

Transcript: Premier Wynne and Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson

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Energy related items are highlighted.

PREMIER WYNNE AND OTTAWA MAYOR JIM WATSON

March 6, 2017

Time / Location:

9:40 a.m. / Government Caucus Room, Legislature

Speakers:

Premier Wynne; Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson

Media Attendance:

Print – 8

TV – 9

Radio – 1

Media Outlets:

Jones – CP; Benzie – Star; Ferguson – Star; Jeffords – Sun; Smith Cross – QP Briefing; Nanji – QP Briefing; Crawley – CBC Radio/TV; Brulé – Radio Canada/CJBC; Qureshi – 680 News; Tumelty – City TV; Morissette – TFO; Cruickshank – iPolitics; McGrath – TVO.

Statements:

Premier Wynne: Hello everyone. Bonjour. So thank you all for being here and I want to just begin by – by thanking Mayor Watson. It's great to have you here Jim, Ottawa flags and all.

Watson: (inaudible) looks great.

Premier Wynne: So Mayor Watson and I had an opportunity to talk about a number of – of subjects. I – I talked to him about the realities of the electricity prices around the province and – and reinforced with him how we have heard from people all over the province, including in the Ottawa area, about their electricity prices and that the – the 25 per cent on average reduction that we're bringing forward is exactly to deal with the challenges. There also are people in the more rural communities around Ottawa who are dealing with distribution charges that are higher than – than people living in urban communities, and so that also is something that we've tackled in our – in our Fair Hydro Plan. So we talked about that. We talked about infrastructure, particularly the second phase of the LRT, which we are – we're committed to funding and we're working with Ottawa and with the federal government to make sure that all of the financing is in place and that we can move ahead expeditiously on that great project, and there were a couple of other bridge projects that we – that we talked about. And finally we talked about the opioid crisis, the fentanyl issue that – that so many people are grappling with across the country. Ottawa has actually developed a – a plan and Mayor Watson may want to say more about it but I want to just commend him and his public health department for the work that they have done. He's come forward with a plan with some investments that – that he'll be looking to us to support, to put some extra resources in place. There have been tragedies in Ottawa and recently a very – a very tragic death and so – so we are going to work with him to make sure that he has those resources to put his plan in place. I also suggested to Jim that in the face of this, that it might be very helpful if he would bring his strategy to a meeting of mayors from across the province who we will bring together to talk about what they are doing with – because there are – there are other communities – Toronto obviously one of them – but there are smaller communities also that are dealing with – with this issue, and so the work that Ottawa has done I think could inform a conversation about how we might as a province support local plans. We have a provincial plan in place and you know, the gathering of data and the tracking of – the tracking of usage, all of that is very, very important data. At the same time, we know that there will need to be local plans and so I commend Ottawa for developing their strategy and as I say, we'll call together mayors in the very near future and – and I hope Jim will be able to attend and we'll be able to talk about where the gaps are, where the local plans can dovetail with the – with the provincial plan. So, there are a number of issues we talked about, not the least of which was the calendar of events for the 150th. Jim Watson is – I would say – the number one booster of Canada 150 and kudos to Ottawa for all they've done to celebrate, and I look forward to coming to Ottawa for a number of events, but particularly on July 2nd I will be having a picnic lunch with Premier Couillard to celebrate Canada 150. So Jim it's great to have you here.

Watson: Great, thanks Premier. Well thank you very much Premier. Thank you for the plug for 2017, and the premier and her counterpart in Quebec will be having a picnic lunch on the Alexander bridge. Freshly-laid sod will be there and it's a beautiful view of our nation's capital and obviously the city of Gatineau on the other side. Let me just begin by thanking the premier for her hospitality and that of her ministers. We have a delegation of about 25 high-tech leaders that Sir Terry Matthews and I are leading to meet with key ministers dealing with the technology sector, autonomous vehicles, fifth-generation cellular service, and this is very important for us because sometimes we feel that we're a little far away from the centre of power here, and we every once in a while

