

Transcript: Premier's Remarks and Avail on Throne Speech

From: Energy In The News (ENERGY) <energynews@ontario.ca>
To: "@ENERGY-COMM-Issues_and_MediaRelations" <mei-comm-issues_and_mediarelations@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "Adi, Sana (ENERGY)" <sana.adi@ontario.ca>, Alexandra Campbell (IESO) <alexandra.campbell@ieso.ca>, "Armstrong, Hillary (ENERGY)" <hillary.armstrong@ontario.ca>, "Berg, Denna (ENERGY)" <denna.berg@ontario.ca>, "Carson, Cheryl (ENERGY/MEDEI/MRI)" <cheryl.carson@ontario.ca>, "Cayley, Daniel (ENERGY)" <daniel.cayley@ontario.ca>, "Chaput, Kaitlin (ENERGY)" <kaitlin.chaput@ontario.ca>, "Cindric, Christina (ENERGY)" <christina.cindric@ontario.ca>, "Coker, Meaghan (ENERGY)" <meaghan.coker@ontario.ca>, Darren Matsugu (IESO) <darren.matsugu@ieso.ca>, "Diamond, Alyssa (ENERGY)" <alyssa.diamond@ontario.ca>, "Dier, Kirby (ENERGY)" <kirby.dier@ontario.ca>, Donna Kinapen (OEB) <donna.kinapen@ontarioenergyboard.ca>, "Esdaile, Trevor (ENERGY)" <trevor.esdaile@ontario.ca>, "Feather, Adam (ENERGY)" <adam.feather@ontario.ca>, "Flannery, Catherine (ENERGY)" <catherine.flannery@ontario.ca>, "Gibbs, Diana (ENERGY)" <diana.gibbs@ontario.ca>, "Hill, Allyson (ENERGY)" <allyson.hill@ontario.ca>, "Ho, Larissa (ENERGY)" <larissa.ho@ontario.ca>, "Hume, Steen (ENERGY)" <steen.hume@ontario.ca>, "Imbrogno, Serge (ENERGY)" <serge.imbrogno@ontario.ca>, John Bozzo (OEB) <john.bozzo@ontarioenergyboard.ca>, John Cannella (IESO) <john.cannella@ieso.ca>, "Johnson, Paul (ENERGY/MEDEI/MRI)" <paul.johnson3@ontario.ca>, Jordan Penic (IESO) <jordan.penic@ieso.ca>, "Kacaba, Jennifer (ENERGY/MEDEI/MRI)" <jennifer.kacaba@ontario.ca>, Karen Evans (OEB) <karen.evans@ontarioenergyboard.ca>, "Katona, Keley (ENERGY)" <keley.katona@ontario.ca>, "Kitchen, Matthew (ENERGY)" <matthew.kitchen@ontario.ca>, "Landmann, Peter (ENERGY/MEDEI/MRI)" <peter.landmann@ontario.ca>, "Latto-Hall, Arla (ENERGY)" <arla.latto-hall@ontario.ca>, "Lazakis, Chloe (ENERGY)" <chloe.lazakis@ontario.ca>, "Leung, Thomas (ENERGY)" <thomas.leung@ontario.ca>, "Lina Buccilli (Lina.Buccilli@ontarioenergyboard.ca)" <lina.buccilli@ontarioenergyboard.ca>, "Lindsay, Ken (ENERGY)" <ken.lindsay@ontario.ca>, "Linington, Brenda (ENERGY/MEDEI/MRI)" <brenda.linington@ontario.ca>, "Lyon, Sam (ENERGY)" <sam.lyon@ontario.ca>, "Major, Candace (ENERGY)" <candace.major@ontario.ca>, Mary Bernard (IESO) <mary.bernard@ieso.ca>, "Moulton, Dan (ENERGY)" <dan.moulton@ontario.ca>, "Naveed, Fatima (ENERGY)" <som.fatima.naveed@ontario.ca>, Neal Kelly (OPG) <neal.kelly@opg.com>, "Nelms, Scott (ENERGY)" <scott.nelms@ontario.ca>, "Nutter, George (ENERGY)" <george.nutter@ontario.ca>, "O'Donnell, Cheryl (ENERGY)" <som.cheryl.o'donnell@ontario.ca>, "O'Riordan, Eamon (ENERGY)" <eamon.o'riordan@ontario.ca>, Paul Crawford (OEB) <paul.crawford@ontarioenergyboard.ca>, "Pelkey, Bryan (ENERGY)" <bryan.pelkey@ontario.ca>, "Pitkeathly, Doreen (ENERGY)" <doreen.pitkeathly@ontario.ca>, "Poirier, Linda (ENERGY)" <linda.poirier@ontario.ca>, "Ramcharran, Shanice (ENERGY)" <som.shanice.ramcharran@ontario.ca>, "Rehob, James (ENERGY/MEDEI/MRI)" <james.rehob@ontario.ca>, "Reid, Michael (ENERGY)" <michael.reid@ontario.ca>, Richard Mackie (OPG) <richard.mackie@opg.com>,

