

Notes for Remarks

By

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To

The Chiefs of Ontario  
Toronto

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to talk with you today.

I'm particularly honoured because this is the second time that I've had the privilege of being here with you.

The fact that you've made time again for me speaks volumes about your generosity of spirit and perhaps your willingness to allow hope to triumph over experience.

Some of you will recall that a year ago I came to you as the newly appointed CEO of the Ontario Power Authority.

A couple of months into the job, I was still learning about the wonderful complexity of the province's electricity system. And it probably showed.

A year later, I know a little more. And I'm still learning. But what a year it has been! And how far we have come.

Last November, I talked about the enormous change that was coming to Ontario's electricity industry, and I invited First Nations to become our partners in this redevelopment.

We talked about the new legislation that was coming that would stimulate the development of clean, green energy.

I am very happy to stand before you today and say that, indeed, now we are actually in the midst of the transformation of the electricity system that has been ushered in by the Green Energy Act.

In those 12 short months, Ontario has become a North American leader in both energy conservation and the use of renewable energy sources for electricity generation.

And we're seeing that this transformation is helping to revitalize the provincial economy by creating new green jobs.

I am often asked, "what's the best thing about making the change from my old job at the Ministry of Finance to this one." It's simple, we're doing something that there isn't nearly enough of right now – that's creating jobs. And what makes me feel even better, is that many of those jobs will be jobs for people in your communities. And beyond jobs – real opportunities.

This is something that I know you likewise feel strongly about.

For most of yesterday I was at the Aboriginal Energy Forum, and one perspective came up repeatedly – a perspective that I know is also held by key members of the

government – “there is no sector that offers more potential in this effort to create economic opportunities for Aboriginal communities and people than the energy sector.”

I couldn't agree more.

So I am also very pleased that we will be working together as we go into this exciting new era.

Last year, I said that we wanted your advice and we invited your involvement. And we have listened. Even more importantly, we have acted on what you told us and we are building a relationship of trust, cooperation and mutual respect.

Let me catch you up on what has been a very active 12 months.

One of the first changes I made as the new CEO of the Power Authority was to create a dedicated First Nations and Métis unit. I felt we needed to beef up our own capacity and give Aboriginal issues a stronger voice at our executive table.

In the meantime, we have also worked hard, working with you to increase **your** capacity to participate in the transformation of the electricity sector.

For example, the Union of Ontario Indians has completed the work agreed to under our capacity-building agreement with them. Work under a second capacity-building agreement with NAN is well under way.

As well, we are working with Treaty 3 and the AIAI to develop agreements.

We are also supporting the work of the Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs Forum and the Northwest Ontario Transmission Working Group focused on opportunities for remote communities.

We have also undertaken an enhanced process of communication and consultation. I won't list all the details of that but we have had 24 engagement initiatives with Aboriginal communities across Ontario since December 2008.

These meetings addressed the Integrated Power System Plan, opportunities for your communities to participate in renewable generation, the Green Energy Act and the development of the Feed-in Tariff program.

Last July, we convened a meeting of Aboriginal economic development officers and others to gain input on support for Aboriginal projects.

In September, we worked in partnership to hold a Conserve the Light conference on conservation in Thunder Bay.

As a result of these meetings and others, the Power Authority has heard many comments that have influenced the development of the Green Energy Act and the Feed-in Tariff Program.

You told us, for example, that you wanted to participate in the Feed-in Tariff and microFIT programs launched by the Green Energy Act.

In that regard, I am pleased to note that, as of Monday afternoon, there have been over 40 applications under FIT for Aboriginal projects – over half for hydroelectric and another quarter for on-shore wind. This signals remarkable interest and opportunity for your communities.

We intend to continue to spread the news about FIT and microFIT.

We're running ads in Aboriginal newspapers and we intend to have further multi-page inserts, along with regional meetings and workshops with your economic development officers and more.

We also plan to produce informative DVDs about renewable energy development approaches and processes, as well as enhanced conservation practices.

You've also been saying that we needed to recognize your particular circumstances and financial need to have equity in projects.

And Ontario responded to this need with the creation of the Aboriginal Loan Guarantee Program to increase your access to the capital you need to help you make renewable-energy projects in your communities happen. This program will be delivered by the Ontario Financing Authority.

You told us that First Nation communities need to be recognized and incentives created to foster partnerships.

So we created the Aboriginal adder that tops up prices for renewable energy projects with First Nation and Métis ownership. In response to your feedback, we further refined it to accommodate varying degrees of Aboriginal ownership. We have also reduced the security deposits requirement to further assist and increase Aboriginal participation in renewable generation.

The government also established the Aboriginal Energy Partnerships Program to support your communities as you develop sustainable energy projects, whether that's wind, solar or hydroelectric.

I'm very happy to say that the Power Authority is making good progress and that the AEPP will be up and running in the new year.

As most of you know, the AEPP will have three components – and all three components of the program were ideas that came directly from your communities.

First, there's a Community Energy Plan.

Under this, First Nation communities will identify their energy needs and seek out local opportunities to develop conservation, renewable generation or reduce reliance on diesel in a remote community.

Second, there is an Aboriginal Renewable Energy Fund that will help with front-end costs.

These are the so-called “soft costs” that will help you to explore green project possibilities and to create business cases for these projects.

And, third, there’s the Aboriginal Renewable Energy Network.

This network will help communities share information and increase knowledge of green energy projects and opportunities.

Now, as some of you will recall, I attended the Chiefs of Ontario Grand Council a couple of months ago.

At that time, I said that we valued your advice but we also needed your service. I would like to repeat that request today.

We are forming an advisory committee to put some flesh on the bones of the AEPP. The committee will include five First Nations people from your communities.

We have asked the Grand Chiefs to nominate members drawn from First Nations leadership to join the committee, which will also include a couple of members drawn from the Métis community. We would appreciate these nominations by December 7 and we hope that these people can be in place before the end of the month as we want to start work as soon as is practical in January.

We’re looking for people who are not currently office holders. Community Elders, former economic development officers and retired chiefs or deputy chiefs may be logical choices.

The initial advisory committee members would be appointed for one year.

Initially, we would expect the advisory committee to meet two or three days per month for the first six months and then less frequently after that.

We would ask the committee to help guide the criteria for three issues.

First, the final design of community energy plan templates and guide manuals.

Second, the review and confirmation of the criteria for approval of submissions for funding.

And, third, the scope, content and feel of the Renewable Energy Network.

There would be some modest remuneration but I hope you will agree with me that the real payback for your service would be the opportunity to develop the ultimate elements of the AEPP.

We believe that First Nations are ready, willing and able to make a significant contribution to Ontario's energy sector.

The Green Energy Act is designed to make that happen by providing Aboriginal communities with the resources they need.

We've got the resources at the Power Authority to help. But, as I've said before, this isn't a top-down thing.

We see our relationships strengthening in response to community interests and market conditions.

And we need your help to determine the best responses.

Because you know your communities better than we do. That goes without saying.

We respect your aspirations and expectations for the future – for the welfare and sustainability of your families, your communities and for the environment. I – we at the OPA – share those aspirations.

In conclusion, let me go back to what gets me excited about this job. We get to create real economic opportunity. We get to make our shared world a better place. And we get to do it together. Not many can say that these days.

I believe that we can say to you that we have heard you and that we have responded.

We have not just talked. We have acted.

I hope that you will get involved in the new era of renewable energy. The Power Authority is here to work with you to make that happen.

I'm confident that with continued good will, collaboration and mutual respect, we can move ahead with a bright future.