we have to raise our flag – and you’ve done that for us today and we appreciate that very much. On the issue of LRT, the province was the first government to come to the table with phase two funding, which is a big deal for us. Our project phase one is on time and on budget. It opens mid-next-year, and we want to hit the ground running with phase two which will see the rail system go farther east, west and south. And several months ago, the premier was in Orleans in the east end announcing their contribution of approximately \$1.1 billion. And now we’re in negotiations with the federal government to see that partnership matched so we can get shovels in the ground shortly after the first phase of LRT opens up. With respect to the issue of the opioid crisis, it is a crisis throughout the country, and certainly we’ve seen some tragic deaths in the city of Ottawa in the recent past several weeks. This is an issue that B.C. has been grappling with for some time, and just last week or a week and a half ago, the Big City Mayors’ Caucus got together via conference call with Minister Philpott, the federal health minister, as well as Minister Goodale, the public safety minister, to talk about a national strategy. But we also need a provincial-municipal strategy, and that’s why I want to thank the premier for agreeing to call mayors together, of not just big cities, because there are smaller cities and smaller municipalities that are grappling with this terrible tragedy of young people becoming addicted, not having the necessary detox capacity or treatment facilities, and literally people dying every week in the province of Ontario. So I very much look forward to working with the province. We believe that we need to have a holistic approach that deals with both enforcement of drug laws as well as the treatment and the detox capacity in cities and communities around the province. And finally as I mentioned on 2017, this is a big deal for us. It’s part of our economic strategy at the city of Ottawa. Tourism is our third-largest industry. Government obviously is first. High-tech is second, and tourism is third. And

[Speaking French] certainly, for me, the 150th anniversary of Confederation is very important for not only our country but specifically the province of Ontario and the city of Ottawa, because tourism is very important for our future.

And we have a whole series of events from the – we just hosted Red Bull Crashed Ice. I was hoping to see the two Robs here from the Toronto Star, they could race each other. It was –

Unidentified: I read it was cold (inaudible).

Watson: It was very cold, the coldest day recorded in history of Ottawa, March 4th, so the ice didn’t melt, I’m very pleased to report that, but we also have the Juno awards coming up. We have the Grey Cup. And we’re working very hard to secure an NHL Outdoor Classic, which would commemorate the 100th anniversary of the very first NHL game between the Senators and the Canadiens. It took place in 1917. So I know that tourism is an important priority of your government and we were very pleased to receive a \$9-million contribution towards our 2017 celebrations and we thank you for that. Merci.

Wynne: Awesome. Merci. We’re happy to take your questions.

Media Questions:

O. Benzie: On Friday. (inaudible) interview on Metro Morning where you talked a lot about the (inaudible) the hydro plan to succeed because of your own political –

Premier Wynne: Well those are the questions. I –

Q. Benzie: So what I wanted to ask you was a) do you feel under the gun? I mean, is there kind of clock ticking, you know, to see if this plan is – is a success. Do you have a clock in your head (inaudible) kind of say, 'well if it's not a success by say June 1st when the House rises, then maybe I have to really think about that walk in – on the beach.' And if you don't, what's your message to the – to the folks who, you know, may be wanting to succeed you?

Premier Wynne: So two parts. The pressure on me around electricity prices in Ontario is about people who are struggling to pay their electricity bills. So the people that I've talked to, the people who I haven't talked to but who I know are worried about, you know, paying their rent, feeding their kids, being able to – to look after their families, look after themselves, they need this 25 per cent reduction. So for me what's critical right now is that we – we get this into people's hands, we get this onto their bills by the summer. So that's the pressure. That's the pressure on me. In terms of are there people who are waiting in the wings to – to run for leadership? It is extremely important in any organization, including a political party, that there are people who have the capacity to be the next leader, who would think about that. I think that succession planning is often not done well actually in – in political parties. I have a strong, loyal team. You know, we're a cohesive, cohesive group. And I look forward to working with them every day and if some of them are thinking one day they might want to be the leader, excellent. That will make them better MPPs, better ministers, and – and better constituency workers because they, you know, they take it to heart and they take it really seriously.

Q. Benzie: You don't feel like there's any usurpers in the midst or anything like that.

Wynne: No, I don't. I really – I honestly do not. As I say, we're a – we're a very strong team and you know, it's only right that there would be people at some point who would think, 'you know what? Maybe this is a job that – that I want to do.'

Q. Brulé: [Speaking French] Ottawa as a bilingual city, it seems that it will not happen for the 150th anniversary of Canada. Are you (inaudible) Ms. Wynne on a bilingual Ottawa? It seems that the main obstacle is the money – that is funding. Could the city – could the province help Ottawa?

Premier Wynne: [Speaking French] So you want – I mean that if the city council makes a request to the province in this sense, our government will support this – this approach. But for me, it's very important that the City of Ottawa make that decision. It is a decision for the council and for – for the people, for the people of – Ottawa.

