

The Cost of Fear

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Commentary by Michelle Robichaud, President, Atlantica Centre for Energy

Fear can be a powerful motivator. It protects us from real danger, sharpens our judgment, and forces important questions into the open. In the case of recent opposition to energy projects in Atlantic Canada, fear is being used to crowd out evidence, ignore cost implications and force one-sided reports on trade-offs. The results of which can lead to expensive outcomes.

Instead of fear paralyzing us, we need to have honest conversations and informed debate around New Brunswick's proposed Tantramar gas generating station and the complimentary generation capacity project proposed on Prince Edward Island.

Public discussion has focused almost entirely on the negatives of the facilities: a fossil-fuel asset, a potential source of emissions, and a project some see as incompatible with environmental values. What has been largely missing in public discourse is a serious conversation about what the real alternatives are and what happens if we don't build it or if we delay decisions.

Energy systems rarely fail all at once. More often, they weaken quietly, through small constraints and growing vulnerabilities that only become visible under stress.

Prince Edward Island offers a timely example. The province is deeply committed to climate action and has made meaningful progress integrating renewable electricity and electrifying home heating. But the Island remains heavily dependent on imported power through constrained transmission lines. Decisions to address these supply challenges have been delayed or avoided, and now the province must plan for [rotating outages](#), like during the [polar vortex](#) this weekend.

This would leave some people in the cold. It would interrupt business and growth.

Reliability risks are no longer hypothetical.

When we talk about energy infrastructure, we have to talk about all consequences, not just intentions. This means highlighting potential environmental impacts, but also considering cost, security, reliability and economic implications.

Reliable electricity is not optional. It allows daily life to function, and it enables much of what we say we want: electrification, lower emissions, economic growth, and opportunity

for the next generation. Wind and solar are essential parts of that future, but they do not yet replace the need for dispatchable, on-demand power, especially in a winter-peaking region like Atlantic Canada.

Acknowledging this reality does not make someone “anti-environment.” It makes them serious.

Being serious also means asking hard questions: if not this, then what, and at what cost?

Battery storage will play an increasingly important role in delivering low-emitting and reliable electricity across the region, but it is not yet readily available or cost-effective to meet the current needs.

Nuclear power offers promise, and Atlantic Canada has already developed most of its viable large-scale hydro resources. Both of these options take decades to plan, permit and build, placing them outside the timeframe of current system needs.

Increased reliance on imported power could be another option if it was available, but it too comes with trade offs: price volatility, constrained transmission and reduced energy security during peak events when neighbouring jurisdictions are facing the same pressures.

None of these options are wrong but pretending they are interchangeable wastes valuable time and money. These facts are based on extensive modelling and resource planning, which is vetted by independent energy regulators.

As a mom, I care deeply about sustainability. I want my children to inherit a cleaner environment and a province where they can afford to live, work, and raise a family. That means affordable, reliable power. It means jobs that pay well. And, it means an energy system that supports growth rather than constraining it.

Energy enables economic development. Jurisdictions with sufficient, cost-competitive power attract industry. Industry brings jobs, higher incomes, and the fiscal capacity to invest in health care, education, and environmental protection. Weak energy systems do the opposite; they stall growth, push costs onto households, and force young people to leave.

I don't often weigh in on specific issues, but there is a profound risk in how this debate is unfolding.

When energy decisions are framed as a moral test, such as one side claiming environmental virtues while casting those who disagree as reckless or uncaring, it shuts down learning. It discourages people from changing their minds when evidence evolves. And it allows for fear to crowd out facts. Citizens deserve a voice in energy decisions, but

that voice must be informed by how power systems actually work, not just how we wish they would. It is good to be aspirational, but we must also be realistic.

Balanced discussion is not climate denial. It is responsible governance.

New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Atlantic Canada more broadly, face real dilemmas. Demand for electricity is rising. Aging infrastructure must be replaced. Delays carry costs, even if they are not immediately visible. Ignoring those costs do not make them disappear; it simply shifts them onto households, workers, and future governments.

If we want a sustainable and prosperous future for Atlantic Canada, we must be willing to make informed decisions based on evidence; not allow fear to decide for us.

Michelle Robichaud is president of the Atlantica Centre for Energy, the proactive voice of energy in Atlantic Canada, bringing together industry, government, education and research sectors, and the public to support sustainable energy growth in the region.