

**RNAO Submission on Bill 34, the Green
Energy Repeal Act**

Speaking Notes

October 30, 2018



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My name is Hilda Swirsky, and I am the Region Six Board Representative for the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. With me today is RNAO's Senior Economist, Kim Jarvi. On behalf of RNAO, I wish to thank the Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Social Policy for this opportunity to present the views of Ontario's registered nurses, nurse practitioners and nursing students on Bill 34, the *Green Energy Repeal Act*. We are here to speak to the health implications of the bill.

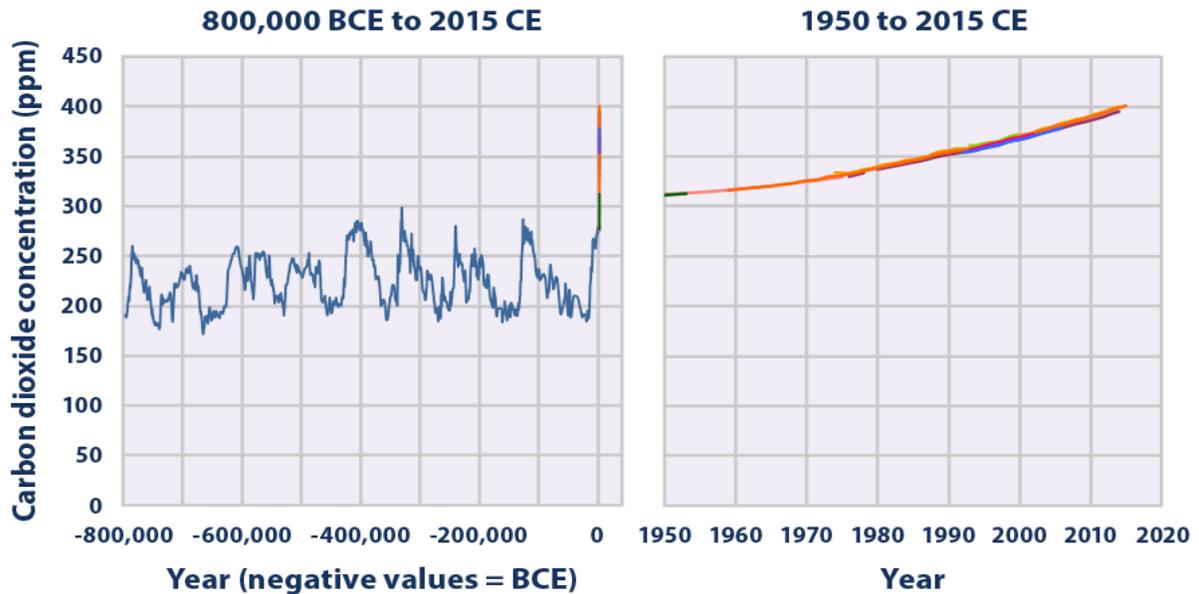
First, we wish to share our urgency for Ontario to respond to climate change and for the role that renewable energy must play in that regard. As the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario pointed out this month,¹ the effects of climate change in Ontario have never been more evident. For example:

- the province is 1.5 °C hotter than it was in 1948, warming much faster than the global average.
- a further 2.5 °C to 3.7 °C rise is expected by 2050.
- these changes are very unevenly distributed, with some regions very severely affected
- extreme weather events are increasingly common, for example
 - the 2016 drought in eastern Ontario
 - flooding in 2017
 - the 2018 wildfire in Parry Sound
 - the 2018 tornadoes

The urgency to respond is all the greater given the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. It warns the planet is already 1 °C hotter than it was in the pre-industrial era, and it is on track to rise above 1.5 °C as early as 2030. That change would bring widespread heat waves, wild fires, droughts, famines and huge losses in ocean food production. If we fail to keep the temperature rise to under 2 °C, the situation would be dramatically worse.

The unprecedented growth in greenhouse gases is driving climate change. Today, the levels of carbon in the air far exceed those at any time in the last 800,000 years.² The accompanying graphs from the US Environmental Protection Agency show the extraordinary spike in carbon dioxide concentrations since 1950.

Global Atmospheric Concentrations of Carbon Dioxide Over Time



Data source: Compilation of 10 underlying datasets. See www.epa.gov/climate-indicators for specific information.

For more information, visit U.S. EPA's "Climate Change Indicators in the United States" at www.epa.gov/climate-indicators.

This warming and extreme weather bring increasing health costs to Ontarians:

- vector-borne diseases like West Nile and Lyme disease
- increased mortality from heat waves and extreme cold snaps
- illness from increased mold in flooded homes
- worsened asthma from more pollution and greater pollen exposure
- illness from pollution promoted by higher temperatures and smoke from wild fires

Economic costs are soaring as well. For example, Ontario insurance losses are trending up exponentially, exceeding \$1.3 billion in 2013, the year of the Toronto floods.

Ontario has taken important action. For example, it progressively closed its coal plants by 2014. This greatly reduced provincial greenhouse gas emissions, which is good for health. But the co-benefits included a reduction in smog days from 53 in 2005 to zero in 2014 and 2015.³ This was important, as coal emissions attack human respiratory, cardiovascular and neurological systems - as do many other pollutants.

