

Transcript: Premier Wynne's Remarks and Availability at YWCA in Toronto (May 31, 2017)

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PREMIER WYNNE'S REMARKS AND AVAILABILITY AT YWCA IN TORONTO

Date: May 31, 2017
Length: 18:30 minutes
Speaker(s): Premier Kathleen Wynne

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Thank you very much, Kevin. And thank you to everyone who is here today, to the folks at the Y. Thank you very much. and Kevin and I had the opportunity to meet with (inaudible), all of whom are women who have a very close connection to people who are either earning the minimum wage currently or who are earning just above the minimum wage but are in that 30 per cent of people in Ontario who are working at below \$15 an hour. And they were very, very encouraging of the changes that we are making, and made it clear to both of us that this will make a huge difference in the lives of the people who they work with every day. And in many cases, in the lives of their family members, and would have made a difference in their lives. All of them come to this country and have experienced an uncertain workplace at one time or another. And so I just want to put in context what Kevin was talking about because I believe that government exists to help people face the challenges in their lives, to support them and to make our society as fair as it can be. I think that that's what government exists to do. And so as Kevin said, two years ago, we knew that there needed to be a good hard look at the changes that were happening in the workplace. And so we have come forward now with a plan that's based on the recommendations that that review brought forward. And beyond that, we recognize that the minimum wage needed to be updated. But all of that, so a plan for fair workplaces and better jobs is part of a broader plan for the Province of Ontario that includes, for example, free tuition for young people that will start this September. Young people who might not otherwise go to college or university, they will have access to free tuition and that's more than 200,000 students. It includes building 100,000 childcare spaces. It includes lowering people's electricity prices and in this latest budget that we've brought forward, providing free medication for children and young people from zero until their 25th birthday. All of those things are responsive to people's needs, but they are about building a strong economy. We're in competition with jurisdictions like New York, like Seattle, like San Francisco, that have already moved on some of the, some of the changes that we are making. And we are capable in Ontario of competing with the best in the world. And so we want to retain great talent. We want to bring great talent here. Businesses are growing. Ontario is leading economic growth in Canada and we want it to stay that way. And so building a stable economy and, as (inaudible) said this morning on the minimum wage, we need to start somewhere. And so making sure that businesses, yes have the supports that they need to be competitive like a low corporate tax rate, which they have, like a reduction in electricity prices, which small mom and pop businesses will see all over the province this summer, those supports need to be in place. At the same time, the people who go into

their stores, the people who buy the goods and services, need to be able to have a living wage. They need to be able to look after their families. That's good for those individuals in those families, but it's also good for the businesses in communities all over the province. So we're moving ahead to put in place the conditions that will increase the fairness in this province. That's what this is about. So we're happy to take your questions.

Q: Premier, the Progressive Conservative Leader said yesterday that he wouldn't commit to a \$15 minimum wage. (Inaudible) worried about job losses. I'm just wondering if you think that that \$15 minimum wage will be an election issue in the campaign that will end a year and a week from tomorrow?

PREMIER WYNNE: And how many hours? I think that fairness and a strong economy are absolutely going to be election issues because, as I said, government exists to put those conditions in place and to work to build a strong economy and build a fair economy. I, you know, I can only assume that Patrick Brown opposes the plan that we've brought forward. The Conservative Party has, has opposed every minimum wage increase that we've brought forward. And we've raised the minimum wage 10 times in this, in this province. So I can only assume that they don't support it. You'll have to check with him what his actual position is. But I make that assumption. Will a fair Ontario be an election issue? I hope so because that's why I'm in politics. I'm in politics to, to build fairness because the market's not going to do that alone. And that's why government has a responsibility to step up.

Q: (Inaudible) budget deficit (inaudible).

PREMIER WYNNE: So the FAO, I haven't, I haven't seen the full report, but my understanding is that the FAO has looked at our numbers and has said that a balanced budget is within reach. I know that he's looked at a different set of numbers. We have, we have made a decision around the treatment - I think it's the pension asset issue that you're raising - we accepted the Auditor-General's numbers in the Fall Economic Statement. We asked external experts to come in and give us advice. They gave us advice. And we are basing our projections on what, on what that panel of external experts brought forward. And we have brought in a balanced budget; first balanced budget in more than a...in almost a decade. And we were committed to balancing the budget through 2020. So that's, that's the, that's the position that we've put forward. And I think that, I think that the FAO, as I understand it, has described that situation and has described that that, that that's what we have put forward.

Q: A report from your own government in January 2014 talks about that increasing the minimum wage can actually have an adverse effect, especially on young people, teenagers included. (Inaudible) workers at or near the minimum wage may lose their jobs because of an employers' reduced demand for labour. We're here at the YMCA today. This is where a lot of young people hand out. And the Canadian...one of the organizations that has been, of course, criticizing this came out and (inaudible).

PREMIER WYNNE: So there are, there are lots of analyses, analyses about the the impact of this change. And we will continue to work with, work with businesses. (Inaudible) made an interesting point this morning. She said, 'you know, if people are working three jobs and they're working three jobs because they have to put together a living wage, if they then get a living wage in one of those jobs, they will actually vacate jobs that will be available to other people.' So I believe that a strong economy, a productive economy which is what we have in Ontario, is capable of absorbing this

change. Are there challenges for some small businesses? Absolutely, which is exactly why we've said that we will work with small businesses. You know, they are, as I said, the mom and pop businesses on Main Streets in this province are going to see a 25 per cent reduction in their electricity costs. We've said to them that we will work on regulatory burdens. We are already doing that. But there may be some other things that we can do. There may be business and administrative fees that we can look at. So we'll work with the Chamber of Commerce and with businesses to see if there's anything more that we can do to support them. But remember, businesses in Ontario already have a very, very favourable and competitive tax rate, if you look at other jurisdictions. That's why businesses come here; that's why they expand here. And we are going to continue to work with them. The bottom line is, however, that over the last number of years, we've seen some people in this province do very, very well. We've seen the economic growth has benefited some part of the population, but not all of the population. There are individuals, there are groups of families and individuals who are not feeling the benefit of the economic growth that we are seeing. And so that's why we need to step up as a government and make sure that we protect those people who are not seeing that, that growth and allow them to take part in the economic opportunity that that we have in Ontario.

