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A surreal spectacle in Quebec

By **NEIL WAUGH**, EDMONTON SUN

QUEBEC CITY, Que. -- For three solid days the surreal jawing went on.

Hogging the microphones at the Council of the Federation meeting here are the Four Horsemen of the Climate Change Apocalypse - Quebec Premier Jean Charest, Manitoba Premier Gary Doer, B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell and, most of all, Ontario's Dalton McGuinty.

Before the final wrap-up Friday McGuinty performed his latest political stunt.

He passed out a press blurb in the media work room announcing Canada's former big "have" province has now joined something called the Western Climate Initiative.

It involves "partnering" with Quebec to develop a regional cap and trade system for greenhouse gases, a boondoggle that Premier Ed Stelmach compared to a fat guy from Alberta hiring a skinny guy somewhere else in the world.

"Sending them money and keep eating as much as he was," Stelmach winked.

"We all have a part to play in the fight against climate change," the Ontario Liberal lectured.

"Together we can leave a better world to our children."

Ontario relies on coal-fired power plants. Until McGuinty can figure out a way to switch them off without turning out the lights, Ontario is committed to buying carbon credits, resulting in a massive transfer of cash to Quebec. What else is new?

Dalton wouldn't say how many millions.

"We don't have all the answers to this," he confessed. "It will take some time working together to make sure we find a way that does not compromise our economies."

A light finally went on, even though it was a pretty dim bulb.

That's the point Nova Scotia Premier Rodney MacDonald tried to make.

"At the national level, a carbon tax like the one being floated will mean significant increases in electricity for Nova Scotia because of our dependence on coal," MacDonald warned.

Try a boost of 50%.

"I want it on the record I'm opposed to such a tax," the Blue Nose pol sniffed.

B.C. consumers didn't exactly warm up to the 2.4 cents a litre Gordie Grab that hit Lotus Land gas pumps on Canada Day at a time when motor fuel prices were already soaring because of rising world oil prices.

"The income tax reductions we put in place this year will be significant," Campbell insisted.

B.C. consumers will need more than a few extra bucks on their paycheque to be convinced, especially when they become voters later this year.

That is the fundamental issue that the Kyoto Kult premiers miss when they lock themselves away in a posh hotel room.

But Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall gets it.

"I know who signs my paycheque," he said. "It's the people of Saskatchewan.

WHAT'S THE COST?

"Before I sign anything on their behalf I want to know the cost to my citizens, the cost to business and I want to know if it threatens our 'have' status economically."

That's exactly what Stelmach has been saying.

Bank of Canada governor Mark Carney - who breakfasted with the preems on Friday - made it clear the energy sector is what's keeping the Canadian economy ticking, despite a lot of gloom in Ontario.

The Liberal and NDP premiers want to punish the sector with cap and trade schemes and carbon taxes, all of which will be flowed through in the end to consumers, who every four years or so become pesky voters.

Now it appears they have already smelled a political rat.

A national Innovative Research Group poll found that the Alberta/Saskatchewan carbon capture and storage plan beat out cap and trade 41% to 29%.

Once the Kyoto Kult premiers finally level with their consumers, expect that gap to widen.

"They should be all be costing it out to their consumers and telling the truth," spat Stelmach.