

Transcript: Premier Wynne's Year-End Interview with Thunder Bay Radio

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PREMIER WYNNE'S INTERVIEW WITH THUNDER BAY RADIO

Date: December 20, 2016

Length: 13:10 minutes

Speaker(s): Premier Kathleen Wynne; Thunder Bay Radio

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: So, the commissioner of elections in Ontario Chief Electoral Officer is part of that process, and who, he facilitates the process. I believe that setting up a discussion around whether there should be one or two new ridings in the north was a good idea, specifically because of the size of the geography, Sherry. I think that it's hard to argue that that geography is as well-represented in southern Ontario as it as it should be and so we'll see what the commission says.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Precisely. I mean, it, you know, it does mean that there will be fewer people in those ridings than in some of the ridings in southern Ontario. But, the geography and the ability to, as you say, actually get to constituents and talk to them is just massive. And so, I think that there's a good, strong argument to be made and, as they say, we'll get advice from the commission.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Yeah there will be an opportunity for the public to have input and, as they say, Elections Ontario guides that process. OK.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: So, the infrastructure funding, and we're very happy that, you know, we've been able to work with the federal government and that those dollars will flow to municipalities. That is in the works right now and I think municipalities are engaged with the government on and getting those projects underway.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, it depends on the community. But, there are water and wastewater projects that are that are being built. There are transportation projects that are being built. And then the second tranche of funding from the federal government has not yet been finalized, but those initial projects were already on the books and some of them some of them have already started.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Yeah, we're waiting on the process for the second round of infrastructure dollars.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, the twinning of Highway 17 remains a priority. It's something that our

Ministry of Transportation is committed to. There are various components of that. There's a piece by the Manitoba border and then there's pieces farther east. But, we continue to work to get that work completed.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: So, in that Kenora section, there's been a discussion with the Indigenous people of Shoal Lake 39. You know, I was actually Minister of Transportation at the point where we were beginning those discussions. And part of the issue is, how do we make sure that the community part can partner with the government and with other municipalities to make sure that the training opportunities and the job opportunities benefit the community? So, that has been a discussion that hasn't concluded at this point.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, you know, Northwestern Ontario is a real priority for us. One of the things that I have talked with Mayor Canfield about repeatedly is bridge construction in Kenora and I had the opportunity this past summer to do a bit of a boat tour and to see some of the bridges from the water. They're so critical. And so my hope is that, as we move forward, there will be opportunities for those kinds of projects. I think as you mentioned the twinning of Highway 17. There are sections of that road that haven't been finalized for twinning and we need to continue to have that discussion. But, Minister Gravelle and in the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines has a good handle on the Northern Highways project and we continue to put hundreds of millions of dollars into northern highways and that will not stop in 2017.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, I think there are lessons to be learned from what happened with the Nipigon Bridge. I think that we need to take those lessons. I know that you Steven Del Duca the Minister of Transportation is very seriously looking at how do we ensure that, "A," we get that project completed in the best way possible, and then how do we make sure that in the contracting, in the oversight, that we put all of the all the protections in place.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, I know how important that transportation route is, so it was, I, yeah I remember waking up in the morning and thinking, "Oh my goodness, this, you know, we've got to get on this right away and how are we going to help people to move across the north." And so, that, and you know, if people in the south haven't been to the north and seen how vital that link is, it's harder to understand. But, I know that everybody has to travel that route. And so that's why the projects that we talked about earlier are so important.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Well that was one that was one of the first questions I asked the Minister of Transportation when this happened. You know what is the backup? And so as part of the follow up we have to make sure that we have those backups in place as we go forward.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: So I can't give you a date. What I can say to you is that you know I really am looking to the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services to come forward with a plan for the updating of the infrastructure in corrections. You know we need to know that the priority buildings and I'm pretty sure that Thunder Bay Jail is going to be very close to the top of that list. So I hope within the very next few months you know we will be having a change in the minister there because David Oraziotti has resigned. But there will be someone as a minister, permanent minister, very shortly and that is a very high priority for us.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Well again what we're looking to the Ministry for is a priority list because there are, there are some other facilities in the province that are, that are challenged as well. There have been new jails built but we know that there are still some replacements that need to happen and so my question to the ministry is how close to the top of the list is Thunder Bay or who is at the top of the list? And what's the plan going forward? So I'm not looking for that plan to come forward pretty soon.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Well right now Kevin Flynn who is our Minister of Labour and is a very capable minister is taking on the interim position. But it will be, it will be very soon that we'll announce a new minister. We had we didn't, we didn't have any advance notice of David Orazietti stepping down. We're going to miss him. He's a great minister. He's been a great member since 2003 but I completely understand that he needs to spend some time with his family. You know he's been pretty much away from home most weeks since his first child Olivia was three and he's never been, he's never been working close to home since Alexander, who is now 8, was born so I understand that he needs to be closer to his family. But we will be announcing his replacement very soon.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: January 1st, 8% will be coming off everyone's electricity bill. That's the provincial portion of the HST and that's for businesses and for individual residents. But we know that there's more that has to be done (inaudible). I mean that that will help somewhat. We also have the Ontario energy support program and I guess I would just say to people who are living on low income, if they haven't applied for the OESP, to do that through their local distribution company because there can be significant reductions in electricity bills for low income families from that program. So we'll continue to make changes. January 1st is the next one and we're going to be looking, Glenn Thibeault is a very strong minister who is advocating for the North you know as a northern member and that he will continue to look for ways to help people with their electricity costs.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: So a couple of things, particularly people in the north. On top of the 8% reduction for many people in more remote and rural areas they will be eligible for another 12% reduction. So a total of 20 per cent. And that's really that's really on their distribution charges. What I would say though is that we have made investments over the last decade to make sure that our electricity system is reliable. You know having an electricity system that means that you can't count on the lights going on, can't count on electricity, is not good for anyone. It's certainly not good anyone. It's certainly not good for people who are living in northern communities. And so the investments that we've made have had a cost associated with them. It means that we have better infrastructure, you know we've invested in more than 10,000 kilometers of line. We've shut down all the coal fired plants. So we've reduced greenhouse gas emissions, we've reduced pollution. We've got a more reliable system but there's been a cost associated with that and we're working very hard to find more ways to help people with their bills.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Well you know polls come and go. Our plan is in place to grow our economy. Ontario is leading the economic growth in the country. Our unemployment rate is below the national average but everybody in the province hasn't shared equally in that, in that growth. And I know that there are communities in the north that feel that they haven't shared in that economic growth and that they need more support. And I think that you know I want people to know that I recognize that and that we need to work together to make sure we make the right regional economic development decisions. The Northern Ontario Heritage Fund has helped many businesses across the north to get started, to expand. But we know that there is more that we need to do. And our plan, it was never about my personal popularity. You know it was about growing the economy and building

an inclusive Ontario and that's the work that we're engaged in.

THUNDER BAY RADIO: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: I just want to wish everyone a happy holiday. I hope people get some time to stand with their families over, over the next few days.