Q: [Speaking French]

PREMIER WYNNE: [Speaking French]

Q: The FAO (inaudible) he says that because of (inaudible) balanced budget 2017/18 (inaudible) in part due to the (inaudible) one-time revenues, and I'm guessing that's the sale of Ontario Hydro. But he says there will be a steady, increasing deficit from there on out, as a result of this one-time (inaudible) hydro. So you are going to have a real tough time balancing your books down the way. So what are you going to sell off? How are you going to cut...what are you going to cut? You are going to have problem after this one.

PREMIER WYNNE: So, well, you know, as I said, he projects out a number of years. We project out a number of years that we're going to be able to balance the budget. And, obviously, we're going to work very hard to continue to grow the economy. We've done very well. We made some very tough decisions. When I came into office in 2013, we were still confronting a very large deficit in this province. We committed to balancing the budget in 2017-18. And you all know we made some very difficult decisions. The people of Ontario know we made difficult decisions in order to do that. And we made investments in the province, whether it's in infrastructure, whether it's in schools, whether it's in hospitals, education, health care, we made those investments in order to foster the kind of economic growth that we are actually seeing now. And so we're going to continue to work with all of our partners across the province to continue to grow the economy. And part of that is, as I said, having a productive, fair workplace. Part of it is making sure that as many young people as possible can go to postsecondary education. The number one reason that businesses come to Ontario...when I travel the world and I talk about business coming to Ontario, the number one reason that they come is our highly educated workforce. So making sure that we continue to invest in, in those advantages is exactly what we'll do over the next number of years.

Q: Premier, (inaudible) you don't have Ontario Hydro to contribute to the books to help balance the budget. So how are you (inaudible)?

PREMIER WYNNE: So if you look at, you look at the projections that we've made,

we've committed to, in the next four years we've committed to working with, with all of our partners. And we are we are on track to keep the budget balanced over the next number of years.

Q: (Inaudible) increase in the HST to fund municipal infrastructure.

PREMIER WYNNE: I beg pardon your pardon.

Q: AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, has put out a special paper advocating for a 1 per cent increase in the HST to pay for municipal infrastructure. You ruled out an HST increase in 2014. Has anything changed or is AMO wasting their breath?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, so let me just say that the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, OCIF, is just going - it's growing from a hundred million dollars to 300 million dollars over the next couple of years. So the municipalities that are members in AMO actually haven't seen the full benefit of that 300 million dollars. That's a permanent 300 million dollar fund that is mostly formula-based. So communities will see that infrastructure. They also haven't seen the benefit yet of the doubling of the gas tax, there are 100 - about 100 municipalities in Ontario that will see a doubling of their gas tax that will allow them to invest in transit. So there's a lot of support that we've got in place that hasn't actually fully been realized yet in Ontario. So we have a great working relationship with AMO. We'll continue to work with them. We know infrastructure is a challenge. But as I said we're increasing the funding to infrastructure as we speak.

Q: (Inaudible).

PREMIER WYNNE: You know what - that's not something that we have talked about. As I said, we've responded to municipalities' calls for infrastructure funding. And the money that we've put in place, the OCIF funding is going to grow to \$300 million by 2019. And the gas tax funding will also be \$300 million for those 99 municipalities - actually it'll be double that, it'll be double that. It's 300 million now, it'll be 600 million. Alan?

Q: It's been a few days that we haven't had a chance to ask you this. How do you feel about giant rubber duckies?

PREMIER WYNNE: I think the Minister has done a (inaudible) job responding to questions about that issue and there are going to be many, many festivals across the province, in communities all over the province to celebrate Ontario's 150th and Canada's 150th. And I look forward to attending many of those.

Q: (Inaudible) rubber duckies.

PREMIER WYNNE: The festivals...I know that, I know that's what you want me to say, but here is what I'm going to say. I believe that the festivals that we're investing in across the province are good for communities and people are going to have a great summer.

Q: [Speaking French]

PREMIER WYNNE: [Speaking French]

Q: [Speaking French]

PREMIER WYNNE: We had many plans though that were already in place. And so when I say implementation, this report was commissioned two years ago. We have free tuition that was already in place. So there's been the implementation of many of the things that we had started and we also had to respond to certain things.

PREMIER WYNNE: [Speaking French]

Q: Premier, you said the increase in minimum wage is going to be good overall for the economy (inaudible), why haven't you provided that cost-benefit analysis? Where's the economic evidence that this is actually going to be good?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, as I've said, there are reports and analyses on all sides of this issue, you know. And I understand that we need to continue to work with those experts, work with those business communities, and work with the advocates who have been providing us with information for years about the benefits of creating a fair workplace. So I'm confident that the objective of what we're doing, which is to give people an opportunity to get a decent wage in a workplace that is fair, that we will reach that objective. That's the point of this.

Q: One other thing, there's a lot of talk among Conservatives that they fear that you're going to call a snap election, which is kind of interesting given your poll numbers. If you actually caused an election in the fall ahead of their policy convention - they have no platform. Will you commit to sticking to the next election in June 7th next year?

PREMIER WYNNE: Yes. Thanks everybody, Merci.