

Transcript: PC Leader Patrick Brown's Session Opener Press Conference

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PC LEADER PATRICK BROWN'S SESSIONAL OPENER REMARKS & PRESS CONFERENCE

Date: February 21, 2017
Length: 16:17 minutes
Speaker(s): PC Leader Patrick Brown

PC LEADER PATRICK BRWON: [Speaking French] Wanted to have this opening session presser to highlight some of the issues that frankly we've seen around Ontario. I just got back from my northern Ontario driving tour; my second northern Ontario driving tour and what I saw up north was similar to what I've seen across the province. It's an issue of affordability. Ontarians struggling to meet the demands today in this province that is now more expensive and harder under the Wynne Liberals. Whether it was hearing about health care access that is more difficult, whether it's hearing from physicians in Chapleau about how their budgets have been cut, hearing about the hydro costs in the hospital in Timmins, or the long-term care facility in Sault Ste. Marie; the Davey home where their hydro bill had gone up by 39-per-cent in a year and they have to cut services for seniors. Life is harder under this government. The Ontario PC party has been working hard to hold this government to account for this continued decline we've seen with our province and the quality of life. This month we raised alarm bells over the huge pay hikes for public sector executives the Liberals let fly under the radar and we called the government out on the toll taxes. I remember being lectured in the legislature by Liberals saying why we needed tolls and we forced them to make a U-turn on an issue that would have made life more expensive in the GTA. And we had called on for years for the Liberals to cut the HST on hydro bills and on January 1st that has happened. But frankly it shouldn't have simply been a knee-jerk reaction to the Scarborough-Rouge River by-election. It should have been done under a recognition that life is unaffordable under this government. We pushed in the legislature last spring the issue of autism funding and once again we saw the government respond to our questions, the pressure we mounted across the province on that to finally agree that autism does not end at five and not take away that life-altering therapy. In the year ahead we still have a lot of work to do to make sure that we keep this government from further damaging our province. You know even when they backpedal or U-turn it's the right – It's never late to do the right thing. And we applaud the government when they correct course, where they have made an error. Where I want to start today, is the issue of winter disconnections. For the last year, we've been calling on the government to stop this cruel hydro disconnect that have left family in the cold. Minister Thibeault rather than simply act tried to blame everybody else. He tried to blame the opposition when it came to hydro bill. I think it was a radio show in London saying people just don't understand their hydro bills. What Minister Thibeault does not understand and seems to be oh oblivious to, he's part of the majority government. Yes, it may be shocking news for you here – We have a majority government. Minister Thibeault has that power. If he wanted to deal with winter disconnects, he could have easily done that in the fall. He chose not to act. He also could have used ministerial directives. They've done it over a hundred times. He has that in his authority, but he chose not to. Instead, let people suffer in the cold and he chose to blame the opposition, rather than act and lead. Today our energy critic Todd Smith, will table a Private Member's Bill to end winter disconnections. To get this through he has reached out to the other parties for co-sponsors. We will move unanimous consent be granted and this bill immediately becomes law. We don't want Glenn Thibeault to have anyone else he can blame. I hope the Liberals don't stand in the way. We also know this government will be announcing hydro relief some time soon and I'm going to encourage Kathleen Wynne, rather than

simply window dressing and more shell games, that they look at some of the root challenges, some of the structural challenges in hydro. I think one of the reasons that hydro is still an issue and the Premier thought it was over in September when they made their small changes is because the province can see through window dressing. They can see their hydro bill when it doesn't change; they can see that the major issues in hydro have not been addressed. So I'm calling on the Premier to look at the big issues. First of all, the fire sale of Hydro One has to stop. We know that's opposed by municipalities across the province – the Financial Accountability Officer pointed out that it is short sighted. Secondly, the green act – and I've talked about this a lot. We heard about from the Auditor General Jim McCarter in 2011, when he forecasted that that fast-tracking this green projects would cost our electricity bills to skyrocket. In 2015, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk announced between 2006 and 2014, Ontario overpaid \$37 billion for dollars to electricity. Over the next 18 years, the cost will rise another \$133 billion. \$133 billion and they're not actually dealing with that; they're not actually touching that topic. The Liberals know this has a huge impact on Ontario, but they have not changed their agenda – and frankly that is a must if they want to take the hydro issue head on.