"Ruttan, Craig (ENERGY)" <craig.ruttan@ontario.ca>, Sandra <sandra.dykxhoorn@opg.com>, "Sermat-Harding, Kaili (ENERGY)" <kaili.sermat-harding@ontario.ca>, "Shear, Dan (ENERGY/MEDEI/MRI)" <dan.shear@ontario.ca>, "Simmons, Valerie (ENERGY)" <valerie.simmons@ontario.ca>, "Spence Lair, Marlo (ENERGY)" <marlo.spencelair@ontario.ca>, "Spence, Marcia (ENERGY)" <marcia.spence@ontario.ca>, "Stoiko, Andrea (ENERGY)" <andrea.stoiko@ontario.ca>, "Sweet, Edward (ENERGY)" <edward.sweet@ontario.ca>, "Syed, Usman (ENERGY)" <usman.syed@ontario.ca>, Sylvia Kovesfalvi <sylvia.kovesfalvi@ontarioenergyboard.ca>, Ted Gruetzner (OPG) <ted.gruetzner@opg.com>, "Teliszewsky, Andrew (ENERGY)" <andrew.teliszewsky@ontario.ca>, "Thompson, Erin (ENERGY)" <erin.thompson@ontario.ca>, "Todd, Brian (ENERGY/MEDEI/MRI)" <brian.todd@ontario.ca>, Tom Bergen (OPG) <tom.bergen@opg.com>, Vanda Wall (OEB) <vanda.wall@ontarioenergyboard.ca>, "Visheau, Vanessa (ENERGY)" <vanessa.visheau@ontario.ca>, "Waddell, Colleen (ENERGY)" <colleen.waddell@ontario.ca>, "Whittington, Matt (ENERGY)" <matt.whittington@ontario.ca>, "Whytock, John (ENERGY)" <john.whytock@ontario.ca>, "Wright, Lindsay (ENERGY)" <lindsay.wright@ontario.ca>, "Xavier, Katrina (ENERGY)" <katrina.xavier@ontario.ca>, "Yadav, Saurabh (ENERGY)" <saurabh.yadav@ontario.ca>

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Energy content highlighted.

PREMIER WYNNE'S REMARKS AND AVAIL ON THRONE SPEECH

Date: September 13, 2016

Length: 18 minutes

Speaker(s): Premier Kathleen Wynne

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Thanks everybody for being here. I just had an opportunity to speak in the Legislature, and I talked about choices – choices that our government has made. And thanked the Lieutenant Governor for reading a speech for the Throne yesterday.

(in French) The speech announced our government's priorities and shows our determination to create progress in Ontario, thanks to a balanced plan that will benefit everyone.

