

Transcript: Premier Wynne Remarks and Avail at the Hydro Announcement at J'adore Fine Cheese and Chocolate in Barrie (Mar 14)

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PREMIER WYNNE REMARKS AND AVAIL AT THE HYDRO ANNOUNCEMENT AT J'ADORE FINE CHEESE AND CHOCOLATE IN BARRIE

Date: March 14, 2017

Length: 14:56 minutes

Speaker(s): Premier Kathleen Wynne; Ann Hoggarth, Liberal MPP

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: So thank you Jesse and Bekki. It's really a pleasure to be here, It's a pleasure to be here with my colleague Ann Hoggarth, a local MPP and Brian [Inaudible]. Thank you very much. You're going to speak in a bit about Electra but I want to just say how -- what an honour it is to be in a business like this. Jesse and Bekki and your whole team, because you've got a great team including your mom upstairs who I know is -- she's hiding upstairs. But this is the kind of business that builds community you know, and the cheese and the chocolate is amazing. But this is about those 10 people who work with you now, those job creators that small businesses like this really are. And so it's really, really -- I want to just say congratulations to you for what you've done over the last three years and I know you've got great plans to have a patio and expand. So we want you to thrive. And so I, you know, I have spent a fair bit of time over the last -- more than a year listening to people, talking to people about the challenges that they're facing. You told me that your hydro bill is your second highest bill after your rent. And so -- and then you said every bill is a challenge for an entrepreneur when they come in. So what we've heard over the last number of

months and years is that there are challenges that are being faced by businesses like yours, by farms, like by residents who are seeing their hydro bills go up, go up at a rate that is too -- at a pace that's too fast for you to keep up with and too high. And so we, you know, we've done a number of things as you know and you talked about the 8 per cent reduction so that's something that is helping. We made decisions around taking costs out of the system like renegotiating contracts. But what we heard quite clearly was that that wasn't enough and that there was more that needed to be done in order for people, businesses and individuals to keep up with their electricity bills. And so we made a decision that we would put in place a significant reduction, an average of 25 per cent reduction off electricity bills that will come into place by the summer. And you were talking about the intricacies of air conditioning with cheese and chocolate and having to find just the right temperature. So we know that there are real challenges when you're running a business like this. So what we hope is that the 25 per cent reduction will help and that it will allow you a bit more flexibility so that your business can grow. There are other things and Ann was talking to you about other programs and so on that you may be able to tap into as well, in terms of efficiency. So we want to make sure that the conditions are in place for you to succeed, for you to thrive because of course it's good for you and your family and the people who work here. But it's good for Barrie, it's good for the community. I want to just spend just a moment talking about how we got here because I think it's important that we recognize that the reason that electricity prices have been going up as quickly as they have been and have gotten as high as they are is that we've made a lot of investments in the electricity system in Ontario. And so \$50 billion worth of investments to make sure we have a clean, reliable electricity grid which we have now and what has happened is that this generation is being asked to pay those costs. And what we determined was that we need to spread those costs over a longer period of time. So instead of a 20-year mortgage for example, we're looking at 30-years and asking the generation that comes next that will use the assets that we've invested in to also take part in paying for those. So that's how we're coming up with the average 25 per cent reduction. And you know we're-- in addition to that there are some people who live in more rural, more remote areas and with certain local distribution companies who are paying a disproportionately high distribution charge. In fact, InnPower is one of those that's paying high -- people are paying high distribution charges. We're going to tackle that as well and reduce those distribution charges because that can often be 50 per cent or more of a bill. And we also are expanding the program that supports low income consumers in Ontario. So all of those things together we're doing because we recognize that the changes that have been made are good for the air in Ontario, shutting down the coal-fired plants, rebuilding thousands of kilometers of transmission lines, jump-starting a renewable energy, that's meant that we have a clean, reliable electricity grid in Ontario. But it's also meant that there's a cost associated with it and so we're putting these reductions in place so that people can bear the cost of their electricity, their electricity usage. So thank you so much for having us here. It's a great example of a thriving business and wish you all the very best. And now I want to turn it over to Ann Hoggarth's who is the local member of provincial parliament and a strong and determined advocate for Barrie, just let me say.

Avail

PREMIER WYNNE: So just wrap up; so this is about fairness and as Ann said, this is not something that's going to happen one month and be undone the next month. We've made a commitment to keeping prices down at the rate of inflation for at least four years and working with LDCs, like Electra, we will see that happen across the province. So we're happy to take your questions.

Q: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Well you know, what we have done is we've tried a number of things to get electricity prices down. And as I said, what we heard clearly was it wasn't enough. And so we're stepping up to do more. You know my motivation here is to make sure that people who are having trouble putting food on the table for their kids or paying their rent or businesses that are struggling under high electricity rates, that they will see relief and people will make a judgment about whether it's enough and you know the politics of it, but for me it's about actually seeing those rates go down so that people are better off.

Q: Premier, do you see any way to turn around the anger that people are directing [Inaudible]. How are you going to turn that anger around [Inaudible]--

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, you know, people don't have their bills yet. You know they haven't seen the reduction yet, and all I can do in my role with my colleagues is listen to people and do the things that, based on the evidence, based on what we hear, we believe are the fair things to do. That's all I can do. And if it helps people in their day to day lives then that will mean it's a success. And what they, you know, what they feel about me or my popularity is actually beside the point. What's important is that they can pay their bills and they can look after their kids and they can run their businesses. That's what's important.

