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Speech From The Throne

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MOVING ONTARIO FORWARD: A PLAN FOR JOBS AND THE ECONOMY - NOVEMBER 22, 2011



Ontario

Mr. Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great privilege to welcome all of you to the first session of the 40th Parliament of Ontario.

Before proceeding, it is my honour to extend warm congratulations and very best wishes to all parliamentarians on behalf of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada.

And while I have this opportunity, let me say how much I look forward to two important milestones in 2012: the 60th anniversary of Her Majesty's accession to the Throne and the bicentennial of the War of 1812.

I encourage all Ontarians to celebrate and reflect on these important milestones in the year ahead.

Mr. Speaker, this is a historic place.

It is an important symbol of our democracy.

But it is more than that.

It is a living, breathing institution -- one that continues to grow, and evolve.

It continues to welcome new members and new ideas.

It continues to speak to the needs of successive generations of Ontario families.

Against the backdrop of World Wars, the Great Depression, constitutional crises and recessions, the Speech from the Throne has always been a moment for Ontario governments to reflect on their challenges and opportunities, set out their priorities, and call Ontarians together to strengthen our province.

I find that very inspiring.

So it is with great pleasure that I welcome our members.

And especially, our newest members.

Ours is a time of significant global change, upheaval and uncertainty.

Many fear that the world's largest trading block -- the European Union -- is on the verge of recession as it struggles to deal with its ongoing debt crisis.

For the world's largest economy and our biggest trading partner, the United States, overcoming their economic challenges will also take many years and great effort.

We don't fully know what the global economic uncertainty means for Ontario, and for our families, yet.

But we do know that we will continue to see challenges to our economy from outside Ontario.

And here at home, we still have too many people looking for work.

Simply put, our world has entered into a time of slower growth.

And we expect that slower pace of growth to continue throughout the four-year mandate given to this Parliament.

One of the paradoxes of this time, however, is this: while the global economy lags, innovation continues to surge ahead at a staggering and unprecedented pace.

In areas such as communications, automotive technology and clean energy, changes are coming quickly, and profoundly reshaping the way we live.

For example, 77 per cent of people over 65 have embraced the Information Age and are now on the web.

In the first quarter of this year, sales of hybrid and electric vehicles grew twice as fast as conventional car sales.

And, last year, more money was invested in renewable technologies worldwide than in fossil fuels.

So, while the challenges facing Ontario in the global economy are considerable, there are also opportunities to be seized.

And it's necessary to seize those opportunities -- not to strengthen our economy for its own sake, or to improve the lives of a select few -- but so that all our families have opportunities of their own.

That's why -- for the next four years -- your government will focus its efforts on strengthening Ontario's economy and creating jobs.

At the same time, it will continue to protect the gains Ontarians have made, together, recognizing that quality hospitals, good schools and strong public services are the foundation of a strong economy and a great quality of life.

To that end, your government will implement the plan it campaigned on -- and Ontarians elected it to carry out -- as a strong, steady government.

Your government will do so in the context of our new, global economic reality -- recognizing that priority must be given to those parts of the plan that best address the immediate needs of Ontario families as it works to steadily improve Ontario's economy.

It will do so knowing that tax reforms undertaken by your government have been touted by Forbes magazine and the World Bank as key factors that have positioned our economy to grow -- and add new jobs.

And it will do so working with all members of this House -- recognizing that at a time of global economic uncertainty, Ontario families need their leaders to work together.

Your government sees this Parliament as a tremendous opportunity for all members to strengthen our province, together.

To do that, your government will move forward with its economic plan.

First, your government will continue to build a stronger, more competitive workforce.

That starts with our youngest learners.

Your government is committed to ensuring that 250,000 Ontario four- and five-year-olds will be enrolled in North America's first full-day kindergarten program by 2014.

And it will continue to raise test scores and graduation rates.

We know that 70 per cent of all new jobs in the global economy will require postsecondary education and training.

So your government is creating 60,000 new spaces in our colleges and universities to ensure that every qualified Ontario student who wants to go to college or university can do so.

To keep tuition affordable and within the reach of all Ontarians, your government will reduce the average college and university tuition by 30 per cent for families earning less than \$160,000 per year.