The economic growth that Ontario is demonstrating reflects the choices that we have made as a government and reflects the fair and balanced plan that we have put in place; that we are implementing to build the province up. And we've made choices not to cut services or to tax the middle class. We've made choices instead to make investments whether it's in new schools, hospitals, roads, bridges or people's talent and skills. But those are the choices that improve people's quality of life and allow everyone to share in the prosperity of this province. **We've made choices to put, put in place cleaner air and reliable electricity.** We've made choices to make sure that we have a competitive business environment by partnering with business; by cutting red tape and by putting in place the conditions that allow businesses to thrive.

(in French) Our main priority remains job creation and economic growth so that everyone can benefit and prosper from our initiatives.

We're leading in jobs and growth, across the country our economic growth is leading. We have created more than 600,000 jobs since the recession. Next year we will have a balanced budget in place and jobs and economic growth remain our first priority. What that means is that we can make more choices that help people in their everyday lives and that has been – since I've been the Premier – has been the fundamental mission of our government and we will continue to take our cues from the people who we serve. And so there's been some notion that the Throne Speech came out of one by-election. That's simply not the case. The fact is that we've been working on this for months, but it is – it's a natural extension of the work that we've been doing for the last two years. It's a natural extension of the plan that we ran on in 2014, and that we have been implementing. So what we have done is we've extended that, we're now committing to build 100,000 more licensed child care spaces; 5,000 kilometres of road; 350 kilometres of new rapid transit; 18 more new hospitals; and all of those things are things that will help people in their day-to-day lives. We've also committed to removing the provincial portion of the HST off electricity prices; helping rural and remote consumers to deal with distribution charges; and to help businesses, more businesses, smaller businesses, to benefit from conservation initiatives that will allow them to save up to 30 per cent of their electricity prices. So we've been listening to people for the whole time as we've been developing policy, as we put our plan in place. We continue to listen to people across the province, and that was – that was reflected in the Throne Speech yesterday. So I look forward to a new session and I look forward to getting on with the business of improving and building up this province that we love.

Q: (in French) There was nothing the speech for Francophones. There should have been something on a Francophone university, on the law for Francophone Services for example. But not a word. What do you say to them?

PREMIER WYNNE: (in French) All the initiatives in the speech are for all Ontarians. And it was not possible to have all initiatives for ministries in the speech. In the coming weeks, we will have an opportunity to read the mandate letters and in those letters, we will see all the initiative from all ministries. But I want to repeat that all the initiatives for hydro, child care and health are for all Ontarians, including Francophones.

Q: (in French) But high hydro rates are not new; a lack of child care spaces is not new; you say there is no link to the by-election but what is this about? Why is after 13 years as a government, you are finally addressing high hydro rates? You are finally addressing the lack of child care spaces?

PREMIER WYNNE: (in English) Just to make sure that I am getting it. You are saying these are not new issues; there has been a concern about child care and electricity.

Q: (in French) Why now and you say it has nothing to do with the by-election loss?

PREMIER WYNNE: (in French) But we have created day care spaces, 56,000 so far but we need another 100,000 spaces. We have made changes to hydro. For example the Ontario Energy Support Program for Ontarians with low income.

PREMIER WYNNE: (in English) So we have made changes, we know this is a concern. What we said yesterday in the throne speech is simply an extension of changes that we have already made.

Q: Premier on another subject. The former deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan who is leading the federal task force on marijuana legalization is now saying that the federal government should probably go slowly. You have been saying that you would like them to expedite things because we are in this grey area and there are these illegal dispensaries all over the city, all over the province. I was just wondering how do we reconcile what she is saying that there are so many hoops to go through, health, legal and so on, societal. I was just wondering where you are guys are at right now. We have not talked to you about that in a while.

PREMIER WYNNE: Well I understand the competing interests. I think what we need as provincial governments is that we just need some clarity like how long is this going to take? And it is up to the federal government to get this right. I know there are a lot of issues that have to be addressed. But we just need clarity of what the timeline is going to be.

Q: So you would like it sooner rather than later. You don't want to be fighting an election in 2018 when legalization is still (inaudible).

PREMIER WYNNE: I would like some clarity on what the process is going to be, so certainly in light of these comments we will be having a conversation with the federal government about exactly what their timeline is so we know what to expect.

