Neil Brodie

From:	Neil Brodie
Sent:	February 24, 2017 8:14 AM
To:	Rosemarie Leclair
Subject:	Fw: Ministry of Energy Top Issues - February 24, 2017

Andrew thanking the team for their hard work.

Original Message
From: Teliszewsky, Andrew (ENERGY) <Andrew.Teliszewsky@ontario.ca>
Sent: Friday, February 24, 2017 7:08 AM
To: Brian Hewson; Martine Band; Mary Anne Aldred; Neil Brodie
Subject: Fw: Ministry of Energy Top Issues - February 24, 2017

Thank you!

From: Doig Moore, Jacqueline (ENERGY) <Jacqueline.DoigMoore@ontario.ca>
Sent: Friday, February 24, 2017 7:03 AM
To: @ENERGY All
Subject: Ministry of Energy Top Issues - February 24, 2017

Good morning,

Here's what's making news:

· Ontario Bans Electricity Companies from Disconnecting Power in the Winter -- CKWS

· Ontario's ban on disconnecting hydro customers in place until end of April - Toronto Star

· Ontario Energy Board orders utility companies to reconnect all customers - Global News

· Ottawa appeals to nuclear industry in clean-energy push - Globe and Mail

· Wynne's a reverse Robin Hood; Her Liberals take from the poor to give to the rich - Toronto Sun

· Hydro relief on the way - Minister - Northern Daily News

· Rebate could ease burden of soaring electricity rates at Fairhaven home in Peterborough - Peterborough This Week

· Bruce Power, University of Guelph and Nordion team up in research project - Saugeen Times

· Promises and pitfalls of the carbon tax; will Liberals learn from Hydro One debacle? - Kingston Heritage

Ontario Bans Electricity Companies from Disconnecting Power in the Winter

Source: CKWS

Feb 23, 2017 6:20 PM

Anchor: After weeks of debate, accusations and a midnight deadline, winter hydro disconnections are now against the law in Ontario. The Minister of Energy asked for local utilities to voluntarily stop cutting off power in the winter for those who cannot pay their bills. As of the midnight deadline, some had not agreed, so the minister moved forward with legislation, which passed under the Liberal majority.

Ontario Minister of Energy, Glenn Thibeault: So, I know of two. I am not interested in doing the naming and shaming, in that sense, because there are some legitimate reasons for that. Some of them have said that they need to work with their boards on this, so they're going to comply as best they can. And so we have the majority of the almost 70 LDCs in the province in compliance with that.

Reporter: While this legislation assures you can no longer have your electricity turned off in the winter, currently those who have already lost power are not guaranteed to get the lights turned back on until their bills are paid.

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

Ontario's ban on disconnecting hydro customers in place until end of April The Toronto Star 2017-02-23

Byline: ROB FERGUSON, Queen's Park Bureau

Customers behind on their electricity bills won't have to fear being disconnected until May, after the Ontario Energy Board ruled that service must remain in place until Apr. 30.
The order issued late Thursday afternoon follows legislation<https://www.thestar.com/news/queenspark/2017/02/22/ontario-passes-bill-to-ban-winter-disconnections-for-non-payment-of-hydro-bills.html> passed by MPPs the day before to ban winter disconnections as many residents of the province struggle with high hydro prices and delivery charges.
“We credit the OEB for moving quickly and decisively on this matter,” said Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said in a statement. Thibeault was under heavy pressure<https://www.thestar.com/news/queenspark/2017/02/16/ontario-energy-minister-asks-electricity-companies-to-stop-winter-disconnections.html> from opposition parties to take action.
He speculated Wednesday that the ban might end in late March, but noted that the decision was up to the energy board.
The order also requires homes disconnected from the power grid to be reconnected to it “as soon as possible, at no charge.” As well, it calls for the “prompt removal” by local utilities of any devices installed on homes to limit the amount of electricity they can use, and prohibits installing them. Utilities used “load-limiting devices” to provide customers with limited electricity.
Energy board vice-president Brian Hewson said the ban and other steps are interim measures until the organization can complete a “comprehensive review” of customer service rules for both electric and natural gas utilities.
The review will determine how well rules in place since 2011 have been working in ensuring “an appropriate balance between customer protection and the ongoing operational needs of utilities,” Hewson added, in a statement.
The review will consider disconnections, security deposits, accounts in arrears, billing errors, equal payment plans, bills and other aspects of the system, such as reconnection fees.
The energy board does not yet have statistics on how many customers had their hydro disconnected for non-payment this winter season. Some 60,000 people lost their electricity last year.
Thibeault and Premier Kathleen Wynne have promised more hydro rate relief<https://www.thestar.com/news/queenspark/2017/02/15/relief-package-coming-for-northern-rural-hydro-users-kathleen-wynne-says.html> soon. This follows an 8-per-cent instant rebate of the provincial portion of the HST on electricity bills that took effect Jan. 1.

