Why not follow Alberta?s lead?

EDITORIAL

PREMIER DOUG FORD has rejected a warning by Ontario's Auditor-General that his government's policies on climate change won't meet Ontario's 2030 emission reduction targets and are riddled with errors and omissions.

In her report released last week, Auditor General Bonny Lysyk said the Progressive Conservative government calculated some reductions based on green policies it scrapped when it came to power last year, double-counted other savings, and failed to properly estimate costs for more than half of the initiatives in its Made-in-Ontario environment plan.

?Our audit concluded that the emission-reduction estimates in the plan are not based on sound evidence or sufficient detail,? Ms. Lysyk said in her 2019 annual report.

Without producing much in the way of supportive expert evidence, the premier has contended that killing the previous government's ?cap and trade' program, cancelling hundreds of green energy contracts and effectively barring any new wind or solar farms were all appropriate.

It seems the Ford government is echoing the beliefs of the Trump administration that governments need only rely on polluters to clean up their own acts.

Accordingly, Ontario is going to spend untold millions of taxpayers' dollars taking its constitutional challenge of the federal carbon tax to the Supreme Court of Canada despite having lost in the lower courts.

And thus far we've seen no hint that the Ford troops are at all interested in a tactic employed by their Alberta cousins, Jason Kenney's United Conservative Party, in devising a different type of carbon tax that has passed muster with Ottawa, meaning that province's consumers won't be paying the federal tax.

In October, the Alberta government announced that it will maintain a $30-per-tonne carbon tax on large industrial facilities that's designed to align the government's plan with the federal climate law and stave off possible intervention from Ottawa.

Already accepted by the Trudeau government, Alberta's industrial carbon tax is the centrepiece of Premier Kenney's climate strategy and, on Jan 1, 2020, will replace a similar system introduced by his New Democratic predecessor. The tax could increase in future years to keep pace with the federal government's climate plan for industry.

Much of the oil sands will be covered by the industrial tax, introduced a week after the federal election highlighted regional divisions in the country, particularly over climate change.

The industry tax is being set at a higher level per tonne than Mr. Kenney promised during Alberta's election last spring, $30 instead of $20, in a move to ensure that the provincial government's plan would comply with the federal climate law. Due to the size of Alberta's industrial base, especially the province's large oil and gas industry, the expected reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from the plan will contribute significantly to meeting national targets.

So why not a similar approach in Ontario? Is it just because it would require ripping off the anti=carbon-tax labels on the province's petrol pumps?

The Auditor General's report says the environment ministry's own calculations from last November would only get the province's globe-warming emissions to 160.9 megatonnes (Mt) by 2030. That is well short of the 143.3 Mt target it would need hit to achieve a 30 per cent reduction in emissions from 2005 levels by 2030, its stated policy goal.

And in August the AG also asked the environment ministry to recalculate its forecast to account for new data, and in response the ministry lowered its projections to say it expected to emit 163.6 Mt in 2030, even further from a target critics say is not ambitious enough.

The Lysyk report did not estimate the cost to Ontario of dealing with the effects of climate change, which include more severe and more frequent flooding and other extreme weather that is putting a heavy strain on the insurance industry.

However, global economic losses from climate-related extreme events were estimated at around $10 billion a year in the 1970s and since 2010 have exceeded $100 billion (at constant 2012 currency values), according to a 2015 report commissioned by the Insurance Bureau of Canada.

Perhaps Mr. Ford needs to have another chat with Mr. Kenney.

