



May 19, 2016

The Editor
The Globe & Mail

Sent by e-mail

Re: The editorial May 18, 2016: "Less central heating, more central planning"

Dear Editor:

The Consumers Council of Canada is the major intervenor for Ontario's retail electricity consumers at the Ontario Energy Board, in concert with a diverse group of other intervenors focused on industrial, institutional, environmental and anti-poverty interests.

The Council, a national non-profit voluntary organization headquartered in Toronto and working in conjunction with these other intervenors, has been effective in keeping electricity distributors and local power utilities accountable in the price review process at the OEB. However, it is important for consumers to know that many costs of many kinds that contribute to current rates are not reviewed by the OEB.

However, despite tremendous change in the global energy sector, Ontario consumers pay middle-of-the-pack retail prices for electricity in North America, as indicated by a HydroQuebec report at http://www.hydroquebec.com/publications/en/docs/comparaison-electricity-prices/comp_2015_en.pdf. Price comparators for U.S. states are readily available, too, at https://www.eia.gov/electricity/monthly/epm_table_grapher.cfm?t=epmt_5_6_a

The Globe and Mail assertion on its editorial page today that Ontario is "North America's leader in overpriced power" is hyperbole that may confuse a typical retail consumer's understanding of what they pay for electricity in Ontario relative to other jurisdictions.

Having said that, the major retail consumer intervenors at the OEB, the Council and the Vulnerable Energy Consumers Coalition, represented by Public Interest Advocacy Centre, should be better supported financially through the OEB and other public initiatives to act independently in public accountability processes in Ontario and Canada concerning energy policy, planning and pricing, given the monopolies and oligopolies of supply, whether publicly or privately controlled. Business and government exercise too much unobserved control over energy-related decision-making outside of ordinary competitive markets at the expense of the consumer interest, which is defined by much more than price. This should be corrected by a national commitment to

strengthening consumer groups' institutional role in decision-making processes related to energy and improving their capacity to participate.

It will not be acceptable to Canadians for either business or government to take this role for themselves.

The OEB intervenor process, despite its limitations, has been the best approach in Canada to make rate-setting accountable to retail consumers. But Ontario's Minister of Energy should direct the OEB to implement reforms that bring intervenors for retail consumers the resources necessary to exercise their role institutionally to protect consumers rights and interests.

Consumer representation is not a 'cost' or an 'aggravation', it's a right.

Expanding institutionalized, broad-perspective consumer representation similar to what has existed and needs to grow at the OEB would benefit national institutions, too, like the National Energy Board, where this independent perspective is not developed and seldom heard.

Consumer groups need greater capacity to engage public planning and policy processes related to energy. Consumers need assurance they will have effective, independent representation. And consumer groups have a responsibility to demonstrate they provide it. Otherwise public distrust for and discontent with business and government will continue its growth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Arhe Blane".

President