

Why Doug Ford wins even if Ontario pays the price on global warming

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Doug Ford is the anti-carbon Teflon man. Nothing sticks to him in these honeymoon, halcyon days.

Ontario Premier-designate Doug Ford speaks to the media during a break from the first meeting of the newly-elected Ontario PC Caucus at Queen's Park in Toronto on June 19, 2018. Ford's promise to pull Ontario out of the carbon market will cost taxpayers plenty, Martin Regg Cohn writes. (Tijana Martin / THE CANADIAN PRESS)

The premier-in-waiting has declared an [end to carbon pricing](#) in Ontario — no cap and trade, no carbon tax, no fuss, no muss, no nothing. No matter.

He is a man of action. Albeit a premier without a plan after he's sworn in June 29, with no hint of how he'll combat climate change. Never mind Earth's rising temperatures. Ontario's gas prices are coming down, and that's a Ford promise (forget rising world oil prices).

Ford vowed in the campaign that he is "for the people." His victory surely proves his grasp of the political environment — if not the planetary one.

Read more:

[Incoming Premier Doug Ford quietly axes Green Ontario Fund](#)

[Environmental program helped homeowners get smart thermostats, energy-efficient windows and other retrofits to reduce their hydro bills and fight climate change.](#)

Ford loves lampooning the overpaid CEO of Hydro One as the "Six Million Dollar Man." But what shall we call Ford once taxpayers see the price tag for his fateful decision to pick fights with governments in Ottawa, Quebec and California (over our linked carbon market)? Quite apart from the environmental costs, his Tories pointedly set aside \$30 million for a court battle to fend off Ottawa's new law imposing a federal carbon tax on any province that doesn't do enough to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That looks like a long shot, losing money to save face.

Will Ford be tagged the “Thirty Million Dollar Man” who enriched lawyers while impoverishing taxpayers?

Will he be dubbed the “Three Billion Dollar Man” who had to reimburse private companies for the carbon allowances they bought at auction [under cap and trade](#) — plus legal fees?

Will he be deemed “Doctor No” for cancelling the [Green Ontario Fund](#) (financed by cap and trade revenues) which helped people get smart thermostats and energy-efficient windows to reduce energy bills, ultimately saving Ontarians big money?

That’s a lot of liabilities. All of which could easily dwarf the Liberals’ billion-dollar-boondoggle over gas-fired power plants.

Doubtless Ford believes it’s a price worth paying to keep all those promises. Even if taxpayers lose, it’s still a winning strategy — because fighting a so-called “carbon tax” (as he wrongly described cap and trade) helped him win the Progressive Conservative leadership last March.

The original PC election platform, under former leader Patrick Brown, committed to replace [cap and trade with the federal](#) carbon tax. But when Brown quit last January, Ford assumed the anti-tax mantle — forcing his major leadership rivals and all of the party’s MPPs to grudgingly and belatedly embrace his position.

On June 7, Ford won a “change” election. Not a *climate change* election, mind you, but a campaign to *change* the government by ousting the famously unpopular Kathleen Wynne Liberals and jousting against the NDP.

It was a winning wedge issue within his own party and across the province. Ford’s anti-tax stance not only cast him as a man of action but of distraction and disruption.

Now, the fight against global warming is going from the provincial to national front, as Tories in Ottawa and Alberta dream of slaying a federal carbon tax — with Ontario leading the way. But they may be reading too much into the voting results, for while Ford boasted of his anti-carbon animus, it was an incidental and accidental issue, not a vote-determining “ballot question” for most Ontarians.

That won't stop Ford from claiming he won in the court of public opinion. But his next step is to convince the Supreme Court of his opinions.

Win or lose, he triumphs either way. If the federal carbon tax is upheld and imposed in Ontario, Ford will earnestly claim that the devil (the Supreme Court) made him impose the carbon tax dreamed up by that other devil (Prime Minister Justin Trudeau). The Thirty Million Dollar Man will cast himself as the Thirty Million Dollar Martyr.

Ontario will be no further ahead after a court defeat. But the anti-carbon Teflon Man will have profited handsomely, first winning the party leadership, and then enjoying the premiership — for as long as the honeymoon endures.