

Environmental Defence disappointed with Provincial budget, but cites possible silver lining on 413

By **ROB PAUL**

Local Journalism

Initiative Reporter

With the announcement of Ontario's provincial budget last week, Environmental Defence has come out against the provincial government's lack of focus on the environment.

As climate change continues to become more crucial, Environmental Defence was hopeful the Ford government would change their tune and put more effort into reducing emissions with the Provincial budget being a jumping-off point for a shift towards preserving the future.

"We are disappointed with this budget," said Environmental Defence Programs Director Keith Brooks. "We were hopeful that the government would use the opportunity of the budget to kind of reset their approach to the environment. This government has taken a pretty hostile approach to the environment on multiple fronts, and I think they've received a fair bit of criticism for that, and we were hopeful that they were going to maybe begin to reorient towards a more pro-environmental position."

"One of the biggest issues here, in Canada and also around the world, they're talking a lot about a green recovery and creating jobs through climate action while putting climate change at the centre of their recovery plans from COVID and also their job creation plan. This is happening here at the Federal level in Canada and in many countries in Europe, and it would have been nice to see some kind of action on climate change in the Provincial budget. But climate change is only mentioned twice in the whole document. They didn't even allocate money towards some of the things that are in their environment plan, such as this emissions reduction fund?they're supposed to put \$400 million towards an emissions reduction fund and they haven't even done that. It's disappointing that there's no interest in actually fighting climate change in Ontario."

Despite efforts coming from the Federal government in the fight against climate change, Brooks says the country isn't even scratching the surface of what has to be done to make a meaningful difference and other countries around the world are outpacing Canada.

"We know the Federal government is doing a number of things to fight climate change, but Canadians need to know that Canada is not doing enough," he said. "We don't have plans to do nearly enough?we have a plan in place for the first time ever in Canada and that plan is expected to take us to Canada's target, but Canada's target is far too weak. Our target is not going to have our country do our fair share when it comes to reducing emissions and keeping global warming to 1.5 degrees, or even 2 degrees as was agreed to in Paris."

"We're behind our peers?we're behind the U.S. even in terms of emissions reductions, President Biden is expected to table a new pledge for the United States about their emissions cuts and it's expected to be more ambitious than what Canada has done. It's good that we're taking action [at the federal level], but we are behind the eight-ball on this."

Now that Canada's Supreme Court has ruled in favour of the Federal government's carbon tax, Brooks is hopeful the Ontario's government will accept it, but does take issue with the break being given to industrial emissions.

"Are we finally going to stop the battle on carbon pricing now that the Supreme Court has ruled against Ontario and in the Federal government's favour? I sure hope so, because the Province hasn't only been fighting this, but misleading Ontarians about the impacts of the carbon price by talking only about the cost and not about the rebates?that's a problem. Ontario has its own industrial carbon

pricing system?which the Federal government did grant equivalency too?the details of that system are not even sketched out and it's very weak. We are giving industries in Ontario a free ride to emit carbon at basically no cost. Industrial emissions are the second largest source of emissions in Ontario, this is a huge problem.?

Looking for positives in a budget that lacks them from Environmental Defence's perspective, Brooks points to Highway 413 being left out of it, which he says is a good sign it won't move forward.

?We are glad that there is no mention of funding set aside for the controversial Highway 413. The next step must be for the government to cancel this unnecessary project which would cost Ontario at least \$6 billion. It's the silver lining that it was not mentioned?the budget contained a page with a list of different highway projects that the government wants to move forward on and 413 wasn't listed there, that's good news. But the government needs to follow through and actually cancel that project once and for all.

?Unfortunately, the Bradford Bypass, otherwise known as the Holland Marsh Expressway, is mentioned in the budget. This highway would bulldoze through the Greenbelt and the Holland Marsh, one of the most productive agricultural specialty crop areas in the country and one of the largest wetlands in the region, causing severe stormwater and groundwater impacts.?