I also believe they need to reign in exorbitant executive salaries. My grandfather use to say: We watch your pennies, you watch your dollars. The fact that we have some of the hydro executive compensation that is completely out of sync with the rest of the country, whether it's the Hydro One CEO getting \$4 million a year, when they get \$400,000 in Quebec or \$400,000 B.C. I think speaks to the challenge we have with spending. Today, obviously, we are going to talk about hydro. We can't stand for hydro prices that are putting seniors in a very difficult position, that are putting families at the brink and causing businesses to lose their ability to be competitive, to bleed jobs out of Ontario.

[Speaking In French]

We look forward to working in the legislature with the Ontario PC caucus to hold the government to account to make sure Ontario can be affordable and competitive again. On that note, I would be happy to take any of your questions.

Q: How are you guys – how's your caucus going to vote on the anti-Islamophobia motion from Nathalie Des Rosiers today? How are going to vote and is this a whipped vote and what do you expect from your caucus?

BROWN: Well, I'm going to support the motion. Whether it's hate against any faith, it's wrong. I will always stand in opposition to any form of hate. We're having our caucus later today, but I would say that I think it's pretty universal with my team that we oppose any form of hate and I will support the motion.

It's not whipped and you'll talk about it in caucus today?

BROWN: Yeah, we're having a caucus meeting later today. But since you're the first person to ask me where I stand on it, in terms of any procedural, how it went, when it will be – I think the vote is on a Thursday afternoon. They've picked a time when a lot of people go back to the ridings. But you know, I'm going to support it and I would encourage my members to do the same thing. I think it's pretty straightforward. We will always condemn any form of hate. In firms of Islamophobia, it is real. We saw the firebombing of the mosque in Peterborough, saw the hate incident in London. I had a friend, actually, this weekend who was a victim of Islamophobia. And so it's real, and I will always condemn it.

Q: [Inaudible]

BROWN: I'm not sure that they want it public – but I can connect you if they do. But something that can never to be tolerated.

Q: Obviously, we're asking about this because of the debate, the federal motion has generated, do you have any thoughts on some of the comments, some of the debate that the federal motion has spawned?

BROWN: I will share my thoughts on the Queen's Park motion. I'm not going to get into the federal debates, but to be very clear, I support the motion. I think that speaks for itself.

Q: Just to follow-up on this. The federal islamaphobia motion, some of the people in the federal Conservatives have expressed concerns about whether this could possibly lead to an infringement on free speech. Do you share those concerns?

BROWN: You have to speak to those federal Conservatives who have expressed those concerns. I support the motion. And I would also, frankly, any form of hate we condemn – whether it's hate against those of Muslim faith, whether it's hate against those of Jewish faith, for example, the BDS motion, where our caucus was very clear on that. We'll always stand against any form of hate. One of the things I love about Ontario, it doesn't matter who you love, where you are born, what the colour of your skin is, what your faith is, you have a home here. And I hope we're always a province that aggressively opposes any form of hate or discrimination.

Q: Given everything that's happened south of the border and here in Quebec with all the Islamophobia stuff, in your ten years in politics, have you seen anything like this, where one particular group is under pressure and going through something like this that we've been going through this in the last few months?

BROWN: The beautiful thing about our province it is incredibly diverse. What those of the Muslim faith have to go through right now is horrible. There are acts of islamaphobia. And you would hope that it would never happen in Canada, but obviously, Quebec was a wake-up call that it does happen in Canada and we have to guard against it. There are other persecuted communities in Canada that I have worked with. But obviously, right now, the threat of hate crimes target towards those of Muslim faith is an immediate concern.

