

Transcript: Premier Wynne Speaks To Caucus About Plan For Fairness & Opportunity - August 17, 2017

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PREMIER WYNNE SPEAKS TO CAUCUS ABOUT PLAN FOR FAIRNESS & OPPORTUNITY

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Speaker(s): Premier Kathleen Wynne

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Thanks Lou. You know what, I have a mic on so I'm going to leave that. And I just want to say hi to everybody. Some of you I've seen over the summer but not everyone and it is lovely to be back in this room with all of you. It's just great. So welcome back, and I know you have been working very hard in your ridings. I've seen you on social media and I know that you've made lots of contacts with your constituents. So what I wanted to do today was just take some time and kind of assess where we are, and I know we're going to have some time over the next two days to have a really good discussion about what you've been hearing and our plans going into the fall.

But I just wanted to take stock. Maybe it's because I just got out of a canoe – I was up on the Rainy River with – well between eight and 12 at any one time young Métis people in a voyager canoe. They had been on the water for 80 days, 80 days these kids, they're between 18 and 25, and they had been every day paddling at a clip of 56 strokes a minute, okay, try that. It's really fast, is what it is. And the young guy in the front, we would try to get him to slow down, but he was like his clock was set for 56 strokes a minute. But you know when you're in a canoe for two full days and then two half days, there's a lot of time to talk and think and so maybe I wanted to do this because I've been reflecting on where we are, and I had a chance to talk to some of those kids.

And one of them asked me on the last day when we were just heading out – and Jane was with me, and just for the record we would lift our paddles from time to time because they were all much younger than we are so – but this guy, his name was Noels, he asked me why I got into politics, how I got into politics. And it got me into thinking who we are and I, you know, I had the opportunity to answer him in a way – there were no cameras around at that point and there was no other context, we were on this beautiful river, and this was a kid who hasn't been involved in politics, hasn't been particularly engaged, and was truly curious about why someone would get involved in political life. And what I heard myself saying, because it was kind of instinctive what came out, I said because I believe that the world is inherently unfair, that we come in with different advantages depending on where we're born, depending on our parents, depending on our advantages and our opportunities. We come in with different paths and that means that as we go along there's got to be some force, I believe, that creates a more levelled playing field. Because there is that inherent unfairness, we can't just assume that it's going to get fairer as we go through our lives.

So I got involved because I believe that government exists to make the world fairer, to make society fairer, to create more opportunities. So whether that's providing education or whether that's health care or whether it's the other things that we are doing that I want to talk about in minute as part of our plan, fundamentally I believe that we can always create more fairness. You know it is – and you know I – often I will say – and this is true, when I'm asked that question, "Why did you get involved in politics?" I will say because I was fighting for education, I was fighting for publically funded education and I'm reminded of – one of my kids, my middle daughter, when she was quite young and I was involved in the fight that many of us were involved in, somebody asked her what her mum did and she said she's a government fighter. That's what she does. Okay. I realized I needed to flesh that out a little bit for her but that was what she saw.

So that notion that we can always make the world fairer, we can always do better is kind of what drives me. And then I was thinking about us, and I was thinking about our values and who we are and I've been

talking a lot this summer, wherever I go, about our diverse caucus. You know we talk about our diversity being our strength and underneath that is why is that important? Why is it important that we have Joe Dickson who runs small businesses? And Lou Rinaldi – what is this, your 50th? 50th year of your business this year. Why is it important that we have Eric Hoskins and Shafiq Qaadri and Helena Jaczek who understand what it's like to sit with a patient and say either 'It's okay. You're going to be okay,' or 'It's really not going to be okay, but I've got your back.' Why is that important? Because the life experience that you all bring – and the fact that a third of us, a third of you, were not born in this country. That's really important. It's really important that Yasir Naqvi understands what it means to fight for democracy because his dad went to jail in a fight for democracy. So that diversity is not – that's not a slogan, that's a reality about us as a caucus and us as a government. And so that value system is what informs our plan, that value system is what informs who we are.

So I was thinking about that, and then I was thinking about the challenges that we're facing that are global. So the reality is that here we are in Ontario, in a place where we have about 13.5 million people, and we're experiencing the same buffeting that other jurisdictions are experiencing you know? There's lots of questions about what the future is going to hold. There are big, big global challenges that we're confronting. So we know that the planet is warming. There's no question about that. We know that the planet is warming. And you only have to go up to where I was in that canoe trip, to Rainy River. You only have to go the shores of James Bay where so many of you have been with David Zimmer. You only have to talk to people who are on the front line of the melting that's happening. You only have to talk to people who've had their communities flooded to know that the climate is changing. And so that is the biggest thing that we are confronting.