Q: Your promises on hydro rebates and childcare as announced yesterday are going to add up to billions in extra spending, and yet you still say you are going to achieve balance. How?

PREMIER WYNNE: So, public accounts will come out in the coming days and what people will be able to see is that the economic growth that has happened – I mean, we have had 6 per cent growth over the last two years, we are projecting 2.5 to 3 per cent growth over the next couple of years. So we actually have been able to see those results because of the investments that we have made, because of those choices that I talked about and so we are in a position to take further steps on both of these fronts. As I have said, we have already created 56,000 new childcare spaces but we know that there is a need for more. We have already made changes in terms of the Ontario Energy Support Program for low income Ontarians. We have taken the debt retirement charge off of electricity bills, but we know that there is more that needs to be done. And because of the success that we are seeing in the economic growth, we are able to make further investments to support people.

Q: We know cuts are needed as a result of this, these extra billions are all found just because –

PREMIER WYNNE: This is not about making cuts. It is always about making choices. That was the point that I was making today in my remarks in the legislature, is that governing is about making choices but we know that at this point, only 20 per cent of families with kids between 0 and 3 have access to affordable licensed childcare and that is not good enough. We need to increase those numbers and so that is related, for example, to closing the gender wage gap, you know. So if we are interested in a playing field that is equitable for men and women, we need to recognize that childcare is part of that equation. So again, that is a choice. It is a social choice because it is a service that is needed by families, but it is also an economic choice because if we can have everyone able to take part in the economy, whether you are a man or woman, that is going to help the economy to thrive.

Q: [inaudible] while you may achieve balance next year, we are going right back into deficits the year after and subsequent years. So when you put a billion dollars into the hydro bills, it might balance next year, but you have also committed about \$3.75 billion to daycare over five years. [inaudible] We are going to have to be borrowing money to pay for these programs.

PREMIER WYNNE: That is absolutely not the intention and we are going to work with the childcare sector, we are going to work with childcare providers and with parents and people who are on the ground to figure out how we do this in the best way. It is about 100,000 childcare spaces, but it is also about the range of services that people want and need for their young kids. I think we have done a very good job on – from 4 years old through post-secondary with full day junior and senior kindergarten, but those 0 to 3 years we have not paid, in my opinion, as much attention as we need to. So I am really looking forward to the work that Minister Naidoo-Harris is going to be able to do with people who are experts in the field, who understand what the possibilities are. And I think it goes back to the choices that we make as government. We have been very clear that the economic growth of this province is dependent on a whole bunch of factors. It is dependent on having the right infrastructure, it is dependent on having partnerships with business, but it is also dependent on having everybody at their best and able to take part, whether that means having post-secondary education or whether it means being able to go back to work with a baby. So that is why we are making this choice at this point.

Q: These plans seemed to be stretched over a long period of time. So basically, the childcare spaces, the bulk of it comes after the 2018 election. A lot of the stuff that is going to come in the climate plan and the sort of popular, consumer friendly stuff like giving people rebates to retrofit their houses – a lot of that will be rolled out largely after the 2018 election. So you are sort of setting this up as a platform to run on, say, you have got to re-elect Kathleen Wynne or you are not going to get your childcare space, you are not going to get your rebate?

PREMIER WYNNE: So, just to be clear, there is already money going into the system to help people to retrofit their homes because we put in place a down payment, as you know, on the cap and trade revenue, so that is already starting to happen. The development of the childcare spaces will start next year, 2017. But, am I interested in bringing in policies that are long term, that are going to benefit people that are not necessarily able to fit within an election cycle? Yes, because I do not believe that the important questions facing us as a society can fit within four year election cycles. We brought in a plan in 2014 that had very long term decisions in it in terms of retirement security, tackling climate change, making investments in education that are very much for the long term, building projects across the province that, some of them will take 5, 6, 7 years even to complete. So I think that is what government exists to do, is to actually make decisions that are going to benefit people into the future and are going to lay the groundwork for immediate prosperity but for future prosperity as well.