Students will receive this support for the semester beginning January 1, 2012.

To ensure more students in more communities across Ontario have access to quality learning, closer to home, your government will move forward with the selection of three sites for new undergraduate campuses.

And to help those who lose their jobs find new jobs, your government will ensure that its successful Second Career program has the resources it needs.

Your government will continue to work hard to close the socio-economic gap between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal Ontarians.

And it will continue to call on the federal government to work with First Nations, other Aboriginal partners and the province to improve education supports for Aboriginal students.

Second, your government will continue to make investments in infrastructure.

Building modern, efficient infrastructure creates jobs and makes our economy more productive and improves our quality of life.

That's why, together with hardworking Ontarians, your government is building hospitals and schools.

It is why, together, we are building new roads and public transit as well as a modern electricity system with new transmission lines and electricity generation.

Your government has already committed to new transit in Toronto, Ottawa and Kitchener-Waterloo, a

new subway to York University and Vaughan, and a rail link between Pearson Airport and Union Station.

The next step in that transit plan will be the introduction of two-way, all-day GO train service -- which will help keep Ontarians living in the GTA and Greater Golden Horseshoe moving while creating 68,000 new jobs.

Third, your government will continue to aggressively pursue new investment in the Ontario economy.

Your government remains fully committed to clean energy and the 50,000 new, good jobs in one of the world's fastest-growing economic sectors. These jobs are being created by its Green Energy Act in communities across Ontario.

There are other opportunities for growth as well.

In Ontario's North, the mining sector is experiencing a historic and exciting boom. Your government remains fully committed to turning the vast, untapped potential of the Ring of Fire into good, leading-edge northern jobs.

And your government will continue to strengthen trade ties in growing international markets like India and China.

Because, in a global economy, international trade is essential to creating jobs at home.

Fourth, your government will continue to focus on improving quality of life for our families.

That means making things a bit easier when it comes to expenses and improving services -- like health care -- that families rely on.

In the case of our seniors, those two imperatives go hand-in-hand.

Your government will introduce a Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit worth up to \$1,500 annually.

This would make it more affordable for our seniors to make home improvements like adding a ramp, walk-in tub or stair lift.

In combination with this new tax credit, your government will move to increase home care services for seniors.

These two initiatives would improve seniors' quality of life by allowing them to stay in their own homes longer and provide a real, tangible benefit to taxpayers by saving long-term care costs.

The new tax credit would also create jobs in the home renovation sector as workers begin taking on these projects.

These are the kinds of solutions your government will undertake as it seeks to both provide excellent health care for families and control costs for taxpayers.

That's also why your government will press for a new, 10-year Health Accord with the federal government, with priorities, accountability and clear goals, including health care reforms designed to meet the needs of our growing population of seniors.

Your government will also undertake specific measures to help more Ontario families manage their home expenses.

As part of a package of reforms that includes a reduction in tuition for middle- and lower-income families, a home renovation tax credit and scheduled tax cuts for families and businesses, your government will also continue to take 10 per cent off the total cost of electricity on bills through the Clean Energy Benefit.

And your government remains committed to uploading services from municipalities to give municipal taxpayers a much-needed break.

Your government also knows that Ontario's wealth is not just economic -- it is found in our abundance of natural beauty and resources, and we all have a duty to protect it.

That's why your government will follow through on its goal to become the continent's water innovation leader by 2015 and work with environmental experts and community groups to develop and introduce a Great Lakes Protection Act.

These and other measures enhance the affordability and quality of life in Ontario. And this, in turn, attracts the world's top talent and new investment in jobs and growth.

Fifth, your government will move forward with a prudent, balanced-budget plan.

Your government remains committed to returning the province's budget back to balance by 2017-2018.

Your government is on track to reduce the Ontario Public Service by five per cent by March 2012.

Reducing the size of the Ontario Public Service by an additional two per cent by 2014 will save a total of \$500 million.

Your government will also find \$200 million in savings at major agencies by 2014.

Your government recognizes that additional, unforeseen expenditures may arise as we move forward.

