

I am not an activist. I have never spoken out before but the current crisis regarding hydro in our province has motivated me to come forward.

Ontarians have experienced Hydro costs escalations over 300% in the past 10 years. Crippling delivery costs and distribution fees are by far the largest concern. The energy file is complex and while the average consumer does not understand formula used to calculate the delivery and distribution fees it does not mean they cannot grasp that the formulas are designed to increase bills. They do not approve or believe it is fair to the consumer.

Hydro One has a captive customer base. A monopoly. Hydro One customers have no option to shop elsewhere for the same product. At the end of the day we have no choice but to pay, or be disconnected.

We have seen the OEB approve Hydro One applications  
We have watched as the OEB appears to rubber-stamp those applications to the point where the cost of delivery and distribution have out-stripped the cost of the product they deliver. The duplication and waste is passed onto ratepayers many of whom cannot afford the costs that are ultimately loaded onto their hydro bills.

As families across this province have struggled with the harsh realities of energy poverty we listen to those in Queen's Park speak about practicing conservation through time of use or investing energy renovations for our homes. Many of these families have done these and have seen no difference on their hydro bills

Families in rural Ontario have been hardest hit with Hydro One increases and subsequent delivery charges, and find little comfort when they hear of less smog days in Toronto.

Just as a segment of our population chooses to live in the urban centers there are those of us who prefer to live in rural Ontario. More and more families are coming to realize that they might not be able to afford to live in rural Ontario anymore. There is an exodus starting of families not only moving to urban centers, but out of the province.

When electricity costs match or exceed your mortgage, something is wrong. When businesses close their doors and manufacturers are moving, something is wrong. When children go to bed hungry because parent had to pay the hydro bill, something is wrong. It is easy to assume that these things apply to only the poorest in our province I am here to tell you that is not the case. Many suffering do not qualify for any programs to help them cope.

We are told that the system has been rebuilt is reliable and clean but from the outage report and the dire predictions of a failing system by Hydro one that would seem to not be the case. It would appear the money invested by the current government did not extend to us the consumer.

Included in the evidence is a survey conducted by hydro one it says that customers would accept a 1% increase but what is not included in that document is the question that was asked. Was it asked straight forward manner or was is asked in a way that would elicit the response they wanted.

I would suggest that the document is self serving and should be viewed as such by the OEB. When Hydro One asks for increases replacement or repairs as it does on every application who is tracking requests?

Hydro One seems to accept the process of applying to the OEB for rate increases as a given, and the consumer is held captive with out any choice but to pay. The OEB needs to do a better job of tracking the requests, and comparing them to previous applications and make sure that those same requests are not duplicated.

The Ontario Energy Board is the mediator that reviews the requests put forward by Hydro One. Rural consumers are in crisis, we have reached the breaking point. We cannot afford anymore increases. I do not know how to make that any clearer.

I would suggest the OEB make Hydro One accountable. You are the last line between rural ratepayers being able to afford their homes, and having to make heartbreaking choices. There comes a time when the answer just needs to be 'no'. I would suggest now is that time.

Electricity is no longer a luxury, it should not be priced as one.

Gail Batten

