

Transcript: CHCH Interview With Premier Wynne On Hydro Rates, Approval Ratings And NAFTA

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Date: Mon, 13 Mar 2017 19:37:58 -0400

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Interview With Premier Wynne On Hydro Rates, Approval Ratings And NAFTA

Source: CHCH

Mar 13, 2017 6:11 PM (8)

Anchor: Earlier this month, the Liberals announced they will be slashing hydro rates up to 17 per cent.

Anchor: Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne spoke on the phone with disgruntled customers about the change. And now we have the Premier live on camera at Queen's Park to talk more about the move and much more. Thank you for joining us, Premier

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thanks a lot Phil. First of all, let me just say to everybody, drive safely in the snow.

Anchor: Absolutely. We have been talking about that for the first 11 minutes. But let's get right to it: For years, you maintained it was unfair to burden future generations with the cost of the fixing electricity system. Yet, your hydro relief plan is estimated to cost taxpayers an extra \$25 to \$30 billion over the next 30 years. What changed that line of thinking for you?

Premier Wynne: So here is the thing. What has happened over the last decade or so is there has been a \$50 billion investment in the electricity system in Ontario. Our air is clean because we shut down the coal fired plants and we built clean new renewable generation. We've rebuilt thousands of kilometres of line - all of that work has a cost associated with it. And so what is happening right now is that this generation is being asked, Phil, to pay for those costs upfront. And what we are seeing is you know what, it is fairer if we spread the costs over a longer period of time. So, as with a mortgage, yes, it costs a bit more. And so the cost will be spread over a 30 year period, rather than a 20 year period. It is more fair in the long run because that asset is being used now by people who are paying for it, but will be used over the next number of decades by people who will also share in the cost.

Anchor: Let's talk about some other numbers. A recent Forum research poll from February 16 shows you are at 11 per cent support with Ontarians. In fact, no leader in Canada has ever been re-elected with a rating low as yours. How does this affect your strategy going forward as we head into an election?

Premier Wynne: Well, first of all, the election is more than a year away, which is a long time in politics. The poll that is important is the one that people take when they go to vote. And my job, no matter what part of the election cycle we are in, my job is to make decisions in the best interests of the people of Ontario. You know, this decision around a fair hydro plan is important because it will help people with their electricity bills. It will help people - people who are struggling to pay their rent or feed their kids shouldn't have to worry about their electricity bill and so that is why we are putting this reduction in place. We made changes over months and a couple of years before, but it was not enough. We heard that from people. That's why we are bring forward on average 25 per cent reduction that people will see in the summer.

Anchor: Are worried about your approval rating?

Premier Wynne: Well, you know, as a politician, there I always a political component to decisions that we make, no matter what time, where it is in the election cycle. What I am worried about is people who are not able to pay their electricity bills, not able to pay their rent, not able to look after their kid. That is why we are making the change. People will make the decision about who they will vote for when the election comes. This is about fixing something that needs to be fixed. We got here because we made a huge investment in the electricity system that is reliable and clean. But we need to make sure it is paid for fairly. That is why people will see, you know, an on average 25 per cent reduction in summer. That is the fairness component. That is what we are focused on.

Anchor: We are going focus on the economy. You spoke with the Michigan governor today about maintaining relationships between our regions. But with their new president looking out for Americans first, how does this mean anything but bad news for the Ontario economy?

Premier Wynne: Well, Governor Snyder and I agreed that this is an uncertain time. We also agreed that our auto sector is so integrated between Michigan and Ontario. You know, an automobile that is built in Ontario or Michigan cross the border 7 times before it is completed. So that just shows you how integrated our economies are. There are hundreds of thousands of jobs in Michigan that are dependent on Ontario because Ontario is just an important market for Michigan. We are working together, Governor Snyder and I. It is very important that provinces and states work together because that is where economies are built, that is where decisions are made about where companies are going to locate and where jobs will be created. Of course, we are concern about the NAFTA negotiations, but we both agreed that we have a really strong trading relationship and that is a message that we will continue to bring to our counterparts in the United States. Governor Snyder has been a great partner and I know he will continue to be.

Anchor: Thank you for speaking to us Premier Wynne. We appreciate your time.