

Transcript: Premier's Avail at the International Plowing Match

From: "Dier-McComb, Becky (CAB)" <becky.dier-mccomb@ontario.ca>
To: "@CAB-QPscrums" <cab-qpscrums@cab.gov.on.ca>
Date: Tue, 20 Sep 2016 14:52:41 -0400
Attachments: 20160920 - Premier Wynne - Availability at the International Plowing Match in Minto.docx (26.65 kB)

PREMIER WYNNE - AVAILABILITY AT THE INTERNATIONAL PLOWING MATCH IN MINTO

Date: September 20, 2016

Length: 18:30 minutes

Speaker(s): Premier Kathleen Wynne; Jeff Leal, Minister of Agriculture

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Hi, everybody. Glad to see you here. And it is great to be here with our Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and our caucus team to join in on the...I guess it's the 99th plowing match. So next year will be a very big, very big event.

[Speaking French]

[Speaking English] We had an opportunity to do a bit of a walk around before the official opening and to talk to folks about, you know, the concerns that they are hearing or that the successes that they are having. This has been a challenging year in terms of the weather. But there are more and more challenging years and so it's really important that we have the support between government, and have the relationship between government and the farm community, and the food processing community to put in place the programs that allow them to deal with unpredictable weather. This year it is drought. Other years it can be flooding. And so we are working with the agriculture community. I used the example in my remarks of the risk-management program that we have in place and will be...some of the farmers that I talked to today will be working with us to assess the, assess the damage that has been done and to figure out how we can be supportive. But I also have heard the issues around electricity prices, you know. We know that, for example, greenhouses...one of the first conversations I had about electricity in my role as Premier was about reliability and capacity of the electricity system for greenhouses and the cost. And so, we're working on both fronts to make sure that we have a reliable system. And Jeff was talking to folks today about how, you know, we've had this very, very hot summer, but we haven't had brownouts, we haven't had blackouts. So we've got a reliable system and, at the same time, we recognize that there is a cost challenge. And so the changes that we're making, whether it's to the ICI program that will mean that businesses that are a megawatt or more will be able to tap into that program and be able to save up to 34 per cent of their cost. Or whether it's support for rural residential consumers who will see a 20 per cent reduction. We've heard those concerns and that's why we're making those changes. And the final thing I would just say is that, you know, I know that there are lots of people, not necessarily in a partisan way, but would like to drive wedges between rural and urban Ontario. And I think it's really important that we recognize how integrated we are, how important it is that we understand that we're dependent on each other. The food that is grown in or processed in rural Ontario is sold and eaten in urban communities. And so it's really important in our urban centres and our towns and cities that we recognize the Ontario Foodland logo, that we buy locally, and that's why we have a local food act in place, and it's why as part of our partnering with business we have a particular fund that is targeted at food processing. We recognize that integration of rural and urban. So I'm happy to answer your questions.

Q: [Speaking French]

PREMIER WYNNE: [Speaking French]

Q: Premier, as you noted during your speech, you got a bit of a mixed reaction...

PREMIER WYNNE: Yeah.

Q: ...when you talked about hydro and there was some booing from the crowd and some of us talked to some of the people that were booing in the crowd. So does that booing and does that reaction you were getting there mean that what you announced in the Throne Speech isn't enough? What is your take on that? (Inaudible) fed up or did you not do enough?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, I think...I mean the Throne Speech...so...again, I haven't had a chance to speak to every one of those people in the crowd and there were, you know, you're right, mixed reaction. I think that there are people who don't yet know whether they are going to qualify, whether they will get the reduction that we've talked about. Or they may not know that they may be eligible for a 20 per cent reduction. You know, our job is to make sure that everyone understands what they are eligible for and that they will have access. What we do know is that they will get the eight per cent reduction for sure and many of them will qualify for a 20 per cent reduction. But that is new information. Not everybody has that information yet. I think what is important is that we are working very hard to support people exactly where they are challenged. And we heard the concerns. As I said, we heard it from small businesses, we heard it from individuals, and we heard it from communities, rural communities. And so, that's why we are making the changes that we are making and it's our job now to make sure that people know that they are eligible and that they have the opportunity to understand exactly what that will mean on their bills.

