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## The hydrogen hustle: Death of the sensible

### *Ford's claim*

Many countries - including Canada - are promoting the use of hydrogen as a major alternative to fossil fuels. The Ford government wants in on the action.

Ford thinks Ontario is “well-positioned to drive growth in a low-carbon hydrogen economy.” He claims the use of Ontario’s electricity system to produce hydrogen, access to the provincial natural gas distribution system, and partnership with “a set of established global companies,” is a winning combination to bring Ontario wealth, jobs, and reductions in greenhouse gases. There are even claims that hydrogen could be used as an alternative to diesel fuel in Ontario’s remote (read, Indigenous) communities.

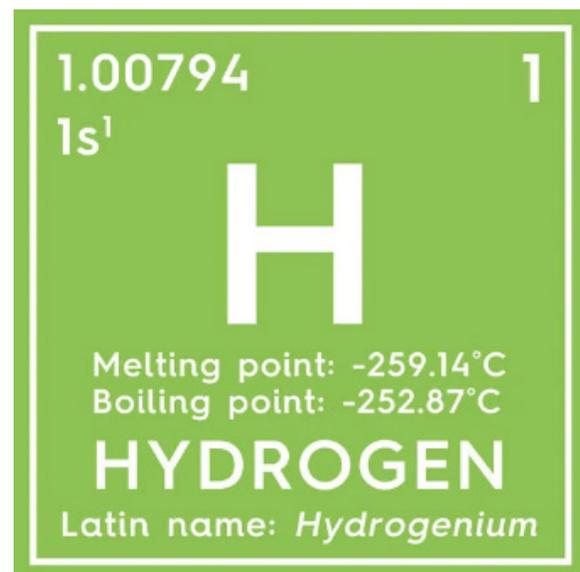
Ford’s hydrogen strategy coincides with the “Hydrogen Strategy for Canada” introduced by the federal Liberals in late 2020. Ottawa is working with interested provinces like Ontario and Alberta to develop “regional hydrogen blueprints” intended to position Canada as a major global supplier of hydrogen and hydrogen technologies.

### *A niche role*

Hydrogen will probably have a role in the energy mix of the future. It may have practical uses to decarbonize

heavy transportation and some industrial processes. But it is a niche role that should be more limited than the grandiose ideas that have captured Ford and his government. The serious problems with many aspects of hydrogen production and distribution include:

- “low-carbon” hydrogen will depend on fossil fuels such as natural gas (methane) for decades to come.
- “green” hydrogen is the preferred colour because it is generated by renewable energy (grey and blue are fossil-fuel dependent) but even it is an expensive alternative to the direct use of renewables together with increased energy efficiencies.
- the carbon capture and storage processes that must be coupled with hydrogen production to meet climate





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targets are expensive and mostly untested. There is no guarantee they will work at the scale required for a “hydrogen economy.”

- hydrogen has troubling properties (it makes metal brittle) that pose significant challenges for distribution, especially through the existing gas pipelines under consideration.
- Ontario’s partnership with large corporations on hydrogen will extend a system of centralized energy production that benefits private shareholders before people and the climate.

## ***The people and climate first alternative***

The Ford government’s eagerness for a cut of a global hydrogen market stands in sharp contrast to its intense dislike of renewables like wind and solar. And its hydrogen zeal is a distraction from the more immediate challenges of climate breakdown. Instead of squandering time and resources on chasing an unknown market, the Ontario government should be supporting existing low carbon technologies, new renewable energy sources, fossil fuel phase-out, and Ontario’s transition to a decarbonized economy.

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