Q: (in French) You are already in election mode. You are preparing for the next election.

PREMIER WYNNE: I am in implementation-of-a-plan mode. For me, it's the point of our decision, our choice because we need daycare spaces: we need help for (in English) electricity bills (in French) and (in English) it's about making decisions that are going to help people now and you know the interpretation of whether we're in election mode or not, I'll leave that to you guys.

Q: (in French) Francophones have been waiting for a long time for an announcement on the franco-Ontarian university file. It seems like the file isn't advancing. Why?

PREMIER WYNNE: Okay you know what, I didn't get that.

Q: The French university [Inaudible] for something, an announcement—

PREMIER WYNNE: (in French) So we have worked with the francophonie to (inaudible) Glendon College for example, and we are working to ensure that francophone students have access to programs in French, and this conversation on a building is ongoing now.

Q: Patrick Brown says that he didn't know that a letter was going out – the sex education letter was going out in the Scarborough—Rouge River by-election even though it is signed by him. Thirteen-thousand copies were printed in English and in Chinese. He says he didn't know but his Chief of Staff knew and the President of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario knew; do you believe him?

PREMIER WYNNE: So I think that Patrick Brown has a lot to sort out in terms of what did or didn't happen. I'm also confident you guys have got that covered in terms of asking him questions so I'm going to leave that to you. For me what's important is that I have been completely consistent on the need for an upgraded sex education curriculum in this province. I was Minister of Education when the curriculum was developed. We have talked to thousands of parents and experts across the province. What we know is that kids need to be safe. They need information to keep them safe in this world where they can get information from all manner of sources that 20 years ago they couldn't get. So it's very important to me that we continue the implementation. As for the politics around Patrick Brown; he's got his own issues to sort out about what he believes or doesn't believe.

Q: Structural question – we asked Andrea Horwath this at one point Friday and she said that in her office the president of the party and her Chief of Staff don't put things out in her name that she doesn't know about. I know you have a lot more mailings that go out but presumably on a policy change, if the Liberal government is making a U-turn or a flip-flop which you are prone to do both of course—

PREMIER WYNNE: You mean an evolution of thinking?

Q: [Inaudible] and the party president, do Andrew and Vince get together and just do something and just sign your name without you knowing? Could that happen?

PREMIER WYNNE: When there's a major change in our office or when there's a policy decision I know about that decision and I authorize it or not. Thanks very much everybody—

Q: [Inaudible] was there a tipping point on the hydro rebate. Was there some moment where, you know, a light bulb went on over your head and you thought we got to do this? You know where did you reach that conclusion? Was it on your Northern Ontario? Was it--

PREMIER WYNNE: No I think that—no. I mean we've been hearing about this for some time which is why we put the Ontario Energy Support Program in place; it's why we removed the debt retirement charge from peoples' bills. So you know we've been working to deal with electricity prices for some time. We just—we got, you know, we understood that it was not enough and that did not come this summer because we've been working on getting a throne speech in place for many months and this was part of it. How can we take the next step in helping people to deal with electricity prices, and again, it wasn't the result of one particular conversation; we had already been trying to find different ways of doing this. And remember this isn't just about taking the provincial portion of the HST off electricity prices; it's also about more businesses having access to the ICI. It's also about the distribution rates for rural and remote communities where you know some of those costs are the highest on their bill. So we've been working to put that package together because we knew that there were different needs in different parts of the province. So

that's how we got to the throne speech yesterday.

Q: [Inaudible] months ago you had to abolish the Clean Energy Benefit and then you're basically bringing a similar thing policy back under a different name. How is this not a massive U-turn?

PREMIER WYNNE: But remember when—okay but remember when the Ontario Clean Energy Benefit was removed, we put in place the Ontario Energy Support Program. So there was a recognition at that time that there needed to be a targeted response to people with low income having challenges with their electricity bills. So this is a progressive process and we have established that there was more that needed to be done and these are the things that we've put in place in addition to the changes that we had already made. Thank you everybody. Merci.