I want to thank Tim Reid, and the Board of Directors of the Empire Club of Canada for giving Wind Concerns Ontario and me the opportunity to address the Club on the topic of Wind Generated Controversy and the financial, legal and political implications of Ontario’s Green Energy Act. It is truly an honour.

It was fitting, when we discussed the topic of my address that we chose to include the word ‘controversy’.

The fact that I am even here, behind this podium, addressing this club has in itself proven to be controversial.

I am going to speak to you today about the growing movement of opposition to industrial wind energy in Ontario, and the challenges Ontario’s Green Energy Act faces from a financial, legal and political perspective, but before I get into that, I will first explain – how a guy like me, a twenty-five year old who grew up in the City, finds himself President of an predominantly rural organization focussed on opposition to industrial wind energy.

I am likely one of the youngest individuals ever to address the Empire Club and probably one of just a few who have done so as a full time volunteer.

You see, it all began with a walk on a beach along the shoreline of Lake Ontario in the shadow of the mighty Scarborough Bluffs. I was taking a walk with someone I had met in my capacity as the Federal Liberal Riding President for Scarborough Guildwood. We met a man named Roy Wright who told me Toronto Hydro wanted to install sixty to one hundred industrial wind turbines out in the lake. At first, I wasn’t sure it was such a bad idea, but I began to see that the process for even being heard was flawed. Watching this failed process play out I got involved, simply to help residents fight for a fairer process and ensure their voices were heard.

At first, I was able to balance my involvement with the Liberal Party and my support of Save the Toronto Bluffs – the local group opposing Toronto Hydro’s plan. But that all changed when Dalton McGuinty announced the Green Energy Act, and cited Scarborough Bluffs residents’ actions as the kind of NIMBYism he was planning to shut down and remove from the democratic debate.

I got a call from a reporter at the Toronto Star who asked me to comment on the Premier’s remarks and characterization of Scarborough Bluffs residents and had to pick between my community and my political party. Guildwood is where I was raised, so the choice was clear. I responded by asking ‘If the facts are on his side, why bludgeon us with legislation, why not just do an environmental assessment and prove us wrong?” But the GEA also took away our rights of participation and my response to that was ‘residents will not lay down, we will continue to get louder and louder and will not go away.’

Wind Concerns Ontario has kept that promise and the government of Ontario has yet to do any form of legitimate scientific assessment of the negative impacts industrial wind development have on human health or the environment.

I am pleased to report however, that two years to the day of Premier McGuinty’s announcement of Ontario’s Green Energy Act, his government nailed the last nail into the coffin of offshore wind development in the province of Ontario by imposing a full moratorium on all offshore industrial wind development until scientific studies are done. That is good news for all Ontarians. This government bowed to pressure because of a firestorm of outrage that threatened the seats of many Liberal MPPs and cabinet ministers has not yet engaged us in meaningful consultation on what scientific assessments they intend to undertake, which suggests they still don’t get it.

It is that lack of commitment to proper, scientific assessment of negative effects on human health and the environment that have turned Ontario’s Green Energy Act into the dirty bath water in which the ‘wind energy’ baby is poised to be thrown out.

 You see, positions have hardened, battle lines have been drawn, the evidence is clear and the industry and government still choose special interest over the public interest, profits over people, and denialism in place of valid independent assessment of impacts.

This is not an academic debate best decided by literature reviews. There is a real problem in real communities with real people living near real wind turbines in the Province of Ontario and real doctors who have examined these real people agree.

Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health can read all the literature reviews and computer models she’d like, but until a proper epidemiological health study is done to determine why so many people suffer serious negative health problems when exposed to industrial wind turbines – those glossy reports are not acceptable to victims and should not be accepted by Ontarians.

There isn’t a community in Ontario where industrial wind turbines have been installed where some residents have not had adverse health effects. Put another way, when industrial wind turbines are installed in a community in Ontario some people always get sick. It’s wrong, and it’s something we all must seek to address if there is to be any further industrial wind development in Ontario ever.

The Industry’s position is a curious one. They seek billions of dollars from Ontarians. They seek to remove local democratic control of the planning process. They also get a streamlining of approvals that remove decision making from democratically elected policy makers.

