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This week's top stories
on torontosun.com

1. Jays' Bautista had it
coming from Odor

Don Brennan

2. Wynne's climate strategy
will drive millions into energy
poverty

Lorrie Goldstein

3. 'Get the f--- out of the way';
Trudeau sorry after elbowing
NDP MP in Commons

David Akin

SUN POLL

Today's question

Would you give up your
natural gas furnace?

Yes
No
Don't have one

VOTE NOW AT
torontosun.com

Yesterday's results

Who do you think will
win Game 3 on Saturday
night?

31% Raptors
69% Cavaliers

BAD GAS ATTACK

Ontario's plan to eliminate natural gas for home heating is one of several misguided ideas in its climate change strategy

Last week we learned Ontario's Liberal government wants to eliminate natural gas as a source of home and business heating fuel in Ontario.

The ostensible purpose is to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions linked to climate change and it is a key component of a 57-page action plan leaked by the *Globe and Mail*.

The overall strategy is apparently still being debated by Premier Kathleen Wynne and her cabinet with the final version to be released in June.

Commenting on the plan, the *Toronto Sun's* Lorrie Goldstein wrote:

"Among (the initiatives), Wynne will double down on subsidizing electric car sales in a massive expansion of a failed government program that often sees average Ontarians subsidizing the car purchases of millionaires.

"But the centrepiece of Wynne's reported strategy is eliminating Ontario's use of natural gas to heat the residential, office and commercial sectors, and to convert them to electrical heating, or solar and geo-thermal, which simply aren't ready for prime time."

Ontario's ever-increasing electricity rates have resulted in the public using less electricity to save money.

The government's problem is that it depends in part on the revenues from electricity consumption to fund the many costly initiatives in its Green Energy Act.

Conservation reduces those revenues, meaning electricity rates have to be increased constantly to maintain the revenue stream.



GREG
VEZINA

Guest Columnist

Natural gas is one of the most efficient means of heating.

High-efficiency condensing furnaces can convert up to 98% of the fuel's energy into usable heat.

By contrast, simple cycle gas turbine plants that back up Ontario's power grid to ensure that electricity flows when the wind isn't blowing and the sun isn't shining, have thermal efficiencies around 30-40%, and 28% of Ontario's power generation capacity comes from such plants.

Given that there is no end in sight to increases in Ontario's electricity rates, forcing Ontarians to switch to more expensive electrical heat from natural gas will put many into energy poverty — where people pay more than 10% of their income just to power their homes — and be a huge drain on our economy.

It would make far more sense to allow Ontarians to continue heating with natural gas, while reducing consumption by retrofitting buildings with better insulation.

Another initiative in the government's climate change strategy is to switch the province's heavy transport vehicle fleet to liquefied natural gas (LNG).

But using LNG risks GHG



TIM BOYLE/GETTY IMAGES

emissions because natural gas can enter the atmosphere through leakage and as the fuel in the LNG tank warms.

The government's plan to convert Ontario's gas-powered automotive fleet to electric looks better on paper.

Since passenger vehicles are typically parked much longer than they are driven, their batteries can theoretically be used to help balance the renewable energy grid — storing electricity when there is a surplus and releasing it when there is a demand.

Smart charging

But this would require smart charging stations at virtually every parking space and a supervisory system to manage every individual vehicle's charge level.

If the government's previous track record on developing software is any indication, this would likely prove to be

another financial disaster.

For the vehicle owner whose commute is within the range of an electric vehicle's battery, an electric vehicle could potentially be useful.

Batteries are the most expensive component of these vehicles, which is why Tesla is building its own battery factory in Nevada.

However, the supply of minable lithium (the main constituent of electric car batteries) is limited, so demand for massive quantities of this commodity will drive up its cost, in spite of manufacturing economies of scale working to drive it down.

Another strategy related to automobiles is to switch to lower carbon fuels such as E85 (85% ethanol) and biodiesel.

Such policies adopted globally will have an adverse effect on global food production because corn is typically used as the fuel-grade ethanol

feedstock.

To grow that much corn, most of our farmland would have to be converted to fuel rather than food production.

This has already had an upward effect on food prices and the process requires more energy in the form of ammonia fertilizer and diesel fuel for the farm equipment than the resulting ethanol saves.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development has said bio-fuels may offer a cure that is worse than the disease when it comes to GHG emissions.

Perhaps the best way to describe the Wynne government's climate change strategy is that it is having a massive gas attack at our expense and to our detriment.

Vezina, chairman of Hydrofuel Inc., is the co-author of *Democracy Eh? A Guide to Voter Action* and leader of the None of the Above Party of Ontario