
PREMIER WYNNE'S YEAR END INTERVIEW WITH HALLIE COTNAM OF CBC OTTAWA MORNING

Date: December 22, 2016
Length: 9:22 minutes
Speaker(s): Premier Kathleen Wynne; Hallie Cotnam, CBC Ottawa Morning

HALLIE COTNAM: Welcome to Ottawa Morning.

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Thanks very much Hallie. Thanks for having me.

COTNAM: So here's my question: do approval ratings matter?

PREMIER WYNNE: They certainly matter on Election Day. You know I think that in between, Hallie, I have a responsibility to focus on implementing the plan that we ran on and making sure that we grow the inclusive economy that we promised and we're seeing success you know? Ontario is leading the country in an economic growth. We're creating more jobs than other jurisdictions. Our unemployment rate is below the national average. So the investments that we're making in infrastructure, in people's education and their talent and skills, it's working. And so it's my responsibility to continue to to implement that plan.

COTNAM: Well if it's working, how do you explain the record low approval rating?

PREMIER WYNNE: Part of the reality is that we are doing some very hard things and we're doing some things that people haven't yet seen the benefit of. I mean I'll give you an example. In Ottawa right now there's a lot of construction going on. Would you agree with that?

COTNAM: Absolutely.

PREMIER WYNNE: So right now our investments in infrastructure in Ottawa just mean it's hard to get around because of all the construction. What those investments will mean is an LRT system that will help people. I think that there's a bit of a time lag. I'm not saying that there isn't a challenge around things like electricity prices because I know there is. But the long term investments that we're making takes some time to realize.

COTNAM: Is there a personal toll though for you? We think back to our high school years. You have a feeling that you might be not the most popular kid, that that hurts. Is there a personal toll?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well you know that's why I think it's easier to do this job when you have some life experience than it would be when you're in high school because you're right. It's really important to be able to focus on the commitments that we've made and make sure that we follow through on those. Everyone likes to be liked, Hallie. I mean there's no secret about that. But our plan in 2014 was not a plan to increase my personal popularity. That's not what it was - that's not what it's about. It's really - my popularity is beside the point. The point is are we doing

what's in the best interests of the people of Ontario? And along the way are we fixing the things that we might have gotten wrong and I'll put electricity prices into that basket.

COTNAM: I'm glad you raise that because we heard from a small business owner - on a different topic altogether, he wasn't talking about Hydro - but just so happens he operates two large fridges and his Hydro bill is now \$1,800 a month and he's had to shut down one of his two fridges and really change the way he does his business, including occasionally having to work 18 hour days. And when I was hearing his story it really put a face on the problem for me and I wondered is there a real person example that sticks with you?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well I've talked to families who are not able to retrofit their homes, who maybe have electric heating and have seen their bills increase. I've talked to families in rural communities who are really struggling because of the distribution charge, Hallie, and so they're asking us about what we can do about those delivery charges that are making their bills go up exponentially. So those are those are the stories that worry me when families are saying that they, you know, they really are having a hard time making ends meet. And that's about people being able to pay their other bills and support their kids. And that's a real problem.

COTNAM: I've heard you explain that you're making decisions for the future. But when I hear individual stories I wonder what do you say to people who are making sacrifices now within their own families?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well I say a couple of things. The first thing is that I understand that and that's why we are making the changes that we're making. You know the the 8 per cent that will come off people's bills in January, that's not the first thing that we have done. We've made other changes, we've put in place the Ontario Energy Support Program for low income families, we've taken the debt retirement charge off people's bills. But it's also why we are - we know that there's more that we have to do. We have to look across the system and figure out what are the systemic changes that will help people who are really struggling with that burden.

COTNAM: I have to ask you this question because I know that you've made some decisions that are going to help people and I don't say and I'm not trying to say you haven't but one has been the hardest decision that you made this year? One in which you knew there were going to be people hurting from?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well I would say the hardest decisions that I've made have been the ones that were I knew there were there was going to be disagreement. But I have really tried hard not to make decisions that mean that people would be hurt, Hallie. So if I have made decisions and they have hurt people, those have been inadvertent. And you know I'll go back to electricity prices. I think there are decisions that we've made around renewable energy, for example, and we've made some of those in the past that have hurt people because the cost associated with some of those decisions has been hard to bear. But you know decisions that I have made like the decision to broaden the ownership of Hydro One, that was a hard decision because I knew there would be disagreement with it.

COTNAM: Earlier you mentioned the investment in infrastructure and just this week the province recommitted to widening our East-West 417 here in Ottawa. What's the thinking behind that, investing in roads and when you're already so heavily doubling down on rail?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well we have to - I mean we have to do both. The reality is in this province that there are people who can use transit but there will still continue to be goods and people who are moving along our roads. I mean we can't abandon the one for the other.

COTNAM: That's why a lot of people are wondering if you widen the 417 in Ottawa, won't more people stay in their cars rather than get on the train, which is what we want?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well it's a balance. We have to find a balance and I think that you know we have to recognize that both have to happen now. There have been decisions where we've decided not to build a new road and that's where in the past we might have gone ahead and built a new road where now we're saying no, we're not going to do that we're actually going to focus on the roads that exist and the transit bill that will accommodate the new traffic.

COTNAM: You've had a close relationship with the Prime Minister but as we saw with the Health Accord talks this week it doesn't always mean a yes for Ontario. Can you pick up the phone and say 'come on, let's work a little harder at this'?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well you're correct to say we have a great working relationship with the federal government but that doesn't necessarily mean that in every situation we're going to agree. And in this case this isn't about Ontario and the federal government. This is about all of the provinces having a real challenge with the fact that the proposal that is on the table for health care actually would reduce the health transfer over the 10 years from about 23 per cent - the federal contribution now - to 20 per cent. That's just unacceptable, Hallie. You know the original notional deal was 50/50, provinces and the federal government. Right now it's 23 per cent the federal government's putting in, 77 per cent that the provinces are putting in. And so we've got to find a better balance. We understand that investing in mental health and home care has to happen. We're doing that anyway and we will do that and certainly Ontario has no problem being accountable for making those investments. But to see the transfers on other investments in health going down over a 10 year period it's just not sustainable.

COTNAM: This has been a year in which we've seen - well it's been a hard a hard year for women in politics partly due to personal attacks, partly too to the changing times. Do you think the political culture has changed? Have you changed?

PREMIER WYNNE: So I would say that the political culture for women in politics really took a hit during the American election. I'm not going to pretend that that's not the case. I feel pretty unhappy about the fact that in 2016 going into 2017, we're seeing a step backwards from where we thought we'd got to you know? I've been around for a number of years and I was just talking to my staff about you know being in high school and in the 60s and the 70s and having the realization that it was going to be a tough slog you know? That fighting for women's place was going to be hard but I never imagined in 1969 that in 2016 I'd be having some of the same conversations. And I also think that social media has meant that people feel completely free to say whatever they want with impunity and that does us all a disservice I think.

COTNAM: Premier Wynne, thank you so much for your time this morning.

PREMIER WYNNE: Thanks very much Hallie. All the best.

COTNAM: You too. That was Ontario's Premier Kathleen Wynne.