Instead these critical decisions are left to unelected bureaucrats at the Ministry of Environment whose job is to simultaneously facilitate and approve projects in a manner that is not subject to freedom of information.

In the meantime citizens have been told to make sacrifices for this industry when all the while they will not humour us, and support an independent health study and safe setbacks from homes based on those results? You’ve got to ask yourself, Why?

If nothing is wrong, what’s the problem? Just do the studies and prove it. If you want to gut the process, end local democracy and jack up residents hydro bills, it seems to me the very least you owe them is a guarantee that decisions will be based on the best possible science, not just what is best for those who plan to profit.

Based on the independent science done globally by an esteemed collection of highly ethical and independent experts, it is clear a setback of five hundred and fifty metres is unconscionably close to people’s homes. Industrial wind developers recognize there is enough of a problem. Many have become real estate investors because they’re forced to buy out their victims. Strangely though each agreement comes with a the gag orders which victims are forced to sign in order to settle with the wind developer. They sign away their right to speak about what happened and why they were bought out. Someone at the head table today (Sandy MacLeod) has recently signed one of those deals, and I am proud to be speaking for her as well today.

Is it any wonder target communities, fully aware of this industry’s awful reputation, fight so hard, to keep them out?

It has become clear the wind industry cannot be trusted to take the health and wellbeing of community members into consideration when pursuing their projects.

It has become clear the Government of Ontario and the Chief Medical Officer of Health failed to act as independent protectors of citizens and for those reasons, Wind Concerns Ontario fights every single proposal any industrial wind developer brings forward, and continues to advocate for a full moratorium on any further industrial wind development in Ontario until a proper, third party epidemiological health study is done. We also seek to have existing turbines in communities where negative health effects are being reported to be turned off to prevent further harm, while we get to the bottom of what needs to happen to makes these projects safe.

I have met far too many people who have been forced from their homes, or are living at home and suffering. I’ve seen how devastated those who are bought out and lose their right to speak. Imagine that.

But the industry has seen them too. The current Chair of the Canadian Wind Energy Association recently shared this podium and delivered an address which was light on facts and heavy on motherhood and apple pie in which she failed to mention some of the activities of her own company. She is employed by a Spanish wind developer that just bought four homes in Ontario from victims of industrial wind turbines who had to abandon them, another sale is pending, which will bring that to five . Her company has purchased homes from people in Australia reporting serious negative health effects. They too were gagged. So it is curious how she or her organization, the Canadian Wind Energy Association can deny anything is wrong. Why the government allows this to happen, and allows for companies like hers to sign gag clauses with victims, is beyond me, and not something Wind Concerns Ontario will allow to stand.

This lack of process and victimization of communities is perhaps best seen and most broadly felt by the approval process for Renewable Energy Applications. Ontario is alone in the world when it relates to having a centralized approval process that denies municipalities the right to plan and approve local projects. They have no zoning control left. They have no right to approve proposals. The official plan isn’t worth the paper it is written on when an industrial wind developer comes to town.

Currently, an industrial wind development has the right to install wind turbines wherever they see fit so long as they have a Green Energy Act approval issued by the Government of Ontario. Municipalities are obliged to issue building permits to industrial wind developers on order by the Province of Ontario – something not seen with any other form of planning decision in Ontario. What’s more, there are no zoning requirements or exemptions for industrial wind developer, meaning all land is fair game. This is wrong and this is something that has galvanized opposition to industrial wind development in the Province of Ontario.

Wind Concerns Ontario is proud to count among its allies over eighty municipal councils that represent a combined two million Ontarians. They have called on the province to restore local planning control, but first put in place a province wide moratorium until a proper third party epidemiological health study is complete and setbacks can be based on noise guidelines that are complete with science that is up to date.

So that means, eighty municipal councils that represent more than two million Ontarians have lost faith in the process put in place by the Government of Ontario and do not see the industrial wind lobby as a reliable or trustworthy partner in determining what is best for residents either.

That is worth taking note of!

Now let me turn to the environment for a minute, because that is what this is all about right? That’s what the industry’s big story is right? This is all about the environment.

I am going to tell you about a few places in Ontario and I want you to think whether what is being proposed there sounds ‘green’.