For Toronto alone, air quality improvements between 2004 and 2014 were estimated to have reduced air pollution deaths by 23 per cent (from 1,700 to 1,300) and reduced air pollution-related hospital admissions by 41 per cent (from 6,000 to 3,550). Toronto Public Health cited the coal closures as a factor in these gains.⁴

The Ontario government has announced it plans to introduce a climate change plan,⁵ and is holding an anonymous on-line consultation on climate change.⁶ But RNAO is concerned about Ontario's ability to meet its greenhouse gas commitments. Cap and trade was making emitters pay for their carbon pollution, which encouraged them to reduce that pollution. Bill 4 removed that tool. It also removed a major source of revenue for programs to address climate change.

Bill 4 also removed the GHG targets from Ontario legislation, which creates uncertainty about Ontario's commitment to meet those targets.⁷

To still make necessary progress on climate change, Ontario needs a comprehensive climate change plan to address all emitting sectors, including transportation, industry, buildings, electricity, agriculture and waste. Essential strategies include expanding public transit and active transportation, encouraging energy efficiency in transportation, industry and buildings, and more renewable energy. The challenge is how to do that when making polluters pay has been taken off the table and with the government choice to reduce its revenue. With limited possibilities of subsidies and market mechanisms, it would seem that regulation would have to play an outsized role.

With respect to Bill 34, RNAO urges reconsideration of its tilt against renewable energy. Renewable energy is not only healthier -- it is also becoming the cheapest option, even without considering the health savings. For example in 2017, Alberta secured 480 megawatts of wind energy at an average of 3.7 cents per kilowatt hour, which is very competitive with any energy source in Ontario.⁸ RNAO also endorses the call of the Renewable Energy Alliance of Ontario to remove any provisions in the bill that discriminate against renewable energy, such as:

- the proposed removal of the right to appeal local decisions about renewable energy applications, and
- the proposed right of cabinet to prohibit the issuance or renewal of a renewable energy approval in prescribed circumstances, including a requirement to demonstrate need for the energy.

It does not seem fair or sound to impose these constraints on renewable energy while not imposing them on other energy sources.

RNAO recommendations:

1. Commit to a comprehensive program to address climate change through measures to mitigate that change and measures to adapt to climate change. These measures must address all of the sources of greenhouse gases, including transportation, industry, buildings, electricity, agriculture and waste.

2. Commit to GHG reduction targets that at a minimum meet Ontario's existing targets of 15 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020, 37 per cent by 2030 and 80 per cent by 2050.

3. Withdraw the court challenge to federal carbon pricing.
4. Do not create an unlevel playing field for renewable energy projects vs. other kinds of projects. In particular, do not remove the right of appeal for renewable energy projects, so long as other types of projects retain that right. And do not empower cabinet to prohibit the issuing or renewing renewable energy approvals in prescribed circumstances, including a requirement to demonstrate need for the energy.
5. On the issue of transportation, RNAO urges the province to take all necessary steps to:
 - Work with federal and municipal partners to ensure dedicated and sustainable revenue sources to pay for ongoing operation and substantial expansion of transit and active transportation in Ontario
 - Support cost-effective and expeditious delivery of those expansions, implemented by transparent governance and informed expert opinion
 - Avoid resorting to public asset sales like the privatization of Hydro One to fund transit expansions

We wish to thank you again for giving us this opportunity to present the views of Ontario's RNs, NPs and nursing students. We will be pleased to answer any of your questions.

References

- ¹ Saxe, D. (2018). *Climate Action in Ontario: What's Next? 2018 Greenhouse Gas Progress Report Webinar*. http://docs.assets.eco.on.ca/presentations/2018-10-01_Climate-Action-in-Ontario-Webinar.pdf
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- ³ Miller, G. (2017, January 20). On coal closures and straw men: Why shutting down Ontario's coal plants wasn't a waste of money. *TVO*. Retrieved from <http://tvo.org/article/current-affairs/climate-watch/on-coal-closures-and-straw-men-why-shutting-down-ontarios-coal-plants-wasnt-a-waste-of-money>.
- ⁴ Toronto Public Health. (2014). *Path to Healthier Air: Toronto Air Pollution Burden of Illness Update. Technical Report*. April. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265642951_Path_to_Healthier_Air_Toronto_Air_Pollution_Burden_of_Illness_Update.
- ⁵ Ontario. (2018). *Climate Change*. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/climate-change>.
- ⁶ Ontario. (2018). *About this consultation*. <https://www.ontario.ca/form/tell-us-your-ideas-climate-change>.
- ⁷ The targets were to be found in Ontario. (2018). *Climate Change Mitigation and Low-carbon Economy Act, 2016, S.O. 2016, c. 7*. p. 4.
- ⁸ Alberta. (2017). *Alberta renewables auction record-setting success: Renewable electricity in Alberta will keep power affordable thanks to record-low auction prices and strong investor confidence*. December 13. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=511572D67D28E-C09C-E3E6-BA37A772B4C34AF6>