Ontario Energy Board orders utility companies to reconnect all customers Globalnews.ca
2017-02-23
Byline: Brian Hill, Associate Producer Global News

The Ontario Energy Board has ordered utility companies in the province to reconnect all customers currently without power. The order also states that companies must remove load-limiters, a device used to restrict the flow of electricity, from the homes of all residential customers.
The order will see roughly 930 customers from across Ontario reconnected to their electricity services. An additional 3,000 customers will have load-limiters removed.
“I expect that distributors will make reconnections and the removal of load limiting devices a high priority,” said Brian Hewson, vice president of consumer protection at the OEB. “The OEB will be closely monitoring electricity distributor progress, and will take further action if it appears that a given distributor is not acting responsibly.”

The OEB's decision comes only a day after the government rushed through the Protection of Vulnerable Energy Customers Act and a failed ultimatum from Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault and Premier Kathleen Wynne to end winter disconnections voluntarily.

“I find it to be in the public interest to amend the licenses of all electricity distributors in order to ensure that residential customers are not disconnected for non-payment for the balance of the 2016 - 2017 winter,” Hewson said. “I understand that a number of electricity distributors have acceded to the Minister's request to voluntarily suspend the disconnection of residential customers, but others have not.”

The order states that utility companies must comply in a “reasonable” time, but does not provide specifics in terms of when all customers must be reconnected.

All reconnection charges, including fees for the removal of load-limiters, must be waived by the utility companies.

The decision also states that companies are prohibited from any further disconnections or the use of load-limiters between now and April 30.

Companies must also work with customers to ensure they have access to available assistance programs and any government relief.

“During the ban on residential disconnection for non-payment, I also expect distributors to focus efforts on promoting solutions for customers that have substantial arrears, including offering arrears management plans; increasing awareness of assistance or support that may be available through the Low-Income Emergency Assistance Program, the Ontario Electricity Support Program or other sources,” said Hewson.

Between now and the end of winter, the OEB says it will conduct a full and through review of it's customer service guidelines. According to the decision, rules surrounding disconnections from gas and electrical services will be a key component of this review.

Low-income energy advocate responds

Theresa McClenaghan, co-founder and executive director of the Low-Income Energy Network, says she's pleased by the OEB's decision, but worries the unrestricted flow of electricity to customers' homes could result in affordability becoming even more of an issue.

“It's excellent that [the OEB] is acting quickly to implement the all-party direction not to cut people off in the winter, but at the same time I hope they're really going to make people aware of the programs that are there to help,” McClenaghan said.

While McClenaghan's organization is “rather agnostic” when it comes to how the government should pay for such assistance programs - they don't see the difference between ratepayers or taxpayers footing the bill for energy assistance - she says it's essential that rural and remote customers in the province receive adequate financial relief from increasing costs.

“There is a worry with the current prices that people's total bills will be even more out of control then they are already,” said McClenaghan. “So I hope that there will quickly be measures to help people with the affordability side of the equation - especially if they're low-income or lower middle-income.”

McClenaghan says LIEN has been lobbying the government for years for an affordability-based energy system to as opposed to the current system in which costs are based largely upon where a customer lives and how densely populated any particular neighbourhood might be.