When I get into a debate with folks from the wind industry they often love to ask questions like ‘Have you been to Denmark? Or Germany? Or some other far flung place in Europe as though a flight across the Ocean and seeing wind projects running in these countries would result in some sort of religious experience which would convert me to a believer.

I will tell you about some places I have been where it is clear those who claim industrial wind is a ‘green’ form of production have not, because if they had, they’d realize these projects are often as green as their trans-Atlantic carbon footprints.

Let’s start with Thunder Bay.

Thunder Bay is known for a lot of things, but one gem of Ontario’s most populous city in North Western Ontario is the Nor’Wester Escarpment and the Loch Lomand watershed protection lands up on that escarpment that protect this pure water source from any human impacts from inappropriate land use and it has for over ninety years.

These pristine seventeen thousand acres have been preserved for generations of Thunder Bay residents, mindful of the importance of preserving habitat and watershed lands to protect the water source itself.

My first visit to Thunder Bay included my first ride on a snowmobile so I could see with my own eyes what was at stake up on the escarpment. I’ve never been that bundled up in my life as I was when we rode six hundred feet up the mountain and toured the proposed project site. I was also surprized to see buried within the native boreal forest that is common in the area, sugar maple bushes, which are decidedly out of place that far north. These are Canada’s farthest north sugar maples. Some of these maples are one hundred and fifty years old, and there are thousands of them on the escarpment. Local residents harvest that maple syrup and I can attest it is some of the best syrup I’ve ever tasted.

It is believed based on the developers plans four thousand sugar maples will be cut and another few hundred white pines to make way for a project that would amount to a rounding error in energy production in Ontario’s grid.

Can anyone actually justify clear cutting and blasting as being good for the environment?

Let’s talk about Dorian next.

Dorian is a small community about an hour or so outside of Thunder Bay that will soon be home to one of Ontario’s newest industrial wind developments. When I was in Thunder Bay in December, a local resident and I registered at the development to head onto the site to visit some of the crown land, claiming to be ice fishing. I’ve never ice fished in my life.

Once we were in, I got to see first-hand what it looks like when an industrial wind developer clear cuts and blasts roads thirty metres wide, when they seek out all the ridge tops and blast them flat. I saw what four hundred sticks of dynamite can do to flatten what was once a peak.

Even the wind developer there recognizes in their project evaluation report that twenty four percent of birds fly at blade height.

If birds are slaughtered in the woods, and no one is there to see it did it still happen?

If ridge tops are dynamited flat, and no one is there to object, does that make it ok?

Can any environmentalist say with a straight face that this sort of destruction is good for the environment?

I ask you, how is that green?

Let’s move onto Prince Edward County now where I was proud to visit again to speak to and rally with local residents less than two weeks ago.

Prince Edward County is home to Ostrander Point – Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources owned crown land that is part of a globally recognized important bird area and home to endangered species. When we went to visit Ostrander Point, we came across wetlands and bush backing onto the protected shoreline of Lake Ontario, without any development in sight.

Gilead Power is seeking from the Ministry of Natural Resources permission through the endangered species act to ‘kill, harm and harass’ the Blandings Turtle and Whip-poor-will bird – both species protected by the endangered species act and who are known to make their home on Ostrander Point.

When Gilead Power is done ‘killing, harming and harassing’ – remember these are there words, not mine – the Blanding’s turtle and whip-poor-will bird, they’d also like to ‘disrupt and destroy’ their habitat as well, one can only assume so that those who were just harmed and harassed will go and die somewhere else.

Can this really be seen as being Green?

According to the Sierra Club of Canada who is on record as being very concerned about the Blanding’s turtle, industrial wind energy is good, and Wind Concerns Ontario members who support environmental protection are part of some plot to undermine the Green Energy Act. My response is simple – they are part of a plot to undermine endangered species and need to decide whether their campaigns to protect the Blanding’s turtle are fairweather, or whether the Sierra Club will stand with the environment at moments like this, when tough decisions need to be made and the lives of listed species hang in the balance.

Endangered species are protected for a reason, and no one waving $230,000 in the government’s face, as Gilead power is, should be able to change that. That’s Wind Concerns Ontario’s position and if the Sierra Club of Canada wants to keep any credibility, it will become theirs too.

