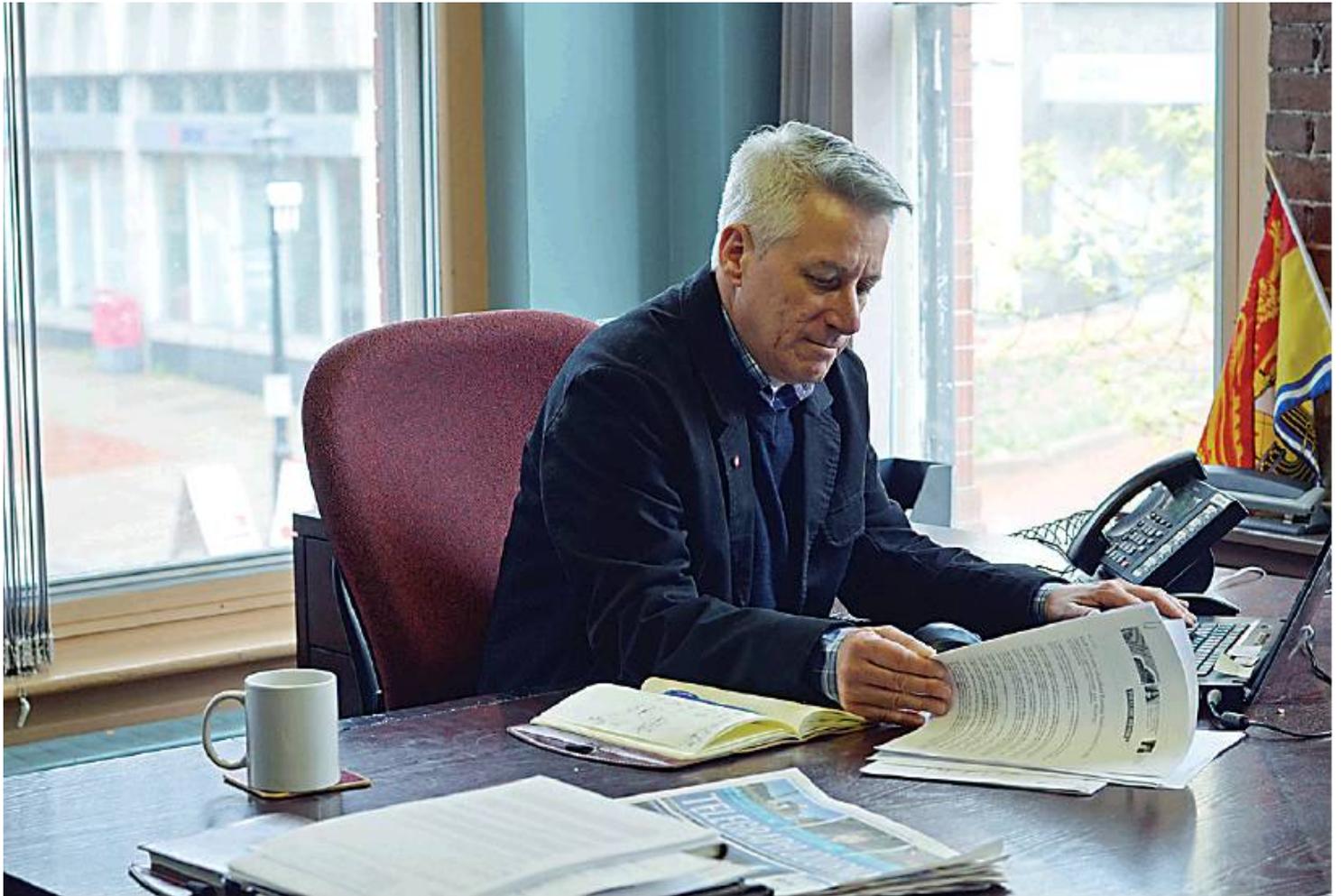


Trump protectionism adds fuel to N.B. energy conference

NADINE YOUSIF TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



David Duplisea, CEO of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce, said the conference is a good way to open dialogue about the energy sector in New Brunswick. PHOTO: NADINE YOUSIF/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

With growing uncertainties south of the border, the future of New Brunswick's energy sector will be on the agenda for this year's East Coast energy conference in Saint John.

The third annual Energy Connection conference will take place Tuesday and Wednesday at Saint John Trade & Convention Centre. Topics to be discussed include the effects of carbon pricing, trade relations with the U.S., and the future of the U.S.-Canada energy transmission project Atlantic Link.

The Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce will be hosting the third annual event. CEO David Duplisea said it is important to discuss the energy sector now as the industry is in flux.

“There are lots of challenges going on, we see lots happening south of the border, we have seen some protectionist policies being discussed with [Donald] Trump,” Duplisea said. He added discussions around carbon pricing are also a hot topic given current events.

“We do know that [carbon pricing] is going to affect business ... depending on how the provincial plans roll out and how they coincide with the federal government’s plan for carbon pricing,” he said. “ ... [and] if the U.S. doesn’t attach any kind of carbon pricing, then does that put us at a competitive disadvantage?”

While discussing major issues facing the energy industry, the conference will do so with a focus on New Brunswick and Atlantic Canada, Duplisea said.

New Brunswick’s energy sector generates one of the highest shares of GDP in the entire country, only behind Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan and Alberta, according to former economic adviser to the province, David Campbell.

Campbell, who will be giving a talk at the conference on the potential of exporting energy to outside markets, said New Brunswick’s energy sector fares well compared to other provinces due to geography and other assets.

“We have more installed wind energy capacity than most other provinces,” Campbell said, adding that energy startup incubators and other companies across New Brunswick are building products and services that have the potential to be exported to other markets.

But Campbell said the challenge for New Brunswick is to ensure the growth and expansion of the province’s energy industry.

“We don’t want to necessarily charge New Brunswickers more for energy ... really the focus needs to be on how can we leverage our geography, our assets, our capabilities, to build markets outside of New Brunswick,”he said.

One project that aims to transport energy outside of the province is Atlantic Link, a submarine cable that will extend from Newfoundland through New Brunswick to southern Massachusetts with the purpose of transmitting renewable energy.

Duplisea said the conference would be a great opportunity for businesses to find out more about the energy project and learn how to get involved.

“Atlantic Link is a huge opportunity for our region, as you know it’s a \$2-billion investment, so any time you start talking numbers like that that’s tremendous value,”he said.

The conference will also feature former New Brunswick premier Bernard Lord, now chair of Ontario Power Generation. Duplisea said Lord will provide valuable insight on how other provinces handle their energy sector.

“[Lord] is really in an ideal situation to help us learn from some of the mistakes there and some of the successes of other provinces,”Duplisea said.

With the conference having its third annual run in Saint John, Duplisea said the Port City is the perfect host due to its critical role in the province's energy sector.

"Saint John is very much an energy focal point," he said, adding it is an "energy hub" of the province.

"We have the largest oil refinery, we have the first [liquefied natural gas] terminal in Canada ... it really is topical to discuss energy in Saint John," Duplisea said.