Q: (Inaudible) With GM, were any promises or assurances made to the company in those talks in terms of assistance or (inaudible).

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, actually the Minister has been very clear that we are always ready to partner with businesses. We've worked with the auto sector consistently. And, in fact, right now the Ministry of Economic Development and Growth is in conversation with both GM and Unifor. So we are very much, we are very much involved and I'm thrilled, thrilled that there is a tentative agreement. I look forward to the vote on Sunday and I'm very, very pleased that we see a bright future for the auto industry in Oshawa and across the province.

Q: (inaudible)

PREMIER WYNNE: No. No, we're not. But it's a good thing you've asked. We've always operated with grants. We haven't engaged in loans, we've always been working with companies and there have been grants coming from the provincial government. But the nature of that, exactly what the conversation is, you know what, that needs to unfold in a confidential way, and I am—as again, I will say—I am just thrilled that we see this outcome between Unifor and GM.

Q: (inaudible) farmers talk about rate structures (inaudible) unlike in the cities (inaudible) heating chicken farms (inaudible) what do you say about people almost going bankrupt (inaudible) hydro bills (inaudible).

PREMIER WYNNE: So I'm going to let the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs because I know he's talking with these folks every day.

MINISTER JEFF LEAL: Just to let you know how strong the agricultural sector is in the province of Ontario, now contributes \$36.6 billion to Ontario's GDP. And some of the very entities you've just described are some of the fastest growing elements of Ontario's agriculture sector. I'm on large dairy farms, large chicken farms, and they're making crucial investments to expand their side of the industry and giving Ontario the opportunity to export beyond our borders. One of the things that's been helpful, that's been announced by our colleague Glenn Thibeault, the ICI program will now kick in for 1 megawatt of usage over a year. So I always like to explain things in plain Tim Hortons language, so if you were in Peterborough, Ontario, a large Tim Horton's in Peterborough, Ontario would use about 1 megawatt of electricity over a year. So, Minister Thibeault will be reaching out to our farm sector of course to make sure that they can take advantage of the improvements and

amendments to the ICI program. For a lot of farmers in Ontario that find themselves in the R2 distribution designation area, they will get the 8% HST removed and the extra 12%, because we recognise, we want to make our farm sector the most competitive in the world.

Q: (inaudible) energy (inaudible) reducing consumption (inaudible).

PREMIER WYNNE: So let's just—let's just look at the situation. What we have done is we've made some changes, we're in the process of making some changes because we heard from businesses, farms, greenhouses, individuals alike. So we will continue to work with, you heard the CEO of Hydro One talking about the changes that company is making, and we recognize that there needs to be an ongoing conversation with businesses and with residents across the province. But we're taking these actions. We'll have to, as I say, they haven't even come into effect yet, so we're going to have to work with folks to see what the impact is and where maybe there are situations where they're not able to take advantage of the changes. And I hear what you're saying about the peak and off-peak, I get that, and so we need to make sure that we understand the impact of the changes we've made. And if there are other structural things we have to do we need to have that conversation about what comes next.

MINISTER LEAL: Premier, if I could just respond. The initiative that was announced in the Throne Speech, was recognized as a great step by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Don McKay wrote a column about this. And we're very pleased that the Ontario Federation of Agriculture sees the benefits of the changes. And secondly, I can tell you from my ministry's perspective, we're getting inquiries each and every day for new food processing companies that want to come to Ontario, and part of it is because of our competitive tax rates right here in the province of Ontario.

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, and you know, I've travelled to India and China and Israel, and then most recently Mexico, and in every one of those jurisdictions we've had conversations about agriculture. And in fact, most recently in Mexico it was with a company that is looking, as Jeff says, in coming and siting their operation here in Ontario. So those are very, very hopeful signs when businesses are looking at the province. They're seeing the produce and they're seeing the business conditions, and they're saying, you know, this is a place we want to be.

Q: (inaudible) party and your personal polling aren't doing so well. How much of that has to do with (inaudible), I mean we are hearing a lot of anger.

