fair financial return to taxpayers and address climate change.

Trump accused his predecessor of waging a "war on coal" and boasted in a speech to Congress that he has made "a historic effort to massively reduce job-crushing regulations," including some that threaten "the future and livelihoods of our great coal miners."

The order will also chip away at other regulations, including scrapping language on the "social cost" of greenhouse gases. It will initiate a review of efforts to reduce the emission of methane in oil and natural gas production as well as a Bureau of Land Management hydraulic fracturing rule, to determine whether those reflect the president's policy priorities.

It will also rescind Obama-era executive orders and memoranda, including one that addressed climate change and national security and one that sought to prepare the country for the impacts of climate change.

The administration is still in discussion about whether it intends to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Trump's order could make it more difficult, though not impossible, for the U.S. to achieve its carbon reduction goals. The president's promises to boost coal jobs run counter to market forces, such as U.S. utilities converting coal-fired power plants to cheaper, cleaner-burning natural gas.

Trump's Environmental Protection Agency chief, Scott Pruitt, alarmed environmental groups and scientists earlier this month when he said he does not believe carbon dioxide is a primary contributor to global warming. The statement is at odds with mainstream scientific consensus and Pruitt's own agency.

The overwhelming majority of peer-reviewed studies and climate scientists agree the planet is warming, mostly due to man-made sources, including carbon dioxide, methane, halocarbons and nitrogen oxide.

Opponents say Obama's effort would have killed coal-mining jobs and driven up electricity costs. The Obama administration, some Democratic-led states and environmental groups counter that it would spur thousands of clean-energy jobs and help the U.S. meet ambitious goals to reduce carbon pollution set by the international agreement signed in Paris.

Trump's order on coal-fired power plants follows an executive order he signed last month mandating a review of an Obama-era rule aimed at protecting small streams and wetlands from development and pollution. The order instructs the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers to review a rule that redefined "waters of the United States" protected under the Clean Water Act to include smaller creeks and wetlands.

While Republicans have blamed Obama-era environmental regulations for the loss of coal jobs, federal data shows that U.S. mines have been shedding jobs for decades under presidents from both parties as a result of increasing automation and competition from natural gas, which has become more abundant through hydraulic fracturing. Another factor is the plummeting cost of solar panels and wind turbines, which now can produce emissions-free electricity cheaper than burning coal.

According to an Energy Department analysis released in January, coal mining now accounts for fewer than 75,000 U.S. jobs. By contrast, renewable energy - including wind, solar and biofuels - now accounts for more than 650,000 U.S. jobs.

The Trump administration's plans drew praise from business groups and condemnation from environmental groups.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce President Thomas J. Donohue praised the president for taking "bold steps to make regulatory relief and energy security a top priority."

"These executive actions are a welcome departure from the previous administration's strategy of making energy more expensive through costly, job-killing regulations that choked our economy," he said.

Former Vice-President Al Gore blasted the order as "a misguided step away from a sustainable, carbon-free future for ourselves and generations to come."

"It is essential, not only to our planet, but also to our economic future, that the United States continues to serve as a global leader in solving the climate crisis by transitioning to clean energy, a transition that will continue to gain speed due to the increasing competiveness of solar and wind," he said in a statement.

Associated Press writer Michael Biesecker contributed to this report. Follow Daly and Colvin on Twitter at (twitter.com) and (twitter.com) />

This story corrects the number of coal mining jobs in the U.S. to 75,000, not 70,000.

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