Today's News - Thursday, September 15, 2016

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Premier Kathleen Wynne was in Vaughan today to unveil details of the Ontario Rebate for Electricity Consumers Act, 2016. Ontario is proposing measures that would save families, farmers and small businesses eight per cent on their electricity bills and empower more businesses to shift their consumption away from peak periods to deliver savings directly to the consumer and the system as a whole. These measures would expand the Industrial Conservation Initiative (ICI), which encourages large energy users to lower consumption during peak periods. Reducing peak system usage improves reliability and lowers total costs. The ICI would be expanded to include all sectors while also lowering the threshold for participation. More than 300 businesses are already utilizing the ICI to achieve electricity savings, and with these changes, over 1,000 new businesses are estimated to be eligible. About five million consumers across Ontario would further benefit from the legislation and additional measures, as they would provide a permanent on-bill rebate for eight per cent, equal to the provincial portion of the HST, resulting in average savings of about $130 annually or $11 each month. Rural consumers would receive an additional benefit from decreasing rural delivery charges. Combined with the eight per cent rebate, this would mean average savings of $540 a year or $45 each month for eligible rural customers. These changes build on Ontario's ongoing commitment to reducing energy bills while maintaining reliability for all consumers. The province has:

- Reduced contract costs by $3.7 billion by renegotiating the Green Energy Investment Agreement
- Approved a plan by Ontario Power Generation to pursue ongoing operations of the Pickering nuclear generating stations, expected to save customers as much as $600 million
- Introduced the competitive Large Renewable Procurement process, annual renewable energy price reviews and revised procurement schedules, which are expected to reduce costs by a further $4.1 billion as compared to previous forecasts.

Creating the conditions for businesses to thrive is part of the government's economic plan to build Ontario up and deliver on its number-one priority to grow the economy and create jobs.

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Also today:

- Ontario is the first jurisdiction in Canada to provide the shingles vaccine free of charge, saving eligible seniors approximately $170 and helping them stay healthy. Starting today, the shingles vaccine will be available across the province for people 65 to 70 years of age. Minister of Health and Long-Term Care Eric Hoskins was joined by Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Dipika Damerla and MPP for Davenport Cristina Martins to make the announcement this afternoon. The government is investing $68 million over three years in order to publicly fund the vaccine, which will reduce the likelihood of Ontario seniors developing the painful infection, and reduce visits to emergency rooms and hospitals. Shingles, also known as herpes zoster, affects more than 42,000 people every year in Ontario and can cause complications such as loss of vision and debilitating nerve pain. Studies show that the vaccine is highly effective when seniors are vaccinated between the ages of 65 – 70, and this new program aligns with scientific and expert recommendations from Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization and Ontario's Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee on Immunization. Those who are eligible for the shingles vaccine should contact their primary care doctor or nurse practitioner to receive the vaccination. Expanding Ontario's publicly funded immunization program to help seniors stay healthy is part of the government's plan to build a better Ontario through its Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care.

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- **Ontario is offering production insurance to tender fruit growers who lose their trees so they can feel confident in growing their businesses while managing risks inherent to farming. Tender fruit trees now eligible for coverage include pear, plum, sweet and sour cherry, peach and nectarine. Tender fruit producers who buy production insurance can now claim compensation for the removal and replacement costs of trees that die as a result of specific risks covered by the plan. There is no additional cost for this new coverage. This will help Ontario tender fruit producers compete with producers in other Canadian provinces who already have access to tree loss coverage. Production insurance is part of a suite of business risk management programs designed to help farmers manage losses due to unforeseen events beyond their control such as weather, pests and disease. Production insurance plans also encourage greater innovation, profitability and job creation in the agri-food sector. Strengthening the agri-food industry is part of the government's economic plan to build Ontario up and deliver on its number-one priority to grow the economy and create jobs.**

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- **Ontario is making travel easier for families and businesses and creating jobs in eastern Ontario with a $93 million investment to improve highways, roads and bridges. There are 23 new construction projects underway in eastern Ontario this season, creating nearly 1,000 construction jobs. This includes repaving, repairing and replacing transportation infrastructure such as roads, bridges, noise walls and signs. As with all highway construction projects, drivers are reminded that speeding fines double in construction zones. Investing in infrastructure is part of the government's economic plan to build Ontario up and deliver on its number-one priority to grow the economy and create jobs.**

Our government's four-part economic plan to build Ontario up invests in people's talents and skills, including helping people get and create the jobs of the future by expanding access to high-quality college and university education. It includes making the largest infrastructure investment in Ontario's history —$160 billion over 12 years — part of which is our Moving Ontario Forward plan to build roads, transit and infrastructure. Our plan includes fostering a dynamic, supportive environment for business to thrive, including investing in a low-carbon economy driven by innovative, high-growth, export-oriented businesses. And it includes creating a secure retirement pension plan for workers to have the retirement they deserve.