
THUNDER BAY RADIO INTERVIEW WITH PREMIER WYNNE

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Speaker(s): Premier Kathleen Wynne

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: A couple of things that are going to make a difference to people in the northern part of the province. The first is, something that will affect everybody in the province, all residents who pay electricity and live in the province are going to see by summer an average of about a 25 per cent reduction on their bill. So, it'll be between 23 and 28 per cent but they will see that, they'll see that relief on their bills. For people who live outside of urban areas and are in more remote communities, they are paying very high and distribution charges. So, for example, people who are covered by Atikokan power or Hydro One (inaudible), they will see an additional reduction because of their distribution charges being so high and we're going to bring those distribution charges down to about the rate of what an urban or Toronto resident would pay. So that's going to be on top of 25 per cent. It could be another 10 or 15 per cent reduction for those folks.

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: It's customers who are in the Hydro One, the Northern Ontario Wires, Lakeland Parry Sound, Chapleau, Sioux Lookout, Atikokan, Algoma. Those are the, those are the customers who are paying disproportionately high. And if people are in bigger centers, their distribution charges tend not to be as high as outside of those centers.

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Right and right. And the 25 per cent is the 8 per cent that's already in place. And then, on top of that, 17 per cent what customers in Thunder Bay and elsewhere in the province will also see on top of the 25 per cent is if they are low income families, they will see an additional reduction if they apply for the Ontario Electricity Support Program. So we're actually increasing the Ontario Electricity Support Program and that is as I say that's for low income consumers.

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: We heard very clearly from people around the province, in every corner of the province, that they were looking for a substantial reduction on their bills, and they told us that, you know, the 8 per cent alone was not enough. But, what we knew is that if we could get a 25 per cent reduction and then on top of that where there were special issues like the distribution and like the low income, that we'd be starting to see that significant change that people were looking for. And these are these are very structural changes, you know, we're actually changing the way the system works. The way we're getting the 25 per cent reduction is by spreading out the payment period for the investments that have been made in the system over the last decade or so, spreading those out over a 30-year period rather than a 20-year period. That's a structural change, the distribution charges in the electricity support program. We're taking those off the rate base, taking those off people's electricity bills and putting them on the tax base so. So those are the kinds of fundamental change that people were looking for.

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: I think we have to work together on this. We've made a commitment as a province to do everything we can to clean up the mercury Grassy Narrows. You know I have met with the scientist Dr. Rudd. We have a plan here, but, you know, since the contamination the federal government has been involved in terms of the compensation board and so on, so we certainly will be reaching out to the minister to bring them into the conversation in a significant way.

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: I think this is a shared responsibility. I think it's the community. I think it's the provincial government. I think it's the federal government, and those are the partners who have always been involved in this issue and so I'm pretty confident that we can have an important interaction with the federal government on this. Having said that, we're moving ahead.

We are not, you know, we're not waiting, we're moving ahead. And my hope is that the scientists who are out there looking, for example, for the sites of the leakage into the river to confirm those and figure out how we get that stock to soon as possible and then and move forward on the other initiatives so we get that get that water cleaned up

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Absolutely, I mean, I think that there's no question that the Thunder Bay jail is a huge issue. I think what the work that's going on right now is just a setting of priorities among the different facilities in the province because there are, you know, there are a couple of other situations that are not adequate. And I think that although Howard Sapers is looking at segregation and that is, you know, that's of primary importance and it's a very important thing that we that we need to address, we're also going to be able to get more information about the system as a whole and, as part of that, where are the where are the top priorities in terms of capital projects.

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Well I think it's near the top. But that's me just talking off the top of my head. Not quite - I mean I have had input, certainly from Michael Gravelle and Bill Mauro on this. They're very concerned about it. They have really advocated for a new facility there. And so we're, you know, we're taking this very seriously as we look at the priorities around the province.

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Well my understanding is that parties like the Northern party have popped up from time to time. I believe that we are much stronger together. And, in fact, you know the reason that we're going to have a Northern Boundary Commission to give us some advice on whether we should create another one or two ridings in the Far North is because I think there does need to be even better representation at Queen's Park. I just want to say that the, you know, our representatives at Queen's Park and in my cabinet have been fantastic. Glenn Thibeault, Michael Gravelle and Bill Mauro, and before that David Oraziotti, they've been terrific representatives. And I think at the same time it would be great to have some more representation from the North. So I am quite convinced that Ontario's economy is better off if we are one province.

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: As I say I think this is something that has come up in the past. I think we have to pay attention to the concerns that that have prompted the party to pop up at this point. But, I can tell you that every policy that we bring forward, we are very, very cognizant of the impact in the North and how do we make sure that the pieces that are going to affect people in the North are addressed. So they the electricity, the hydro policy is a perfect example of that, where some of the most serious concerns that we've heard about distribution have been from Northwestern Ontario, and so, you know, I was determined that as we brought this fair hydro rate policy forward that we would address distribution and so that's, you know, in large part why you see it there.

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: No, that's good. Thank you very much. It's a pleasure.