Just yesterday students at Bishop Allen Academy Catholic Secondary School in Etobicoke wrote me to say the choice is pretty clear. Let me share what they had to say:

*Hello John!*

*We are a group of students from Bishop Allen Academy Catholic Secondary School in Etobicoke. We are extremely concerned about the well-being of the Blanding's Turtles habitat within the Prince Edward County and have recently formulated a petition within our community directed towards the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.*

*We are wondering if you could supply us with any other information about the situation and advice on how to raise more awareness within our community. Thank you. Hope to hear from you!!*

That’s an amazing thing. These students get it but the Sierra Club of Canada doesn’t and they are reaching out to Wind Concerns Ontario on how to save endangered species because the Sierra Club of Canada won’t.

Before I move on to the experience on Wolfe Island, I want to speak for a couple of seconds specifically to the students from Albert Campbell Collegiate Institute from Scarborough Ontario, my hometown and where my grassroots activism first ignited. Don’t let people tell you that you’re too young to make a difference or that you need to wait to shape the destiny of your community. If there is something you’re passionate about, something you’re concerned about, get involved, work with your neighbours and friends to stand up.

I am going to be happy to give those students at Bishop Allen advice to help them shape ideas of their own for what they can to protect the Blanding’s Turtle even with the shameful silence of the Sierra Club of Canada. I hope the benefit for them is an entrance or a continuation of involvement in fighting for the things they care about.

Now, let me tell you about Wolfe Island near Kingston that is part of the same migratory bird path as Prince Edward County.

On Wolfe Island there are eighty six turbines installed and the bird and bat mortality rates are six times what the industrial wind developer told the province they expected they would be. So the Minister of Environment changed the acceptable “kill” rate. That’s what happens now if the guidelines don’t fit the industry’s needs they are changed. Environmental protection has been given a backseat to industrial wind development in Ontario.

There are so many birds and bats being slaughtered and rare birds literally disappearing on Wolfe Island now that TransAlta has created two full time jobs for people just to drive around the island and collect bird and bat carcasses. Are these some of the so-called ‘Green Jobs’ Dalton McGuinty keeps talking about?

We also know from Wolfe Island that the wildlife population has declined dramatically near wind turbines, but again because the government has required so little science, we don’t know why.

I think I’ve painted a pretty clear picture of the environmental destruction these projects bring, and now is likely a good time to remind you that every megawatt of wind energy we install into the grid is backed up by fossil fuel. Everyone knows that the wind doesn’t always blow. Therefore we are building twice the capacity we need because wind energy is so reliable without a backup we run the risk of brown-outs and black-outs.

The stage has been well set to clearly express why there is such a fierce opposition to industrial wind energy out there, now let’s turn to the consequences of this from a financial, legal and political perspective. Much of what I’ve discussed so far applies more directly to impacted communities where these projects are proposed, but these next topics impact us all.

Before I address some of the financial consequences of the Green Energy Act, it’s time to deal with the notion that this government is seeking to pay industrial wind developers a premium for an unreliable power that cannot be stored and to wreck the place. This is an absurd proposition but this is government policy in the Province of Ontario today.

The Green Energy Act is responsible for Ontario’s Feed-in-Tariff program and can be attributed with bringing us the provinces deal with Samsung to manufacture and install industrial wind development in Ontario. Ontario’s Feed-in-tariff program requires the province to purchase electricity from industrial wind developers when generated, period. So regardless of demand, and at rates that are usually three hundred or more percent higher than the actual value of a kilowatt of electricity on the open market in Ontario, we’re forced to purchase it.

Because Ontario has strong baseload capacity and because of a declining demand for electricity, the commodity price of electricity on the market has been falling and continues to fall. But we all know electricity rates continue to increase. They are up 84% since Dalton McGuinty became Premier in 2003.

George Smitherman, former Minister of Energy who concocted the Green Energy Act, promised Ontarian’s annual rate increases of about one percent per year to pay for all of this. The government now tells us rates are going up forty six percent over the next five years and a majority of that increase will be due to the cost of implementing Ontario’s Green Energy Act.

To quell voter outrage at the cost of this Green Energy scheme, the McGuinty Government is adding five billion dollars to the provincial debt and handing it out to Ontarians as the ‘Ontario Clean Energy Benefit’. It’s an anti-conservation move that goes against other aspects of their Energy plan. If the supply mix was determined by experts and paid for at market prices where supply and demand mattered, not based on what was convenient to the industrial wind lobby that is five billion dollars the province would not be spending to try to buy your votes back.