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, you know, you'll have to ask the pollsters about that, you really will. What we're focused on is making sure that we address the concerns that people have in their lives. So I will start with the electricity prices because that's something that obviously is very topical and it's topical here, and it's something that we have addressed not just starting with the Throne Speech, but we worked to put in place the Ontario Energy Support Program, which is targeted at low and middle income families to give them the support that they needed. We took the debt retirement charge off people's bills. And we've gone farther now in the Throne Speech to reduce people's bills. But other things that people are concerned about. People are worried about being able to send their kids to post-secondary, and so we've completely changed the way tuition support is going to work in this province, so that low-income families, kids from low-income families, are going to be able to access – starting in September 2017 – they're going to be able to access grants that will be equal to or more than their value of tuition, which means that their tuition will be free. We have – we just announced in the Throne Speech, again, increase to child care spaces. I know from listening to young families that particularly in the 0-4 years, they can't find the child care that they need necessarily. And so, making that a priority is important. So we are working to tackle the issues that affect peoples' lives every single day, and that's on top of making sure that people have retirement security, making sure that we build the roads and the bridges and the transit that communities need to be able to thrive. And you know, we're standing in a field that is at the mercy of the weather in Ontario. And so we have a responsibility to work with the rest of the globe to tackle climate change. And as I said today, the people who are stewards of our land and who understand how nature works the best are indigenous people and farmers. And so working with them is really important as we go forward to tackle climate change.

Q: [Speaking French]

PREMIER WYNNE: [Speaking French] We just received the report – the latest report – on Grassy Narrows. Obviously we'll take a close look at it, but we recognize that there is a need to continue to look at the situation at Grassy Narrows. You know, it's why we put \$300,000 into a field study. It's why our Minister of Natural Resources – or Minister of Indigenous Relations and Minister of the Environment went to Grassy Narrows to meet with the community. So there are studies that are being done. You know, there isn't an easy solution. As I say, I haven't read the report but I understand from the press conference today that the expert who was speaking talked about the potential danger of dredging, and you know, how it isn't clear that dredging – I haven't heard exactly his words but there's a contentious discussion about how to actually get the mercury out of that river system, how to get it out of the food system, and so we need to work with the community to make sure as that work is done, there isn't further poisoning or further contamination of people in the community. So that has always been my objective since I was the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. And you know, the Ministry of Natural Resources has worked with the community and will continue to do so.

Q: (inaudible)

PREMIER WYNNE: I don't even know what Patrick Brown's latest stance on sex-ed is. He's going to have to figure out what he believes or doesn't believe. We've been very clear, very consistent, that kids need to be safe. We had a curriculum that had not been updated since 1988. It had to be updated. It's in the schools and kids will be more safe because they will have information that they need, given the modern world that they live in.

Q: (inaudible)

PREMIER WYNNE: You will have to ask Mr. Brown that question. You know where I stand on this. Okay, thanks everybody.

Q: (inaudible)

PREMIER WYNNE: I'm focused on supporting people in Ontario. I'm focused on, you know, growing our economy because if we can have – if we can continue on the trajectory that we're on – we're one of the leading jurisdictions in the country, you know. We have below average unemployment rate across – below the national average unemployment rate. We're seeing investment in the province. If we can continue on that trajectory, then people will be better off. And as a government, what we need to do is make sure that everyone shares in that prosperity. What the polls say and what the pundits say is fine, that's up to them, they're doing their jobs. I'm working to implement the plan that we ran on to make sure that it is done in a way that helps people in their lives and I will continue to do that. And you know, we'll see you in 2018, because you know, that's really, that's the poll and in the meantime, it's my job, it's my responsibility to not actually get drawn into that conversation. Because if I do that, then I'm not focused on what I should be focused on, which is making sure we make decisions that are going to help people. Okay, thanks everybody.

Q: (inaudible)

PREMIER WYNNE: My message to rural Ontario is that we're with you, we support you, we want to work with you to make sure that you have all of the tools to grow your communities to make sure that your communities are strong. And today I think we walk around this fair and we see prosperous businesses, we see businesses that are supporting the agriculture and the agri-foods sector. And we're very proud of the work they're doing, every single one of them. 740,000 people in the agri and agri-foods sector. It's an important part of our economy, an important part of our culture. Thanks everybody. Merci.