Watson: Yes, well, a big surprise, the city of Ottawa is bilingual. A bill was passed in 2001 after the municipal amalgamation, which says the city is bilingual. We are also the only municipality in the province of Ontario that has a provincial law that requires our city to have a bilingualism policy, and we certainly provide all our services in French and English: translation during meetings; our website; I gave all my speeches in both official languages. So when I said that the city is bilingual, from time to time it is a surprise for – for – activists who ask for official bilingualism. The City of Ottawa is a bilingual city. We are very proud of that. And certainly my goal is to continue to improve services for residents who speak French and speak English in the capital.

Q. Brulé: Are you not afraid of a confrontation between francophones and anglophones, while francophones are asking for an officially-bilingual city?

Watson: But as I said, the question is, is the city bilingual, and I always said yes, the city

is bilingual. I have a copy of the bill, and it is on our web site. I spoke with many francophones. Francophones had the same priorities as anglophones: taxes, public transit –

Premier Wynne: electricity.

Watson: electricity, hydro, the environment, things like that. So certainly for me it's a priority to continue to improve services for francophones. I only gave one example. In our French services office in the City of Ottawa, we received 60 complaints against the city in one year. It is a population of almost one million people and we received only 60 complaints. My goal is next year there are fewer than 60 complaints for - for - for the francophone community.

Q: Jones: Premier, the Tories are asking the FAO to take a look at your hydro plan – will you be sharing costing documents with him, or better yet, the public via the media?

Premier Wynne: So, the FAO has already been briefed. And if there's more information that the FAO is looking for, then, obviously, we will work with him. But he, he has already had a briefing – a technical briefing – on the plan.

Q: Jones: Do you think that – you know, the Tories are saying that it's not quite clear where the \$25 billion in interest figure came from. It wasn't mentioned during the tech briefing. I don't think, or during the announcement. First we heard about it was when you mentioned it during question period. Do you think you've adequately laid out exactly how we will get to \$25 billion interest?

Premier Wynne: So, we can – we can go through that again. We can, we can bring more of that technical information forward. We have used, ah, assumptions about interest over the next number of years – decade. And those are, those are fairly conservative projections. So we've been very careful as we've laid out the – the plan. But, as I say, the FAO has been briefed. And it's very important to me that he have all the information that he wants.

Q. Nanji: (inaudible) Liberal counterparts are overtly coming up with ways to help, you know, (inaudible) do you think that's a good idea for you MPPs here?

Premier Wynne: Yeah, I saw, I saw something about that. I don't know what the specifics are, but certainly, if their – you know if their MPPs – any of their MPPs in the House who are, who are dealing with backlash, then obviously we will work to make sure that that there are protections put in place.

Q. Nanji: are you considering any formal ways of helping them?

Premier Wynne: Well, you know what, we haven't yet. And I haven't I haven't had a conversation with MPPs who are actually dealing with the backlash at this point, but if, if that is happening; then we'll certainly look at what we can do to put those protections in place.

Q. Crawley: Premier, we, we've spoken to the Attorney General about this we had a story this morning revealing that dozens of court cases have been stayed in the last few months because of unreasonable delays, in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision on what constitutes an – an unreasonable delay in terms of getting things to trial, and this is a huge issue in Ottawa. But it's also an issue in Toronto and in court houses around

the country. Is the province actually doing enough to – to – to deal with the backlog in the court system? I mean, this something that's been going on for years and years and years, you know. Under, under McGuinty there was supposed to be, you know, a justice on time initiative to get things going, and, you know, now you're facing so many court cases being –

Premier Wynne: Well, which is exactly why the attorney general has got a, has got a \$25 million plan to – to put more resources into the system. So, 13 more judges, 32 assistant crown attorneys; additional legal aid funding – so 16 duty council and 26 new court staff. So, so we're putting real resources in place to – to move these cases along. It is very worrisome that, ah, that, hum, the length of delay would be the reason cases would be thrown out of court and so, so we're putting real resources in place and we'll obviously be monitoring carefully whether that is enough to get these cases dealt with.

Q: Smith Cross: Premier, (inaudible) are you prepared to put out (inaudible) money to back the O-transit plan?

Premier Wynne: Well, you know, this is the conversation that Mayor Watson and I had this morning, that yes, we are prepared to work with him to, to fund their plan. I think that you've brought forward is about \$2.5 million – and, so we are, we're prepared to work to make sure that Ottawa has those resources. And it's also why, I – I think it's important to get a sense of what the what the need is among municipalities that are dealing with this – using, using some of the, some of the work that Ottawa has done as a starting point.

Q. Brulé: (in French) Mr. Watson, with regard to the opioid crisis, what you have asked from the province; and what do you expect to get?

