
GLOBAL NEWS' ALAN CARTER ON PROROGATION OF LEGISLATURE

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ANDREW LAWTON, HOST: I kind of thought we had already dispensed with our provincial election talk and provincial politics talk at the beginning of the show but oh no. Less than an hour ago Kathleen Wynne announces a snap prorogation of the legislature and no this doesn't mean we're headed towards the longest provincial election campaign in the history of the province. It actually means that – well I don't quite know what it means. We're going to have a Throne Speech on Monday. The budget will still be tabled on March 28th. Premier Wynne still says no sitting days will be lost and all government bills will be reintroduced. What on earth is the point then? Alan Carter anchor of Global News and also Queen's Park Bureau Chief joins us on the line now. Now Alan, good to talk to you. Thanks for coming on today.

ALAN CARTER, GLOBAL NEWS ANCHOR: Thanks for having me on.

LAWTON: So just after the whirlwind of a PC convention, now we have the snap prorogation here. What on earth does the government stand to gain from this?

CARTER: Well what prorogation means, remember it's got kind of a dirty connotation after it was used by a number of minority governments in this country both federally and provincially to kind of get away from the house being on fire. Prorogation is something that's used by governments in the Westminster system all the time to reset priorities and what's happening here is that the Wynne government has decided to prorogue and then have a Throne Speech on Monday. It means no sitting days are lost because the House is not sitting this week because the March Break. But what it allows the government to do is get this Speech from the Throne, a little pomp and circumstance, indicate okay our direction, our legislative direction here has changed. Remember Wynne did this once before when the government pivoted from talking about being aspirational to being about pocketbook issues and suddenly said oh we're going to get on this hydro thing and then shortly thereafter we had the Fair Hydro Plan introduced.

LAWTON: But a reset this close to the election seems particularly fruitless. Already they were going to have the budget which you'd think would have been an ample opportunity to say these are our priorities right now by saying hey this is what we're putting in our budget.

CARTER: Listen there's no two ways about it that this is a nice little bit of theatre because on Monday you got left the Lieutenant Governor and you got a guy in a nice hat with a giant mace walking into the House and all of that that goes with it and it brings a certain level of scrutiny to both the speech and what they have to say and then let me just say here I just want to quote from the statement from Kathleen Wynne here: "We know families are under a lot of pressure,

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whether it's the cost child care for kids or cost of home care for parents." So there you have an indication of what they're going to spend on in the budget. They're just going to tell us what they're going to spend on in the budget for all the days leading up to the budget when they'd lock us all into a room, us reporters, and then tell us what they've already told us.

LAWTON: It sounds as though they're trying to reclaim a bit of the news cycle that they've been losing in the last couple of weeks to the Conservatives.

CARTER: Well I don't think it's a mistake or a coincidence that four days out of four so far this week Kathleen Wynne has held a media availability, it's four for four. And then we have this which also amps up the narrative on the Liberal's side. I mean it's clearly designed to try and do that after six weeks of madness and mayhem and a tire fire at the Progressive Conservatives. You know they're not going to allow Doug Ford or whoever it was to just have a victory lap.

LAWTON: Do you think there is going to be anything that will really be a surprise or do you think that the narrative and the agenda of the Premier is already pretty well established from you know things like universal pharmacare, her comments this week of trying to say that government should do what people can't. I mean her idea of what her government should be doing seems to be expanding areas of programming, really hitting lower and middle class Ontarians. Do you think it's just going to be a further extension of that?

CARTER: Oh yeah, they will continue to eat away at the left. This is the key Liberal play here. What they want with the ballot issue to be about is not populism but policy and it remains to be seen where people will fall on that question, on that key question, because on the populism side, they're going to have Doug Ford and to a lesser extent Andrea Horwath as well, campaigning the same sort of way of saying we need change for all of these different reasons. Maybe not too deep on policy but we've got to get rid of the people that are in there for all the various reasons whereas the Liberals are going to put policy after policy after policy in the window. You want the free drugs for kids. You know you want to educate, the tuition, you want whatever else that they're going to come up with on March 28th. Well then, you got to vote Liberal like it or not.

LAWTON: This is, I think, a really important question here and you touched on the PC sideshow. In spite of that, we talked about earlier in the show Doug Ford's PC poised for majority government under the Ipsos poll that was just released this week. Andrea Horwath is being run off the road with how far left the Premier has been moving her government and her party for the last little while. How does Horwath get back into this game because she's really been MIA in the last few weeks?

CARTER: Well it starts on Saturday. The NDP making a platform announcement this Saturday and then planning to have a technical briefing on it on Monday and talk about it in the house, trying to get back into this conversation. I don't know exactly what it's going to be but they're going to have to try and find something to differentiate themselves and to try and get some oxygen and some wind back in their sails because here's the unusual thing if you look at that Ipsos polling. The popularity of Andrea Horwath, she is the most popular leader but she's 20 points ahead of her own party and that differential – that cannot remain as we approach Election Day. When we get down to brass tacks, those two things are going to meet somewhere.

LAWTON: It's like the opposite of where Doug Ford is – Doug Ford who is behind his party and popularity.

CARTER: Well this is it and of course there's many people who've been saying that, well, I think the only one who's been saying that a turnip with googly eyes can win just leading the Conservatives. And so that's why there's that sort of wind in the sails of the Conservatives. They believe that anybody can lead them to victory. But now, as you say, the downsides for Doug Ford are apparent, too, in this poll.

LAWTON: I guess the one big question that emerges is is this election going to be by virtue of that dynamic about personality rather than policy?

CARTER: Well I think that's certainly what Doug Ford would like to frame it as.

LAWTON: If it's a personality battle, Kathleen Wynne loses.

CARTER: Exactly because all the negatives that Doug Ford has Kathleen Wynne has in triple.

LAWTON: I guess the emerging and lingering question for me, when you have this reset is, I'm not sure Kathleen Wynne can do anything more to win people over apart from just that retail politics that she typically excels at. And look, she's going to be in London doing a canvas tomorrow with one of the candidates. She's very charming. She's very disarming in person. Policy-wise, I'm not sure if that's going to put her where she wants to be.

CARTER: Again what the Liberals are banking on is that you will have to look past that. That mushy middle, that center and center-left voter is going to look at Doug Ford and his lack of policy specifics being on saying that he's going to find efficiencies, which I think there's a fair portion of the electorate that would think, 'hmm, I don't know that – when you start saying 'efficiencies' in health care, what does that mean?' You know, I think there's going to be a fair number of people who might be turned off by that. So that the hope for the Liberals are is that combined with that, 'you know, I really like that policy' whatever it might be, that that's going to get people to just –

LAWTON: And whoever might be championing it.

CARTER: Yeah.

LAWTON: Interesting stuff. Well, I'm sure we'll have lots to talk about in the weeks to come. Alan Carter, Global News. Our Queen's Park Bureau Chief joining us on the line. Thanks for coming. I think I reached out to you like five minutes before you came on so thanks very much for coming on such short notice when the news broke. You're always there so thanks very much.

CARTER: Always appreciate being asked. Thanks so much.

LAWTON: All right, cheers, Alan.