“Right now the system is quite inequitable to low-income and rural ratepayers. So it's not even appropriate to say that it's ‘their costs' that they're bearing,” McClenaghan said. “There was just an arbitrary decision made a number of years ago to draw lines on a map around rural areas and charge costs based on density as opposed to bearing them equitably across the whole system.”

Although the government hasn't provided any details, it's these delivery charges that both Thibeault and Wynne say they'll be addressing with further subsides and possible reductions in rural rates in the coming weeks.

According to the government, an announcement on further energy assistance programs should be delivered before the spring budget, which is typically delivered sometime in March or early April.

Ottawa appeals to nuclear industry in clean-energy push The Globe and Mail Fri Feb 24 2017 Page: B5 Section: Report on Business Byline: SHAWN McCARTHY

The federal government is touting nuclear energy as an important part of Canada's clean-energy mix as Ontario embarks on a $26-billion, 20-year project to rebuild its aging reactor fleet.

In a speech Thursday, Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr told industry representatives that they face a “tremendous opportunity” as federal and provincial governments move to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by adopting carbon pricing and shutting down coal-fired power plants.

”Nuclear energy has to be part of this equation because it already accounts for about 16 per cent of Canada's electricity supply,” he told the Canadian Nuclear Association meeting, “and there is simply no reason why nuclear energy can't claim a larger share of our electricity mix.”

The nuclear industry has received short shrift in the federal-provincial discussion of Canada's planned transition to a low-carbon future, even though that plan entails an increase in the use of electricity for transportation and home heating. The “pan-Canadian framework for clean growth and climate change” - which was signed in December - highlights advances in solar and wind energy, but is silent on nuclear.

Still, Mr. Carr described the industry as a “strategic asset” for the country despite its troubled past. That includes a series of project cost overruns that led the previous Conservative government to privatize the commercial division of Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. (AECL), vendor of the Candu reactor. It is now owned by SNC-Lavalin Group Inc.

“This is your chance to bring the provinces and territories on board by demonstrating how nuclear energy can help Canada to meet its climate-change goals,” he told the nuclear industry crowd in the room.

The industry is hoping to market a new generation of smaller, modular reactors (SMR) across the country, but that technology is not commercially available.

Canadian Nuclear Laboratories - the federally owned, privately managed facility at Chalk River, Ont., - announced Thursday it will look for partners with SMR designs to build a prototype in order to assess its commercial viability. At this point, the nuclear industry is battling to maintain its current market share. Ontario is the only province that relies heavily on nuclearpower; provincially owned Ontario Power Generation (OPG) and investor owned Bruce Power supplied 60 per cent of Ontario's electricity last year. (New Brunswick has one nuclear plant at Point Lepreau.)

OPG has launched a $12.8-billion project to rebuild all eight units at its Darlington, Ont., generating station over the next 10 years, which its chief executive officer Jeff Lyash billed as “Canada's largest infrastructure project.”

Meanwhile, Bruce Power - which is owned by a consortium led by TransCanada Corp. - entered into an agreement with the Independent Electricity System Operator in Ontario to refurbish six of eight reactors at its Lake Huron plant at a cost of $13billion. It will begin that work in three years, after delaying the project to synchronize the timing with OPG.

Critics argue the province is taking on major risks by relying so heavily on nuclear. While Bruce has agreed to cover cost overruns, OPG is a Crown corporation and its financial health is ultimately backed by taxpayers.

“In Ontario, where customers are angry about rising electricity rates, [public acceptance of nuclear] requires a tangible demonstration of value,” Mr. Lyash told the conference. “For OPG, it means making sure we achieve on-time, on-budget success at Darlington and all of our projects.

And I believe this applies across the industry.” However, critics argue the province should cancel the Darlington refurbishment and instead rely on imports from Quebec, renewable sources and aggressive conservation efforts.

”Nuclear projects always become financial fiascoes,” Greenpeace Canada's Shawn-Patrick Stensil said. “Premier [Kathleen] Wynne's plan to rebuild 10 reactors is the biggest threat to Ontario's electricity supply, climate targets and energy prices over the next decade.”