What’s more the requirement to purchase power whenever it is generated without taking demand into account has resulted in more power surpluses which in turn have resulted in expensive dumping of wind energy we are forced to buy into neighbouring jurisdictions such as the USA.

At times we not only give power we purchased for thirteen and a half cents a kilowatt hour away, but we pay our neighbours to take it off our hands. All of this simply adds to the cost for consumers later through that ‘provincial benefit’ we all pay on our energy bills. That’s why electricity rates keep going up.

Ontario Liberals will tell you the Samsung Deal will cost our province four hundred and sixty one million dollars in incentives, while Samsung is going to generously invest seven billion dollars in Ontario. We all know companies like Samsung don’t find themselves with seven billion dollars by trading sums of money that large for incentives like those the Liberals are offering. The purchase power agreement Ontario has committed to with Samsung will cost ratepayers another one point one billion dollars a year for twenty years when implemented – a full twenty two billion dollars for unreliable power we not only don’t need, that harms communities, and we will likely end up dumping in neighbouring jurisdictions.

We all know even before this latest recession that Ontario’s heavy energy manufacturers were in trouble and that especially in the forestry and manufacturing sectors well over two hundred thousand jobs were lost in those sectors since 2003 before this past recession.

The Ontario Liberals economic policy on Green Energy will guarantee those jobs won’t be coming back because we are making our economy economically uncompetitive with neighbouring jurisdictions because of our energy policy. We cannot allow that to be our future. When the C.D. Howe Institute reports that electricity bills for Ontarians will $310 dollars higher than they are now in a few years to pay for all of this, we need to take notice. When that same report determines the rate of subsidy for each so called ‘green’ job is $179,000 per year, we need to recognize how many other people going to real jobs and paying their taxes it takes to subsidize every one of these phoney so-called ‘green jobs’.

The reality is these massive subsides, feed-in-tariff programs, Samsung like deals are no way to create or build a strong economy in Ontario. This is a pathway to bankruptcy which is why so many jurisdictions in whose footsteps Dalton McGuinty wants to travel are being bailed out by others in Europe.

It’s important to note that in communities where these industrial wind turbines are operating there is also a reported property value loss of up to forty percent within a five kilometre radius of an industrial wind turbine, meaning each project wipes out millions of dollars of equity and property tax base in host communities.

That lack of justice for homeowners is a good segway to the legal consequences of Ontario’s Green Energy Act.

As many are aware, Ian Hanna of Prince Edward County, stood up on behalf of all Ontarians and challenged the regulations for Ontario’s Green Energy Act. Wind Concerns Ontario was proud to support those efforts and is anxiously awaiting Mr. Hanna’s appeal. In Chatham-Kent, citizens have opposed the only renewable energy approval to make it through Ontario’s Green Energy Act through an environmental review tribunal where the facts about serious health effects were discussed in detail. This could prove to be a critical step for preventing further industrial wind development at these irresponsible close distances.

Wind Concerns Ontario supports an aggressive legal strategy to seek to prevent future industrial wind development through Environmental Review Tribunal appeals like the one in Chatham-Kent. It is also exploring the role of liability held by the land owners who host the turbines because of the effects these developments have on non-participants. So the folks who are trading five thousand dollars a year for their neighbours health may find they too have legal troubles. And that will make an interesting situation for industrial wind developers to decide whether defending those landowners is worth the extreme cost that will surely come with those challenges. Other innovative legal avenues may seek to restore some of the justice lost through Ontario’s Green Energy Act.

The bottom line is we are going to continue to fight. We are not going to give up and the legal realm is one where the industry cannot donate their way to influence, they cannot lobby their way to influence because that is not how the judicial system works. It is the last vestige of hope for opponents when there is bad politics at play.

Wind Concerns Ontario as an organization has committed to ensuring any renewable energy approvals issued before the fall election will be taken through the environmental review tribunal forcing developers to face delays of at least six months, and the potential to have their project approval overturned by a tribunal which does not express the same interest or sympathy in propping up this failed industry in Ontario regardless of the science or impact on people. That’s good news for all Ontarians because it guarantees there cannot be any final approvals by this government, resulting in construction before the next election.

