

Caledon Chamber joins call for transparency on Hydro One sale

By Bill Rea

There are hopes there will be answers coming regarding the Province's plan to sell off a portion of Hydro One.

The Caledon Chamber of Commerce has joined a province-wide coalition of 33 Chambers and Boards of Trade in calling on the government to provide factual evidence that electricity prices will not increase as a result of the government's decision to sell off 60 per cent of Hydro One.

The plan to sell part of the utility was announced in the Provincial budget earlier this year.

"Rising electricity prices are a collective concern and have put Ontario businesses at a competitive disadvantage," said Caledon Chamber Chair Warren Darnley. "It is important to recognize that electricity represents a significant cost to employers."

He also pointed out there are a lot of costs facing business these days, pointing to the added issue of how much the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP) is going to cost. The concern with these plans is with how much they cost, and what the cost will be down the road.

As the government moves forward with the sale of Hydro One, "it is essential that it works to ensure that business operation in Ontario remains affordable by containing electricity costs," Darnley maintained.

In a recent report by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC), entitled Empowering Ontario, Ontario's chambers called for increased transparency around electricity and system cost drivers from the Provincial government. The partial sale of Hydro One should be subject to a similar level of scrutiny.

Darnley pointed out the Ontario Chamber is calling for more accountability from the government, and is not getting any answers. Since the release of the 2013 Long Term Energy Plan, industrial electricity rates have increased by 16 per cent, and are expected to increase a further 13 per cent over the next five years. Darnley pointed out that will be happening without the sale of Hydro One. He wondered what kind of impact the sale would have on those figures. He also pointed out Hydro costs in Ontario are among the highest in the country.

According to a survey conducted by OCC, one in 20 businesses will either shut their doors or move to another jurisdiction in the coming years due to these rising rates. The government needs to make certain that the cumulative burden on business operation in Ontario does not increase due to the partial sale of Hydro One.

The lack of information is the problem, according to Darnley.

"We're not even sure when it (the sale) will happen," he commented.

The coalition of Chambers are hopeful they will collectively be able to get some action from the government.

"Unfortunately, they do what they want sometimes," Darnley observed.