But a spokesman for Ontario Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said there is no better option for the province that the refurbishment of the fleet of Candu reactors.

Nuclear plants provide about 60 per cent of the province's power, the spokesman, Colin Nekolaichuk, noted. “Neither renewables with storage nor power from Quebec can come close to meeting that level of demand,” he said.

Wynne's a reverse Robin Hood; Her Liberals take from the poor to give to the rich Toronto Sun Fri Feb 24 2017 Page: A5 Section: News Byline: Steve Clark Source: Toronto Sun

The famous outlaw Robin Hood and his Merry Men achieved fame for robbing from the rich to give to the poor.

Today we find an Ontario Liberal staffer taking a job at Tesla that shows the Wynne Liberals as Robin Hoods in reverse: They take from the poor to give to the rich.

Wynne and her cronies have done a lot to wreak havoc on Ontario - what they've done to the hydro system is case in point.

We've long been outraged by their scheme to pay wealthy Ontarians to buy Teslas - a fancy electric car that is the status symbol of choice for Silicon Valley billionaires. The price tag for one starts at

$75,200 - more than the average Ontario family earns in a year.

And let me be clear, this subsidy only applies to one car manufacturer - Tesla.

Once upon a time, Kathleen Wynne said that people who can afford this type of car probably don't need more help from the government. We agree.
So why then did her government flip-flop and reinstate the Teslabuyer's subsidy? It's a question I asked the premier in Question Period. She stonewalled. It's a question I'd like to ask Environment Minister Glen Murray's former chief of staff.

He left the top job in the minister's office to take a government relations job with Tesla the same month the tax break was announced.

It's bad enough that Wynne is having Ontario taxpayers give money so people can buy Teslas; but what's truly insulting is the revolving door of lobbyists, politicians and their staff that is the Ontario Liberal government.

“You scratch my back, I scratch yours” seems to be how Wynne and her Liberals want to run Ontario. We saw it with the outrageous green energydeals given to huge multinational companies to build wind turbines - companies that donated $1.3 million to the Ontario Liberals.

And we saw it with cash for access fundraisers, where government ministers traded access with companies they regulate for massive donations.

Ontarians hurting Meanwhile, every day, taxpaying Ontarians are suffering. Most of the people I know couldn't afford to spend $75,200 on a car.

Wynne's Tesla-buyer's subsidy benefits a narrow sliver of Ontarians who are already well-off.

And the self-interest involved with senior political staff being hired by Tesla shows that her government's ethics still haven't hit bottom.

There is no proof yet that any laws or rules were broken, but a full investigation is needed.

When Wynne gives special subsidies to companies who then go on to hire her top advisors, leaving Ontarians paying more for less and wondering who is going to stand up for them, something is seriously wrong.
We will stand up for Ontario families against this tax-and-spend Liberal government that only wants to help their wealthy friends and donors and get re-elected.

Steve Clark is the Deputy Leader of the Ontario PCs

BY THE NUMBERS

$39: Million in subsidies for electric cars handed out in six years.

$14: Million paid out for cars worth over $70,000.

$8,500: Previous cap on subsidies for electric vehicles worth $75,000 to $150,000.

$14,000: New subsidy paid as of Feb. 1, 2017.

$27,690: Taxpayer cash spent to subsidize the purchase of five Porsche 918 Spyders, worth $1.1 million each.

Hydro relief on the way - minister
Northern Daily News (Kirkland Lake)
Fri Feb 24 2017
Page: A2
Section: News
Byline: Gord Young
Source: Postmedia Network

Ontario residents can expect more hydro relief in a matter weeks, says Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault.

Thibeault once again acknowledged wide-spread public concern over hydro rates and repeated the promise that help is on the way.

“I get the rate issue and we continue to look at other solutions,” he said in a telephone interview, noting the Liberal government is planning to roll out relief package “very quickly.”

Thibeault said that will likely be a matter of weeks, noting Premier Kathleen Wynne is aiming for an announcement prior to the provincial budget, which is typically tabled sometime in February or March.

Some reports have suggested options include reducing the “global adjustment” charge on hydro bills. But Thibeault said everything within reason is on the table.

