

HAMILTON **THE** SPECTATOR

Doug Ford's outlandish claim to a great environmental record

The reality is that the Ford government really doesn't have any plan at all, writes Jamie Swift

By **Jamie Swift**

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"Sudbury teen climate activist Sophia Mathur speaks at a rally. Mathur is one of many who don't buy Premier Doug Ford's claim to have the best environmental record in Canada"

Sometimes politicians make particularly outlandish claims, provoking important questions.

Is such bafflegab the product of complacency, born of hubris? Or should we put this sort of arrogant vanity down to delusional thinking?

All of which came to mind when I read that, visiting Hamilton recently, Ontario Premier Doug Ford had boasted that “I will put our record on the environment against any government in the history of this province, or right across the country.”

A bit of context. It seems the premier, whose government immediately cancelled some 800 signed renewable energy contracts right after taking office in 2018, had been piqued by a remark from federal Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault.

Mr. Guilbeault said Mr. Ford’s government “has no plan to fight climate change.”

Ontario’s Premier likes to play up a populist, good old boy manner.

“Oh, boy, that guy’s a real piece of work, isn’t he?” said Ford during his March 30 Hamilton visit.

Politicians of all stripes are fond of prefacing some claim or other, true or not, with three words. “The reality is....”

Those words bear repeating. The reality is that the Ford government really doesn’t have any plan at all. Nothing to get at the roots of the climate breakdown catastrophe. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has been clear.

“The point of no return is no longer over the horizon. It is in sight and hurtling toward us.”

Here is a political leader who understands what’s at stake.

“Our war against nature must stop,” said Mr. Guterres. “We simply have to stop digging and drilling and take advantage of the vast possibilities offered by renewable energy and nature-based solutions.”

Mr. Ford’s delusions include the notion that electric vehicles can somehow be the centrepiece of green policy. Soon after cancelling those renewable energy projects — and before he eliminated the office of Ontario’s Environmental Commissioner — the Ford government cancelled a groundbreaking Green Commercial Vehicle Program.

It is hell-bent on opening a mineral rich area of northern Ontario called the Ring of Fire. The chromite and nickel in the swampy James Bay lowlands could help in the EV transition, suddenly dear to Mr. Ford’s heart. A publicly financed road would cost some \$1.6 billion. Indigenous communities are split on the road to resources push, so the government is playing the divide-and-conquer game.

The northern peatlands contain untold amounts of stored carbon that, if disturbed, hold the potential of becoming a “carbon bomb” instead of a “carbon sink.”

In a typical bit of fevered bravado, Mr. Ford claimed during the 2018 election that he’d drive a bulldozer himself if Ring of Fire “red tape” weren’t cut.

Which brings to mind Mr. Guterres “war on nature.” Are wild spaces merely storehouses of raw materials ripe for extraction and profit? Or are the vast peatlands a living, breathing complex of interconnected life from which humans should only harvest what can be sustainably shared?

Mr. Ford’s climate plan? Ontario’s Auditor General did comprehensive studies of the government’s climate plan in 2019 and in 2021. The conclusion? The climate action claims were not “supported by sound evidence.”

In November 2019, seven young Ontarians, including three Indigenous youth, sued the Ford government. Supported by Ecojustice, they argued the Cancellation Act would boost greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to dangerous climate change-related impacts. The government, opposing the lawsuit in court, has lost twice.

“It’s important for me to be part of this lawsuit because my generation deserves a future,” explained Sudbury teen Sophia Mathur.

The lawyer representing the government in the *Mathur et al* case admitted that Ford’s climate plan is nothing more than a “glossy brochure” — a “communications project” with no force of law.

To cut through this sort of spin, it’s best to look at government budgets. In Ontario’s most recent budget, the word “climate” appears twice in the 207 pages, with “climate change” popping up but once. “Growth,” on the other hand, appears 188 times.

Here’s the prickly problem. Growth is the ideology of the cancer cell.

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