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Political carbon follies

EDITORIAL

MAN-MADE CLIMATE CHANGE has been in the news recently, with all sorts of indications that politics will ultimately kill any attempts to deal effectively with the phenomenon by reducing carbon emissions.

Right-wing governments everywhere either deny its existence or admit to it while doing little or nothing about it.

In Asia, China and India subscribed to the Paris climate accord but an investigation by the New York Times has shown that both countries are building dozens of coal-fired power plants in efforts to meet soaring demands for electricity that led to blackouts. The Times story found similar trends throughout Southeast Asia, leading readers to wonder how on earth scientists' predictions of cataclysmic consequences can be avoided.

Of course, the most ridiculous and potentially powerful negative effect is U.S. President Donald Trump's determination to withdraw from the Paris accord in 2020 based on his unsupportable argument that the accord was somehow rigged against his country, when the truth is that each country was permitted to set its own targets.

The Trump position ? which seems to be that climate change is a natural occurrence unaffected by carbon emissions and loss of forests ? was illustrated afresh last weekend when the U.S. was the only member of the G20 that didn't support a resolution supporting (unspecified) action on climate change.

One thing that's pretty obvious is that the Trump administration's promotion of coal production and easing of Obama-imposed measures designed to limit production of electricity by coal was smart politics, albeit idiotic to anyone who acknowledges the scientific evidence on the subject.

In Canada, there's precious little doubt that carbon pricing will be a major issue in next October's federal election, with the Conservatives flatly opposed while offering little in the way of credible alternatives, seeing opposition to any form of taxation as a huge vote-getter. Meanwhile, the NDP and Green party are likely to contend that the Liberal government's imposition of a 3 per cent tax on major polluters is too little to achieve Canada's commitment under the Paris accord.

And in Ontario, the soaring electricity prices resulting from a combination of closure of the province's coal-fired power plants and promotion of wind and solar energy was likely the main reason the Liberals went from being the governing party to failing to win party status in the legislature.

The Ford Conservatives, seemingly ignoring the fact that 60 per cent of the electors voted for parties favoring green energy, have killed all the incentives for individual purchases of such things as solar panels and electric cars and now have come up with a scheme seemingly designed to achieve carbon-reduction targets by giving $400 million in grants to polluters who agree to research ways of cutting emissions.

In recent days, we witnessed Environment Minister Rod Phillips acknowledge that under the Liberal governments of Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne Ontario had achieved a 22 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions since 2005, by closing the coal-fired power plants and promoting green energy, leaving the Tories with a need to achieve only a further cut of 8 percentage points.

Yet at almost the same time, Ms. Wynne was under attack for her government's move to cut hydro bills 17 per cent by shuffling debt from the government's books to those of government-owned Ontario Power Generation.

Denying allegations of a cover-up, she told a select committee the move was mainly an attempt to deal with a human problem, targeting ?people who didn't have the resources to deal with these challenging electricity prices. My actions were motivated by wanting to solve this problem,? she said. ?Did I recognize it as a political problem? Yes, I did. But at its base it was a human problem that needed to be resolved by government.?