His comments come as Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown tours northeastern Ontario, capitalizing on the heat the Liberals are under over hydro rates. Brown's tour wraps up today in North Bay.

But Thibeault warns that Brown is not offering any solutions.
“They don't have a plan. They're not offering anything,” he said, accusing Brown of dealing in “alternative facts.”

He was specifically referring to Brown's call for an immediate ban on winter electricity disconnections in Ontario. Thibeault said he can't issue such a directive to the Ontario Energy Board and blamed the Tories for stalling legislation tabled in June that would put an end to winter disconnections for non-payment.

Rather than “playing games,” he suggested that partisanship be put aside so the legislation gets passed.

Thibeault also discounted the notion of cancelling renewable energycontracts, suggesting that would cost billions and damage the province's reputation when it comes to attracting business.

He said Ontario has built a clean, safe and reliable electricity system that no longer relies on coal and has eliminated smog days. And, he said, the focus now is to make rates it more affordable

Rebate could ease burden of soaring electricity rates at Fairhaven home in Peterborough Peterborough This Week Thu Feb 23 2017 Section: News Byline: Jamie Steel

PETERBOROUGH — Since 2012, annual electricity costs at Fairhaven in Peterborough have increased more than $175,000.

Lionel Towns, interim executive director for the long-term care home, says provincial funding simply isn't enough to cover the costs of operating the facility. Making matters more difficult, the Ontario government eliminated the Clean Energy Benefit at the end of 2015, which had provided about $40,000 in financial relief that year.

“It was a lot of money to try to come up with,” says Towns.

Furthermore, while retirement homes are exempt from paying the debt retirement charge on their hydro bills, the same exemption was not extended to long-term care homes.

In 2012, Fairhaven paid $246,586 for electricity. After years of increases, the projected cost for electricity in 2016 is $422,000. It's an increase of more than 71 per cent in four years and as the home's costs continue to outweigh the contributions from the provincial government, more burden is being placed on the backs of the City and County of Peterborough, co-owners of the facility.
At a Peterborough City budget committee meeting last November, Towns described provincial funding for the home as “intensely inadequate.”However, he was quick to thank the city and county, who have owned the facility since 1972, for their continued support.

READ MORE: Fairhaven's fight for funding continues as Peterborough budget committee approves major increase

The county and city both increased their funding for Fairhaven, following the announcement of a potential financial shortfall.

“We have a large body of expenses,” Towns says.

“What we get from the province isn't enough.”

Just this week Towns says Fairhaven was given some hope when they learned they could apply for an eight per cent rebate from the province. He's optimistic Fairhaven will be granted the rebate, but doesn't want to be presumptuous. The July bill will show whether the Peterborough home has actually qualified.

Although it wouldn't completely cover the costs associated with increased electricity rates and fees, Towns says he would welcome the rebate with open arms.

“I'm grateful for the help because it was putting a severe strain on, I'm sure, all homes,” says Towns. “It's certainly positive news.”

Towns says qualifying for the rebate would help Fairhaven balance the 2017 budget. Additionally, it would help the board determine budgets for future years.
The funding model for long-term care homes in Ontario is complex, Towns says, but the province essentially provides funding for four areas: nursing and personal care, raw food, programs, and other accommodations.

Electricity costs would fall under the umbrella of “other accommodations,” Towns says, but the increase to that category hasn't kept pace with the increase to electricity costs. He is working with a group to lobby the province for an adjustment to the funding model.

As Fairhaven awaits the news of whether they'll receive the rebate, municipalities are also being encouraged to post their electricity bills for the public to see.

READ MORE: Electricity use at Millbrook arena accounts for seven per cent of $11,000 hydro bill

At Tuesday's (Feb. 21) council meeting, Cavan Monaghan council voted to post a link on their website's home page to show their most recent electricity bill containing a breakdown of all the various charges. They also voted to forward the resolution to the Association of Municipalities Ontario to circulate the resolution to all municipalities, requesting the same. Furthermore, Cavan Monaghan council voted to forward the motion to Premier Kathleen Wynne, MPP Laurie Scott and all appropriate ministries.