However, any new spending that is not part of your government's current plan will need to come

from savings realized elsewhere.

These and other details will be further described in the government's Fall Economic Statement to be released tomorrow.

In addition, your government will receive a report from Don Drummond in the next few months.

That report will make recommendations on ways to eliminate the deficit and ensure that Ontario has the fiscal capacity to support strong schools and hospitals, even as worldwide economic growth slows.

Your government looks forward to that report and discussing its findings in this legislature. It's hoped that Mr. Drummond's report will spur a mature, thoughtful debate that contributes toward your government's overall objectives.

Mr. Drummond will challenge all those elected to this legislature to bring forward their best ideas to help your government balance the Budget, control spending growth and deliver for Ontario families.

This challenge creates new opportunities for all Ontarians to contribute their ideas to help transform the way your government works. Your government can and will find ways to deliver its services more efficiently and effectively.

With health care consuming an ever-increasing portion of the Budget and with the growing pressure created by our aging population, many Ontarians fear for the future of health care.

Your government commits itself wholeheartedly to the exciting task of renewing and reforming health care for the benefit of our generation and future generations of Ontarians.

As your government moves forward to renew health care, strengthen Ontario's workforce, build infrastructure, strengthen trade ties, improve Ontario families' quality of life and return our provincial budget to balance, all members of this House will be called upon to work together to achieve that plan.

Where there are good ideas, your government will adopt them.

Where members are willing to work together to strengthen our economy and create jobs, your government will welcome the opportunity to work with them.

Your government rejects the politics of division and rancour and will oppose measures that do not serve to move Ontarians forward, together.

Because your government believes that what matters in these times are not the opinions that divide the members of this House but the greater goal shared by all its members: building a stronger Ontario.

Building a stronger province requires us to abide by the values that have made Ontario great, and protecting the gains we have made, together.

So in meeting the challenges before us, your government will be guided by key principles.

It will protect health care and education as the most important public services. Reforms will not compromise quality.

It will also reject across-the-board reductions because these would mean deep cuts to health care and education.

Any reforms adopted must lead to better value for money through improved efficiencies and greater productivity.

The government will not consider tax increases or privatize public health care.

And finally, your government will not pursue austerity measures that harm our economy.

As we seek opportunities for the future, we are reassured by history.

For it teaches us that, through the ages, societies have faced challenges similar to ours and, with ingenuity, resilience and compassion, prevailed.

As Abraham Lincoln once said:

"The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew."

These are serious times.

And they demand that all members of this House devote themselves to a serious plan, and a common goal.

Ontario requires a strong, steady government focused on good jobs and a stronger economy for all our families -- including our most vulnerable.

Ontario families are looking to this House to deliver, today, as it has done in the past.

They need to know that their government is there for them.

They need to know we are going to tackle our challenges, and seize opportunities by working together -- the Ontario Way -- just as Ontarians themselves have done throughout our history.

When the recession hit, your government did not waver in its strong support for the schools and health care Ontario families count on.

It worked to retrain those who had lost their jobs.

It partnered with industry and the federal government to save the auto sector, protecting jobs and businesses.

And it seized exciting new opportunities in clean energy, creating tens of thousands of new jobs for Ontario families.

As the world economy struggles in the aftermath of a terrible recession -- as Ontario experiences these global aftershocks -- the priorities of this government are, and will remain, the priorities of Ontarians:

A great quality of life for our families.

The security and confidence that come with a good job.

And a bright future for all our children.

Inspired by Ontarians, your government will continue to rise to the challenges before us.

When Ontario was confronted with deteriorating public services, your government acted.

Now, Ontario has one of the best public education systems in the world and the shortest wait times for key surgical procedures in the country.

When the global economy was ravaged by a recession, your government acted.

Now, Ontario has a new tax system that makes us a magnet for foreign investment and job creation.

Confronted with today's challenge of providing world class public services and a balanced budget in a time of slow growth, your government will act, once again.

Now, more than ever, in these times of uncertainty, the people of Ontario call upon all the members of this legislature to give them their best by working hard and working together.

They call upon you to lead with vision and with hope.

And your government will not let the people of Ontario down.

Thank you.