Q: Your party is doing something its own thing on winter disconnects but are you also going to support NDP's proposal for [inaudible]

BROWN: So I don't-- for me it doesn't matter which party puts it forward; whatever way we can end winter disconnects. Sometimes there's a game here and people only want to do something if they get credit. I don't care who gets credit, just end winter disconnects. And right now Glenn Thibeault is trying to blame the opposition. We're give him an easy out; he can deal today, unanimous consent, it's over. And we give him-- you know right now he wants to ignore the fact that he's got a majority government, ignore the fact that he can use ministerial directives. That alternate world that he's operating in he can continue to operate in and have the ending of winter disconnects if he supports Todd Smith's motion or supports the NDP effort. But we're not going to stand in the way of any party trying to end this. Doesn't matter if it's blue, red or orange as long as it helps people in hardship.

Q: Last week the NDP said that they would be coming out with a detailed strategy of how they would end or kind of lower the hydro prices. Is that something we can expect from the PCs?

BROWN: Well we've been talking about hydro for years now. I hope when the NDP raise their plan they'll frankly apologize to Ontarians for propping up the Liberals on the Green Energy Act. You know everyone talks about this giant surplus where we're giving free electricity to our competitors. You know we had a minority parliament. We could have stopped this. When Jim Carter mentioned this in 2011 we could have stopped this, we could have stopped this-- the warning we got from the auditor general, this was going to cause hydro rates to escalate. We continued to be the only party that is saying we need to get rid of this Green Energy Act. It has been an unmitigated disaster. And it's not even agree-- it's actually the Bad Contract Act because you look at our own water power that we're not using at full capacity right now. Water power is green. We're not using our own green energy; we've signed expensive foreign deals that Ontario is still paying for and so where I agree with the NDP that we shouldn't proceed with the fire sale of hydro one. You know I really want them to explain their position on propping up the liberals Green Energy Act knowing that a lot of Ontarians are really frustrated with what's happened with the global adjustment. You know when I was up north in Cochrane one of the the mayors for a nearby community, Latchford, showed me the global adjustment on their facilities and it wasn't the price of electricity it was the global adjustment that

they were most infuriated about. And that's an area where the NDP have some representatives and they need to reconcile that.

Q: Last week, just to switch it up a bit, Mayor Tory came out and for the first time really directly said that he wants to see if the City of Toronto Act can be renegotiated and I believe the words he used were 'what are they so afraid of' referring to the government here. If you become premier is that something you'd be open to?

BROWN: So I know right now obviously John Tory is disappointed that Kathleen Wynne would go and encourage him to have road tolls and say you have our blessing and then pull a U-turn when she realized that it was deeply unpopular. But what I've advocated is I want to see better accountability for the infrastructure dollars. I think a lot of municipalities are constrained right now. Look at John Tory mentioned he's constrained on his ability to achieve his infrastructure mandates. We're spending 160-billion on infrastructure over 12 years. The concern I'm going to continue to flag again and again and again is those dollars, those taxpayer dollars need to be spent appropriately. And just like people-- this government has ignored the green energy warnings just like they ignored the auditor general's warning in 2011. They're ignoring the warnings today on infrastructure. The auditor general said in the December report that we don't have performance measurements or surveillance on how we're spending infrastructure dollars properly. They referenced the Pickering bridge that was, part of the bridge was built upside down or the repaving of roads that were happening every two years instead of every 15 years; where we saw in some projects cost overruns at 35-per-cent. Imagine we had cost overruns on 160-billion. No wonder municipalities aren't getting the infrastructure dollars they need and the government can't continue to ignore this.

Q: Given things like the Gardiner and the DVP where the city of Toronto owns and operates it. Why not give it the ability to make its own decisions on things it already owns and operates?

BROWN: And I think if we make sure, I believe if we actually make sure the infrastructure dollars that we budgeted actually get to municipalities, municipalities won't be looking at new ways, new forms of taxation. They would actually be getting reliable revenue source from the province that right now is being diminished because we're not managing taxpayer dollars properly.