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## PREMIER WYNNE'S INTERVIEW WITH AINSLIE CRUICKSHANK, iPOLITICS

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*Speaker(s):* Premier Kathleen Wynne  
Ainslie Cruickshank, iPolitics

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AINSLIE CRUICKSHANK: I guess I just wanted to start with - your government faced a lot of criticism on a number of different issues and I just wondered if was more challenging to handle some of those things after losing some of your senior staff to Ottawa and the Liberal government.

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: That's an interesting question. I wouldn't - I wouldn't say so because I had really strong people coming in behind them. So I don't attribute any of our challenges to staffing. We have really good people.

CRUICKSHANK: Okay so it wasn't - like in terms of them getting caught up or anything like that. There wasn't really a challenge there?

PREMIER WYNNE: No. No, I mean we work pretty much as a team here. So I mean I think that's fair to say. I mean you worked very closely with CETA and you know there was a pretty seamless transition. You know it's always rattling for an organization when a bunch of people leave at the same time but the staff just got over that very quickly and - and I think because we worked closely with the federal government there's a lot of communication between the staff and that's - so that's helpful too.

CRUICKSHANK: Okay, so one of the issues that your government had trouble with was cash-for-access fundraising and now Prime Minister Trudeau is also facing criticism over that, so I just wondered if you had advice or if you have advised the Prime Minister on how to kind of handle some of those criticisms.

PREMIER WYNNE: No I haven't. I think some of my staff may have had conversations with some of his staff just to outline what we did. I had said - I mean there are a couple of differences - I had said over a year ago that we were going to make changes, that we were going to modernize the system and we often pointed to what the federal government had done as sort of the model. But we've gone beyond what the federal government did and you know that is a result of the public dialogue, the consultation on the legislation. So I think we've landed in a good place. I wouldn't presume to advise unless I was asked. I haven't been asked advice about it. But I think that the imperative to modernize the rules is pretty strong.

CRUICKSHANK: At the federal level as well to maybe-?

PREMIER WYNNE: I think it's cross-country quite frankly. I think Canadians expect that there will be a different degree of transparency and clarity about fundraising.

CRUICKSHANK: Some of those changes being kind of whether or not you're allowing Ministers to that.

PREMIER WYNNE: Right.

CRUICKSHANK: Okay, great. You said you work closely and your staff work closely with federal government and that was something that Justin Trudeau campaigned on pretty heavily - a new cooperative relationship with provinces. But after everything that happened this weekend around the Health Accord, would you say that he's still kind of keeping that promise?

PREMIER WYNNE: Yeah. I mean you know we're dealing with a government that we've had a great engagement on infrastructure, on retirement security, on climate change - there are a lot of big issues that we have tackled together and had a lot of success. We are having a challenging conversation about health care. There's no doubt about that. But I believe we'll get through it. And I know and all the Premiers know and I think the Prime Minister knows that health care is at the top of people's list in terms of what they expect government to deliver in this country. It's pretty definitional. As Canadians we see it as something that defines us - is our health care system. So I think we'll get through it. It is a challenge right this minute.

CRUICKSHANK: What do you think of how they handle it specifically this weekend in terms of dropping their proposal on Friday?

PREMIER WYNNE: So I'm disappointed that there hasn't really been a discussion that's been based in evidence. And the reason that the provinces are putting forward a 5.2 per cent escalator is that that's what the evidence points to. So whether it's the Conference Board of Canada or the Parliamentary Budget Officer, they have said that in order for the health care system to be sustainable that 5.2 per cent is what needs to be on the table. And you know we - we're in a situation right now where the federal government funds about 23 per cent of health care costs. The provinces then fund 77 per cent. The original agreement was much closer to 50/50 and we're so far away from that and have been for a long time. So to see a proposal on the table that actually would reduce the share from 23 per cent to 20 per cent over 10 years. It's just not sustainable. Now I'm not saying in any way that we don't have to put more money into mental health and home care. We know we have to do that and you know I have no problem with there being accountability measures in place to make sure that happens because it's what's necessary. I mean those are areas that are growth areas in terms of the need in the health care system. So that's you know - I'm just disappointed that we weren't able to have all of those conversations, especially because we did meet - the Premiers did meet with the Prime Minister last Friday and we had a dinner where we talked specifically about the need for an evidence based approach.

