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The politics of climate change

EDITORIAL

THERE SURELY IS LITTLE doubt remaining as to the existence of man-made climate change, apart from that seemingly felt by the current occupant of the U.S. White House.

As Donald Trump sees it, Barack Obama's moves to combat greenhouse gases by limiting the use of coal to generate electricity were all wrong-headed, and he has moved to boost coal production and remove the Obama-era caps on production by the coal-fired power plants.

In Canada, where even far-right populists like Ontario Premier Doug Ford acknowledge the need to cut back on pollution, the issue is two-fold: whether the federal government has a role to play and whether the needed cutbacks can be accomplished without placing a price on pollution, either through a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade scheme of the sort Ontario had under its previous government.

The Ford government is apparently working on something never accomplished anywhere else ? a scheme to have polluters simply cut back themselves, without any government incentives. It will be interesting, indeed, to see whether such (in)action will work, and what role it will play in the 2019 federal election.

Interestingly, it wasn't all that long ago that Ontario's Progressive Conservatives had an election platform that included imposition of a carbon tax similar to one brought in long ago by British Columbia's centre-right Liberal government. But that was when the PC party was led by Patrick Brown, who now appears to be among the party's few remaining ?Red Tories.?

Although claiming to head a government that's ?for the people,? Mr. Ford seems to have failed to notice that most of the province's residents favour some form of government action to limit greenhouse gases. Just how many is difficult to assess, but the fact is that the Liberal, NDP and Green parties were all on board, as well as an unknown number who voted Conservative just to get rid of the provincial Liberals.

Despite the obvious fact that no one likes to pay taxes, the federal Liberals now seem committed to proceed with a carbon tax that will apply in any province that lacks its own means of making the polluters pay.

As we see it, the Justin Trudeau Liberals' moves to meet Canada's commitment to cut greenhouse gases are too little and too late, yet far preferable to what we're now witnessing south of the border and what is likely to occur if the federal Conservatives win next October.

As matters stand, most if not all of Canada's right-wing premiers are opposing the federal carbon tax, which is to start next January at $20 per tonne of greenhouse gas emissions and rise to $50 a tonne by 2022, but neither they nor federal Conservative leader Andrew Scheer have thus far come up with a credible alternative to the tax, and Mr. Trudeau has vowed that every nickel raised from the federal tax will go back to residents of Ontario and the other provinces that lack their own carbon-curbing programs.

?It will no longer be free to pollute anywhere in Canada,? the prime minister said during an appearance at Humber College in Etobicoke when he announced plans for the rebate program.

As for Mr. Ford, he asserted that the federal government ?does not have the right to ram a carbon tax down the throats of Ontario families and job-creators,? and has joined with the Saskatchewan government in a court challenge of the Liberal plan.

The only certainty arising out of all this is that carbon pricing will be a major issue in the election, with the Conservatives confident that voters' hatred of taxation will trump their support for real action against climate change.

If the Tories are right and end up in power we will likely see the same situation now found in Ontario, with most Canadians wanting credible action on greenhouse gases but a government looking the other way.