The resolution, moved by Mayor Scott McFadden, noted “citizens and businesses of Ontario have a right to openness and transparency of the breakdown of municipal costs of electricity to better understand their impact on municipal budgets”.

Bruce Power, University of Guelph and Nordion team up in research project Saugeentimes.com
2017-02-23
Byline:

Cobalt-60 is an isotope that emits gamma rays essential to the medical community for cancer treatments and the sterilization of medical devices, while it also helps to prevent the spread of disease through an innovative insect sterilization technique. Cobalt-60 emits a blue glow called the ‘Cherenkov effect' when removed from a nuclear reactor and placed in water, which protects the surface from its radioactivity. The Cobalt rods spend up to two years in Bruce Power's nuclear reactors before being shipped to Nordion in Ottawa, where it is processed and shipped worldwide for various uses A high-tech form of insect birth control connected to nuclear power could solve a devastating pest problem for Ontario farmers, says a University of Guelph researcher.
Bruce Power, the world's largest operating nuclear facility located in Tiverton, ON, and Nordion, a global health science company that provides market-leading products used for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease, announced today funding and support for a multi-year study led by U of G Professor Cynthia Scott-Dupree on sterilizing pepper weevils using Cobalt-60.
The researchers hope to control pepper weevils, which can burrow into farmed peppers and destroy them from the inside.
“It is very difficult to control these insects when they are hidden inside the pepper,” Scott-Dupree said.
According to the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers, pepper weevils ruined $83 million worth of crops in 2016 - a figure that does not include the costs of management, suppression initiatives or cleanup of the pest.
Cobalt-60, which is produced in four of Bruce Power's eight nuclear reactors, is used for the Sterile Insect Technique (SIT), which could be a powerful strategy for controlling the weevil, said Scott-Dupree, of the U of G's School of Environmental Sciences.
“We want to move away from insecticide as much as possible, and SIT provides us another tool in our pest management toolbox,” she said. “It fits well with biological control programs that growers already have established in their greenhouses. While no strategy is 100 per cent effective, using nuclear energy to sterilize insects is an environmentally friendly method of controlling these pests. There is no danger of the pepper weevils spreading any radiation following sterilization, so it is also

safe for people." Scott-Dupree, the Bayer CropScience Chair in Sustainable Pest Management at U of G, will send pepper weevils to Nordion, an Ottawa-based supplier of medical isotopes and gamma technologies, which receives its Cobalt-60 from Bruce Power. Gamma radiation from Cobalt-60 will sterilize the insects before they are released to mate normal, unsterilized pepper weevils in greenhouses.

"We will only release pepper weevils that have all the attributes of normal, unsterilized weevils, except that they are sterile," said Scott-Dupree. "When they mate, the eggs will not be viable, no progeny results and the pest population will decrease." Families and businesses in Ontario rely on low-cost nuclear for 60 per cent of their electricity each year, said Ontario's Minister of Energy Glenn Thibeault, who visited Nordion lab facilities in Ottawa on Feb. 23. The Long-Term Energy Plan recognizes the far-reaching benefits of nuclear energy, whether through low-cost, carbon-free power, jobs, economic benefit, clean air, health care and, as is the case with this collaboration, agriculture.

"It is exciting to see Ontario's nuclear community joining forces to help researchers discover innovative, environmentally friendly ways to deal with agricultural pests that cause real harm to food crops," said Minister Thibeault. "This partnership again demonstrates Ontario's nuclear industry is a global leader, providing wide-ranging economic benefits, jobs, and scientific advancement." Pioneered in the 1950s, SIT has been successfully used to control the codling moth, a pest of apples, in the Okanagan Valley in B.C. since 1992. Scott-Dupree has also recently conducted research which has found that SIT has potential to control American serpentine leafminer, an insect pest that feeds primarily on chrysanthemums.

Cobalt-60 harvested from Bruce Power's reactors is already used to help sterilize 40 per cent of the world's single-use medical devices and treat brain tumours.

