

What about the climate change?

EDITORIAL

NEARLY FOUR MONTHS into its four-year mandate, Ontario's new PC (Populist Conservative?) government is doing a great job of ridding the province of just about everything that can be identified as a product of the Liberal governments of Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne.

Gone for good are the sex education curriculum the Wynne government introduced in 2015, the Green Energy Act the McGuinty regime produced in 2009 and the Grits' proposed 3 per cent increase in welfare rates and the \$15 minimum wage that was to have taken effect in January.

Gone, too, is the province's cap and trade program designed to reduce greenhouse gases both by charging carbon producers, thereby encouraging them to cut the emissions, and using the revenue to subsidize things like electric cars and home insulation.

All such moves are being applauded by fans of Premier Doug Ford's populist crusade, who are equally joyful at seeing plans unveiled to review spending by the Liberal regimes that soared 55 per cent over roughly 15 years and ended with a current budgetary deficit of \$15 billion, more than double the \$6.7 billion in red ink promised in the last Liberal budget. (That difference is partly because of a form of accounting the PCs and Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk say was improperly used to include teacher and civil service pension plan surpluses ? over which the province has no claim ? as assets.)

It will be interesting to see what, if anything, will be disclosed anew in the planned nine-member select committee (six Conservatives and three NDP MPPs) that will examine how the budgetary deficit had ballooned, something Mr. Ford says was the result of ?quite possibly the worst political coverup in Ontario's history.?

Both NDP leader Andrea Horwath and Ms. Wynne see the select committee as designed to provide excuses for cuts in public services.

?This is all about more justification for deeper cuts to public services,? Ms. Horwath said, ?and yet he's going to do that while cutting taxes for the richest Ontarians and cutting taxes for the richest corporations.?

The \$15-billion deficit figure takes into account Liberal spending promises, including free child care for preschoolers and expanded pharmacare and dental care that the Tories have cancelled, but the projection doesn't include PC election promises, such as tax reductions or \$6 billion in spending cuts.

Ms. Wynne said Premier Ford's ?inflamed rhetoric? is setting the table for slashing services. ?What I see is a premier who's trying to create the conditions and a context for cuts.?

The new government is promising to enact a new sex ed curriculum after consulting with parents and educators, and it says that while it is challenging the federal Liberals' plans to impose a carbon tax on provinces lacking one or a cap-and-trade alternative, it acknowledges the need to reduce greenhouse gases. But it has yet to come up with even the outline of an alternative way to achieve the cuts.

As we see it, the only real differences between what the Ford government is doing on the climate file and the actions of the Trump administration south of the border is that the PCs acknowledge the existence of man-made climate change and haven't joined with Mr. Trump in calling for more coal burning.

There's little doubt that, apart from their longevity, the McGuinty and Wynne governments' loss of public support was due mainly to the high prices required by green energy programs. Had they opted to keep coal-fired power plants running and required wind and solar projects to be approved in advance by local municipalities, electricity would have been a lot cheaper, albeit with the air we breathe being a lot dirtier.

And interestingly, climate-change action was an area in which the Liberals, NDP and Green Party, who together had 60 per cent of the votes cast June 7, had similar platforms.