Technology, which we hold out as the answer to a lot of questions also raises a lot of questions. I think of technology as a double-edged sword. You know it is the answer to so many challenges and it displaces and raises questions about what people are going to do, what work is going to look like, and how we're going to manage that. So whether it's technology, whether it is climate or whether it's that fundamental question of how do we actually make our society more fair and provide more opportunity? How do we foster the growth in this particular economic moment? How do we foster the growth that is going to allow us to create that fairness and opportunity? It is very tempting, I think, for people to think that if we could just go back, if we could just go back to the way it was, if we could just create the conditions that – certainly as a baby boomer, if I think back to the – I can, to the sixties and the seventies, I was going to say the fifties but really, I was very little in the fifties so I don't have to say that.

But you know, it's tempting to think back to those days when everything was building. When there was so much going on and it was a different economic time. It was a different time in terms of the environment, and I mean that in the broadest sense, in the world. And there was a different sense of what the future was going to hold. And it's easy, I think, to go back and say we just need to recreate those conditions and that's not possible. It is naïve, it's not possible and I think it's dangerous because it takes our eye off the imperative of looking forward and recognizing that there are many, many young people who have lots of ideas about what the future is going to hold. They have lots of optimism about what's coming and we have got to listen to them, and we have got to understand what they are thinking and we've got to create the conditions for those young people to be able to be at their very, very best.

The same young kid said to me, after I talked about why I was in politics, he said, "I don't know how to be engaged." He said, "Where can I go to talk about what I think?" Because he said "I don't want to join a political party but I want to be able to talk about what I think," and it made me realize we've got to do better in creating those places for young people who maybe aren't in college or university, and they're not in the internship at Queen's Park, and they're not thinking politically. We need to create those places.

So we've got those challenges and there is uncertainty because of those challenges. When we talk about climate change and we talk about the economic uncertainty, those are big, big realities. But I believe they play out in people's lives and as I go out around the province I hear people talking about the realities in their lives that I think connect to those big uncertainties like 'What is my kid's job going to look like? Where are they going to end up? How am I going to make sure that they have some certainties in their futures? What am I going to do if I'm a 55-year-old and I don't have the job that I've had for 20 years, what am I going to do? What is it going to look like for me?' So those kinds of uncertainties play out in people's lives and that's what I heard.

So even though Ontario is doing really well, there are lots of people who, in their lives, do not feel that. They do not have that sense of well-being. So those big challenges are what we are confronting. And with our value system and the plan that we've got in place, we are tackling them head on. We are not afraid to tackle those challenges. So how are we going to provide better education and childcare? How are we going to make sure that our healthcare system is sustainable, and fundamentally, how are we going to foster growth so that there is more fairness and opportunity?

Well our plan is exactly designed to tackle those things. We've put the building blocks in place and they are exactly what we need to do in order to face those challenges. So whether it's a hundred thousand childcare spaces so that, you know, moms – because it is women who will benefit the most from those – have the opportunity to go to work or whether it's the more than 200,000 kids who are going to end up this fall, just in a couple of weeks, they are going to be at college or university and a large percentage of those kids would not be there if we hadn't put the free tuition in place. Just think about that.

Or whether it's, starting in January, parents being able to get free medication for their kids. They don't feel that yet but they will. It will make a huge difference to them. Or whether it's the Fair Hydro Plan, and I have to say, I have heard people who has said to me, "You know what? My bill's come down. I've seen it and it's helping me and my pocketbook."

Or whether it's the Fair Housing Plan to make sure that people have access to a place to live. It was interesting to me this morning to hear in the news how young people are saying "yeah, I still want to be able to buy a house." Of course they want to be able to buy a house. It was one of those things like, I don't think this is news. Yes, young people want to be able to buy a house, they want a place to live and that's what the Fair Housing Plan was about, was to create the conditions so that they could do that. \$15 an hour is about having a fairer society. That's what it's about. Because another of the big challenges that we're facing is that really, really rich people are getting a lot richer and people who are not really, really rich are not getting ahead and that gap is real and we have to confront it and the \$15 an hour minimum wage is part of confronting that gap; closing that gap.

So the overarching point that I want to make to all of is that, as I have travelled the province this summer and listened to people and talked to people and talked about the specific parts of our plan, it occurs to me that the big challenges that we are facing as a society are about making our society fairer, making Ontario a fairer place to live, and that the things we are going right now are designed to take that on. But even when all of the initiatives we've got in place are implemented, even when every young person can go to post-secondary regardless of their family's income, even when every kid can get free medication, even when we have enough home care for seniors, even when child care is available to everyone in the province, there will still be more to do.

There will still be more to do. We can't pretend that either we're there or when we finish implementing this plan we'll be there. There is more to do and that's what our value system will help us to discover. That's what our value system will drive us to do and so that's what we're going to talk about today and tomorrow as we come together now at the end of the summer. So I am thrilled to be back with all of you. I always feel in the summer that we stay connected in a way but that coming back together is so important so what we are here to talk about is creating that fairness, that opportunity. At the core of that is making sure that our economic growth does not ever ignore the need to create opportunity and growth. That is what this is about. That's what our plan is about and I look forward to working with you on it as we go forward. Thank you. Let's get to work!