"This innovative research could improve Ontario's agricultural sector by reducing the impact of pests on produce, while also providing a possible gateway to the future of farming," said Mike Rencheck, Bruce Power's President and CEO.

Scott-Dupree and her team plan to determine the optimum radiation dosage that ensures the sterilization of pepper weevils before testing SIT releases in greenhouses.

"The study will take some time, but the potential it has makes it worthwhile," she said. "It is exciting to think of all the benefits this study could mean for farmers, Ontario's economy and the environment."

Nordion's facilities will be used to sterilize the pepper weevils.

"We are excited to see a technology like SIT, which has had wide and successful application in other areas of the world, help us here in Ontario," said Ian Downie, Vice President of Gamma Technologies at Nordion. "Our partnership with Bruce Power helps us support these kinds of scientific advances using Cobalt-60."

Promises and pitfalls of the carbon tax; will Liberals learn from Hydro One debacle?
Kingston Heritage
Thu Feb 23 2017
Page: A11
Section: Out Standing In Our Field
Byline: Aric Mcbay
Source: Kingston Heritage

In January, the Government of Ontario began to phase in a new cap and trade system for carbon pricing, as part of a national strategy to tax carbon.

Carbon taxes aren't new. British Columbia has had one since 2008 but we should pay close attention to how these programs are being implemented, and whether they are actually doing what they are supposed to do: reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reward efforts for sustainability.

Climate change is an emergency which requires a massive and immediate response. With that in mind, I'm willing to overlook some minor flaws. A timely but imperfect response is better than a perfect plan that happens too late.

So far, however, the plans at both the provincial and federal levels have major flaws. And there is a risk that they may reward the biggest polluters while punishing the people who are trying to reverse climate change.

In Alberta, for example, tar sands corporations are currently exempted from the carbon tax, despite the fact that they are by far the biggest greenhouse gas polluters in the country. Ontario has likewise granted exemptions for some of the biggest polluters, such as the Imperial Oil refinery in Sarnia and PetroCanada facilities in Mississauga.
This means that some of the companies that have profited most from destroying the climate are so far being let off the hook to save them “undue hardship”. Corporate needs are being prioritized over the needs of regular people.

There is an eerie similarity with the Ontario Liberal selloff of Hydro One (a process which began with the Progressive Conservative government under Mike Harris). Many observers warned from the beginning that privatizing the provincial utility would lead to rising electricity prices. And that's exactly what's happened. Electricity prices have risen dramatically, especially in rural Ontario.

I've spoken to farmers who can no longer afford to run electricity to the barns in the winter, and who must carry out buckets of water for their livestock. This looks like a return to the 1930s for some farmers, while others are now paying thousands of dollars a month for electricity. Meanwhile, a handful of corporations and banks appear to have profited handsomely from the sale of Hydro One.

The federal and provincial governments should learn from the Hydro One experience. Many small farmers are worried that the carbon tax will be the last straw, that it will put them out of business. But carbon pricing shouldn't be gentle on corporate polluters and harsh on regular people it needs to be the other way around.

And if there is going to be a carbon tax, a big chunk of that money needs to be redistributed to sustainable farmers. While some types of farming can emit greenhouse gases, it's also completely possible to farm in a way that absorbs carbon from the atmosphere and sequesters it in the soil.

Most of our family farm, for example, is pasture and hayfield. Our livestock follow a carefully planned system of rotational grazing to maximize plant growth and return fertility (in the form of manure) to the fields.
The result is a kind of farming that builds soil health and that captures carbon in the form of root mass and organic matter in the soil. We also encourage the regrowth of trees in hedgerows and wild areas. We farm in a way that helps to combat global warming.

There are many ways that sustainable farming can help reverse global warming and to support biodiversity, pollinator health, and local ecologies.

Supporting local ecologies can also mean supporting local economies; some money from the carbon tax must go into directly supporting sustainable rural economies. It must be directed away from the corporations who are destroying the climate and instead sent to regular people who are experiencing and working against climate change.

Otherwise, the cap and trade experiment in Ontario could turn out just as badly as the sale of Hydro One.