Q: And just to add I can tell you that people that call in to our office are [Inaudible] and what you're saying; we haven't heard that at all.

Q: Premier I know you're here to talk about relief but what [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, as I say, the election is more than a year off and we've been working on reducing electricity prices for some time now and again, there will always be a political context. I'm a politician, we're in elected office you know and that's the reality. But I can tell you, I'm going to be working every day up until the day of the election to make sure that we make decisions that are in the best interests of the people of the province. That's my job. That's what I was elected to do. And you know, I ran on a plan that was going to build this province up. You know I came and stood with Ann Hoggarth and we talked about the infrastructure and the GO trains that we're putting in place. We talked about post-secondary education. We talked about retirement security. And we have put those-- we put those pillars in place and so people will make their judgment based on all of the things that we've done. But this issue of electricity prices, this is a fairness issue. This is making sure that people don't have to disproportionately bear a burden that should be spread over a longer period of time. So that's why we're making this decision.

Q: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: So we, you know we know that there is more to be done and I will just make a comment on health funding in general. We know that there have been, you know really significant transformations that have happened in the health care system. There's more community service that is being provided. People want more care in their homes. At the same time we have to make sure that our hospitals have the support that they need. I've been to the hospital, I've been in the Royal Vic Hospital here and I know that there's fantastic work being done. We also know that the funding that we've given to hospitals in years; so they've had additional funding on top of what they saw through the budget. We know that there's more that they need in terms of being able to provide the service that people need because it's not just about home care, it's also about hospital care. So we are very cognizant of that as we go into the budget.

Q: So you're thinking of [Inaudible] relief for hospitals or [Inaudible]--

PREMIER WYNNE: So I'm talking generally. Yeah, I'm talking generally about support for hospitals and I think that there are, you know there are issues around their global budgets and so we're going to be looking at that as we go into the budget.

Q: [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean I-- I was saying yesterday, when I meet with groups of kids they ask me you know what's the hardest thing about your job? And there are two things I say. One is that there aren't enough hours in the day. I can't get to every small store and small business in Ontario and every resident you know. So that's-- but the big challenge is that people in their lives have intractable problems, you know, there are lots of issues that people deal with and we can't always resolve all of their problems but we can help. We can-- sometimes government can do something that has a real impact on people's lives and things like free tuition for kids living in

low-income, things like reducing people's electricity bills that will have an immediate impact on their lives and will significantly change their ability to balance their budgets and run their families. So yes absolutely these are the kinds of things that I see as fundamental and my responsibility.

Q: Premier you started talking about little kids but when you're thinking of those little kids are you not thinking about what they're going to have to pay? You're borrowing all this money; what some people are calling it a short-term [Inaudible]

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, what I said is that you know we talk about our kids and our grand-kids and I'm quite comfortable saying to my grand-kids who are seven and five and three, you know in order for mommy and daddy to be able to do the things that they want to be able to do with you now, that means that when you're their age, you're going to be paying a little bit too for this clean electricity grid that we have. I'm quite comfortable saying that to them because otherwise their parents are not able to care for them in the way that they want to.

PREMIER WYNNE: So you're okay with this short-term [Inaudible] next generation paying more?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well it's evening, right. It evens out the cost. And the reality is that in order to do big things in a province like Ontario, whether it's building roads, whether it's building transit, whether it's fixing the electricity grid, in order to do those big things we have to do it over a period of time. And one of the things that has happened in Ontario for decades I would say and this isn't a partisan comment because it's Liberal, NDP and Conservative governments. Those decisions have been pushed off because it's easier not to make those long-term decisions. You know it's easier for politicians not to have this conversation with you in the media because we just didn't do anything. And I wasn't willing-- I wasn't willing to do that. I wasn't willing to do it on retirement security. I wasn't willing to do it on infrastructure and I'm not willing to do it on electricity. It's got to be fair and it's got to be fair over time.

Q: Premier I know we're here to talk about hydro but [Inaudible] a lot of people want to know, two-way, all day GO train service. Transit in Ontario--

PREMIER WYNNE: It's coming. Ann is on it. Well the service is increasing and we're building up to it and Ann is definitely on it. [Inaudible]

ANN HOGGARTH, LIBERAL MPP: I mean I was just elected in 2014 and the plans all started just shortly before that. You can't put it all way, every day, two-way service in place in three years, and electrify the rail. It takes a while, and that will come. And we already now-- we have more service than we had. Plus we also have all weekend service as well. So a lot of people are very thrilled about that. And a lot of seniors are thrilled because they don't want to get in their car and go down the 400 to Toronto to visit their grandchildren or even over to Milton and places like that. They're quite, quite thrilled to do that. And--

Q: [Inaudible] timeline as to when we could see the plan? Your timeline [Inaudible]

MPP HOGGARTH: Well Minister Del Duca and I constantly are in conversation but it's on its way. I can't tell you when, but it will not come in one big plop, it will be gradual as it has been so far.

PREMIER WYNNE: Great. Thanks everybody. Thank you. Thank you.