CRUICKSHANK: And Ontario put forth that 5.2 proposal.

PREMIER WYNNE: Right.

CRUICKSHANK: Do you think it was a slight to your government that they disregarded it?

PREMIER WYNNE: You know the proposal we didn't put it forward until everybody agreed with it. So it was an agreement among all of the Premiers and we had just done the work that drew on the evidence from the Conference Board and from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, so we didn't have a lot of our identity attached to that. It was more let's find something that that actually is rooted in evidence and that we could bring forward and that was the proposal that came forward.

CRUICKSHANK: Would you - do you think it would have made a difference if you had more of your identity behind that proposal?

PREMIER WYNNE: I don't think so. I think it was important that it was agreed upon by all of the Premiers. That actually was the stronger statement.

CRUICKSHANK: Okay, so, I guess maybe I'll just finish with the health. What do you see kind of happening next?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well I hope that they'll be a First Ministers meeting. Wade McLaughlin from PEI is calling for that. We're - you know we think that that would be an important next step. We'll see what happens over the next few days but I hope that there will be another conversation.

CRUICKSHANK: So your approval ratings have been fairly low and I read the Star story and I know that you said you're not stepping down. So I just wondered what are your plans? How are you going to try to convince Ontarians to kind of give you another shot?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well all I can do is continue to build the province up in the way that that I said we were going to and the way that we're seeing success because and we've got higher economic growth than most of the other provinces - we're number one or two with B.C. We've got an unemployment rate below the national average. We've created over 600,000 jobs since the downturn, so. So the investment that we're making, the track that we're on is having success. I think that I've said you know paying more attention to and doing more to help people with their electricity bills, that's something that absolutely needs to happen. But you know, building those child care spaces, making sure that kids from low-income families have free tuition, those are really important parts of what will happen over the next year and will be the result and people will be able to see those as concrete results of the plan that we're implementing.

CRUICKSHANK: On Hydro, do you have any concrete plans yet as to what's going to come on top of that?

PREMIER WYNNE: So beyond the 8 per cent that's coming off on January 1st, the provincial portion of the HST, we don't have any more explicit plans but I have met with the head of the OEB, I've met with the head of the IESO, and you know we're looking across the system to see what we can do to relieve that burden on people.

CRUICKSHANK: One of the things - it was in the Globe and Star yesterday as well - was your concern that some of the positive things that have happened in Ontario's economy aren't necessarily being felt evenly.

PREMIER WYNNE: Right, right.

CRUICKSHANK: So what kinds of things do you have planned to address that?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well we're working right now on developing regional economic development plans. We already have some of those in place. So the southwestern Ontario Development Fund, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. We've made specific investments in particular parts of the province. Our auto strategy, you know, has a strong - has strong support in it for a place like Windsor or Oshawa. So we are very cognizant of those regional differences. So we will continue to try to develop new strategies to help those particular regions of the

province where there hasn't been the same growth. The other unevenness is that there are certain groups that are not taking part in the same way. So when I say the unemployment rate is at 6.8 per cent is below the national average, the youth unemployment rate is much higher than that and so making sure that young people have placement opportunities and training opportunities, that's an important part of what Deb Matthews is working on in - what's it called? Advanced Education and Skills Development. Sorry we've changed the names and I lose track of it. So we have a multi-pronged strategy.

CRUICKSHANK: Do you think that some of those changes will be kind of felt in time for the 2018 election to make a difference?

PREMIER WYNNE: Some of them will be. Some of them take longer you know? But it is less about the politics and more about getting it right and getting the policies right because the work that we're doing today is going to have an impact on the Ontario that my grandson Hugh lives. You know, he's 3-years-old and if we don't lay a good foundation today, if we don't build infrastructure, make sure that kids have access to education, make sure that retirement security is in place, then the Ontario he lives in will not be as strong. And that's - you know I'm thinking about right now but I'm also thinking about the future.

CRUICKSHANK: I can definitely appreciate that but the politics obviously have to matter a bit in terms of getting your government re-elected.

PREMIER WYNNE: Sure, sure.

CRUICKSHANK: So do you think, like politically, will some of those changes make a difference?