Finally, what may be the most critical element and is certainly why Wind Concerns Ontario is controversial – the political consequences of Ontario’s Green Energy Act. I will say without any hesitation that Wind Concerns Ontario and our member groups will be working hard on the ground in the three dozen ridings in Ontario where we have community groups, to defeat this Liberal government and replace it with one that is prepared to act with courage on this file.

 To be fair, I want you to know this was not the goal all along.

In September 2009, when I was very fresh to being President of Wind Concerns Ontario, just three weeks into my term as President, we went to Ottawa to meet with the Canadian Wind Energy Association. We asked them to support legitimate, independent scientific studies and forget these industry shams. They refused any leeway on studies.

My message to Robert Hornung (President of Canadian Wind Energy Association) in his own board room was ‘then we will defeat you. If you want to fight us on the ground around Ontario, we are more than willing to have that fight, because that is a fight we can win and your members can’t, because you cannot hire enough people to take us on in our own communities.’

Since that day, only one project has made it through the six-month approval window guaranteed by George Smitherman because Wind Concerns Ontario members have stood up and fought CanWEA’s members on the ground in their communities and we’re going to do the same to their political allies in the Ontario Liberal Party when it comes time for all of us to vote in October.

The industry and government’s shameful position on human health effects, refusal to support a study, and stop future development until it is complete in addition to their attack on local democracy, citizen involvement, environmental protections and the economic health and well-being of this province will not be allowed to stand long. We are counting the days to October 6th (election day).

Wind Concerns Ontario has been calling since day one for a moratorium on wind development until a proper health study is done. We’ve been calling for restoration of local control in Ontario, an end to the feed-in-tariff program and justice for those who are currently suffering the ill effects of living near industrial wind turbines.

Our lobbying has been successful in shifting the policies of all three opposition political parties in Ontario away from the Liberal’s vision. The NDP have come out in favour of local planning control and believe these projects should be developed by public agencies as opposed to private investments.

The Green Party also support local control, and wants to see community based projects. But they are still very much in favour of subsidies – just not to large companies like we see presently.

It is the Progressive Conservatives who have gone the farthest, by recognizing the Samsung deal and FIT programs have the economic potential to finish off the blue collar economy in Ontario if they’re implemented as planned. They have stated they will end the feed in tariff program, and the Samsung deal. The PCs have also expressed support for a moratorium and a setback based on a health study in addition to the restoration of local control.

These are major steps that have been made due to the strong efforts of citizen based advocacy around Ontario.

The Liberals’ and industry’s attempts to use money and paid media campaigns to solve the clear public relations problem have not worked and in the dying days of this government, Wind Concerns Ontario members are here today to promise them they won’t work.

Wind Concerns Ontario and our member groups have continued to get stronger and as the PCs have become emboldened on this issue, it is clear that come October, this issue could well decide who wins and who loses in many ridings.

I’m sure we’ve all heard the saying ‘the truth shall set you free’. As President of Wind Concerns Ontario, I am fortunate that each day, my only job is to speak truth about the reality of wind energy in Ontario and work to organize and mobilize those who share our views to ensure that we are well positioned to wind legally and politically with the truth and as long as the financials are so completely out of whack with this industry, more and more citizens join our cause each and every day from all over Ontario.

So I ask that the next time you think about industrial wind, consider these points. Ask yourself why an industry would hide from science if the truth was on their side. Why would an industry support an end to local democracy if their product was all it was cracked up to be? People should be fighting FOR these projects if these are what the industry claims these projects are.

To those who are involved in this industry, ask yourself just how far you are willing to go, and how much of what you and your company are doing would you like to explain to a judge.

It is clear Ontario’s Green Energy Act has become an example of overreaching, anti -democratic, anti-science legislation that is serving to hold our economy back at a time when we can’t afford it.

Having heard what I’ve had to say, I am sure now those of you who may have been surprized that this speech was billed as controversial may understand the core problem. The wind industry does not want anyone speaking truth to power, because doing so gets in the way of their business which cannot withstand the cold hard realities of their trade.

That is what Wind Concerns Ontario is dedicated to doing, speaking truth to power on the topic of industrial wind because someone has to now more than ever.

Thank you very much for your time.