Watson (in French) We discussed - our health department estimates it will need \$0.5 million to help the municipality. For instance, more space for detox; more space for treatment; money to provide firefighters and police with naloxone kits – that costs about \$150,000. So, there are specifics, but I think the suggestion that the Premier has given this morning about creating a task force with other municipalities and the ministry of the attorney general and the ministry of health, - to work with other ministries – to determine a program for the whole province. Because it's not an Ottawa specific problem – it's problem in small towns like Stratford, and other areas in the province.

Q. Ferguson: Premier, when are we gonna get details on the affordability fund under the hydro plan? Because, from what I understand last week, people will be able to get money from this plan without having to lay out huge amounts ranked first. So, I've had two queries from readers: will there be no cash layout required?

Premier Wynne: So that's – that's being worked out right now. And you'll see, you'll see more details in the coming weeks. It hasn't –

Q. Ferguson: (inaudible) you said –

Premier Wynne: It's a two-hundred, it's a \$200-million fund. So, yes, we've determined that, but exactly how it will break down – and remember, it is, it is in addition to the fund that's already in place for low income families; where they can, they can get, get dollars for retrofits and so on. This is, this is for people who don't qualify for that low-income – so it actually adds a whole population to the group of people who can get this kind of support. Will it be absolutely every dollar for every retrofit in every piece of technology? I can't answer that question at this point. So, that's just being developed right now.

Q: Tumelty: The OMB decision in your riding with school, with the condo your (inaudible) your thoughts?

Premier Wynne: So, I have, I have met with the school trustee; with the city councillor. I'm working to bring everyone together to find a solution. You know, there are a number of issues – the, the prime issue, though, is the safety of the kids as any building goes on – on that site. The reality is that something is gonna be built on that site – and so, how do we make sure that the kids are kept safe. One of the issues is whether the kids would be removed from the school or not. And that's something that is really problematic for, for families. – they're worried about that. And so, we're working to figure out together, how to make sure that kids are kept safe. That's the number one priority.

Q. Tumelty: (inaudible) criticism towards the OMB that they simply - some councillors that think that they simply rubber stamp whatever the developers want.

Premier Wynne: So, you know, I'm standing beside (laughs) a former minister of municipal affairs and housing – and we have brought changes forward, this government under the previous Premier – changes to the OMB, we're gonna go much farther. We're bringing, we're bringing forward more changes to the OMB that will put more decision-making power in the, in the hands of municipal councils. Because that's, that's where a lot of these decisions should be made. But having said that, there still will be official plans in place that will have density provisions in them and there, you know, there will still be building that will happen in communities around the province. And, so, there will still be situations – no matter what changes we bring to the OMB – where we have to make sure that we have the right protections in place for, for communities.

Q. Unidentified: Premier, following up on the condo - the proposed development – do you make phone calls to your constituents, and have conversations with –

Premier Wynne: I did. I, I have talked to a number of constituents – I've talked to a number of parents – and just so folks know, this is a school I know very, very well – my youngest child went to John Fisher. So, I'm very, very aware of, of this community. And, so I have talked to parents and – as I said – what we're trying to do is bring together everyone who's involved and find the best solutions for the kids at the school.

Q. Unidentified: Do you wanna see development on that property or what would you like to see?

Premier Wynne: I, I would like to see, ah, I'd like to see this neighbourhood – this north Toronto neighbourhood continue to be a thriving, vital neighbourhood. And, at the same time, make sure that kids are kept safe at all times.

Q. McGrath: Premier, your government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars widening highways both in the GTA and in Ottawa. (inaudible) Over the weekend, your minister of the environment seemed to acknowledge not only do these policies not work, they actually cannot work. Why continue pursuing policies that are failing?

Premier Wynne: As in, the widening of highways?

Q. Premier Wynne: Widening highways is never going to cure congestion – the minister of the environment acknowledged that this weekend.

Premier Wynne: There are many different reasons for widening highways – if you talk about the widening of the highways in the north – those are safety concerns, you know, where you've had two lane highways in the past and are parts of those highways that are incredibly unsafe – if we think about highway 17 across the north, you know, that's a major, major transportation route for goods and people – so –

Q. McGrath: (inaudible) we're talking about congestion –

Premier Wynne: Yeah, well, you know, we're also putting billions of dollars into transit – so we're doing both. And, where it makes sense; where there's a, where there's a bottleneck that needs to be dealt with, then the solution may be to – to change a road. But, but, the overarching investment that we're making in Ottawa, is in transit. And I'm sure all of my ministers would agree that transit solutions do reduce congestion. Thanks everybody. Merci.

N.B.: Comments captured are not verbatim quotes