PREMIER WYNNE: I think some of them will. I think if we have you know tens of thousands of kids who are going to post-secondary education with their tuition paid, that will make a difference in those in those families you know? But are we doing it? I guess the point I want to make is that are we making those changes so that we will get re-elected? No, we're making those changes because that's what needs to happen to strengthen the economy. Businesses say to me all the time that they come here because of our educated workforce. Well we have to keep that educated workforce up to speed, make sure that they're being educated in the right way in order to keep those jobs coming to Ontario, whether it's GE in Welland or whether it's General Motors in Oshawa. You know, those are high-tech, advanced jobs, and so we need to make sure that the education system is as good as it can be. So we're making those changes in order to build the province. Will they help in our re-election? Well maybe. I hope so, but that's not the prime motivation.

CRUICKSHANK: So last Friday, Minister Orazletti resigned. Are you concerned about that? I mean Patrick Brown in his statement said that this is not going to be the first, you know, senior member of your team that will resign—

PREMIER WYNNE: Well Tim Hudak resigned too. Christine Elliott resigned. I mean the fact is that people have lives and they have to look after themselves and they have to look after the families. And David Orazietti has a daughter whose I guess she's 16 and when he came here she was 3. And so you know he's missed all these years when she was in school and he didn't want to miss that last year and a half while she was still in high school. He got an 8-year-old son. He turned 8 on Saturday and he's never been home. You know he's never been home during the week since his son has been born. So he needed to make that decision and I fully respect it. Will I miss him? Absolutely. He's a strong member and he's a strong Minister, but he's

done a lot of good for the people of Sault St. Marie and the people of Ontario and he deserves to make that decision. And that's the thing sometimes we lose sight you know? The party or the caucus is this monolithic entity and they're not. It's made up of people with lives, people at different stages of their lives and different needs.

CRUICKSHANK: So you know, a lot of commentators have said that this is a tired government. You've been in power for over a decade. The PC should be prime to take the next election. But there also—

PREMIER WYNNE: But I've been the Premier since February 2013.

CRUICKSHANK: Yeah. But you know they're facing their own challenges as well, all that drama around nominations and the concern about the social conservatives. Do you feel confident that you can beat Patrick Brown in 2018?

PREMIER WYNNE: You know what? It's way too far away. What I know is that we're doing our very best to make decisions that are in the best interests of the province and that's what I have to continue to do. It's not a political game for me. It's really about getting the policies right, getting the investments right so that people can have better lives. That's why in politics. That's why I'm here.

CRUICKSHANK: Just - because this is sort of what I'm interested in and with David Oraziotti resigning, that's kind of one more seat in the north that's open and I know you're looking at kind of potentially adding one or two more to north. It's also a region that is you know seeing the same advancement that other areas are. So what kind of strategy do you have to kind of catch the north up?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well I'm glad you noticed the one or two more members because I think that's important. Those ridings are huge and I think that we need to have better representation for that part of the province. As I said we're working on regional economic development plans. The Northern Ontario Heritage Fund has done a great job in helping businesses start. But you know I have concerns, like the fact that we don't have a softwood lumber deal is a real problem for the forestry industry and I'm worried about it. I'm worried about Trump. I'm worried about the President-elect and his position on protectionism. So we're - you know we're going to continue to pursue those deals that will benefit the industries in the north. And as I said those economic development plans have to also come from the community so we're working closely with the communities to see where they think the strengths are. One of the interesting investments that we're making - we're working closely with the agriculture community to develop northern agriculture in the New Liskeard - what's the other one, it's north of North Bay. It's a New Liskeard area - Timiskaming area, yeah, sorry - where there is some really interesting soil configuration opportunities for agriculture. That will be a newer industry for the north. So where we can find those opportunities we will support them.

CRUICKSHANK: Just on the softwood lumber - if you're worried about it, is that something that you're already starting to negotiate with like with Trump's people?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well it's really a national negotiation. But when I was in Washington a number of months ago, I had a conversation - before the election - I had a conversation with David MacNaughton who is the ambassador and he's pretty strong on softwood and I made the point that you know the softwood lumber deal is not just about B.C. It's about Ontario as well. And so what our officials are doing are keeping that front and centre. Monique Smith is our

representative in Washington and so she is - and she's from the north, she's from North Bay - and she is very much an advocate for that agreement. So we've got a number of ways of keeping that on the front burner.

CRUICKSHANK: Okay. Well thank you so much for taking time.

PREMIER WYNNE: You're very welcome. Merry Christmas.