
101.5 THE WOLF INTERVIEW WITH PREMIER WYNNE

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HOST: We have been talking about this. Hydro has been on the people's mind in Ontario. The cost of it has been for a long-time and yesterday Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne made an announcement and Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne joining us this morning. Good morning Premier, thanks for joining us.

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Good morning Brian. Good morning Taylor.

HOST: So the cost of hydro in Ontario; it has been a big issue for your government, for the folks in this province and yesterday you announced Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan. Before we get into a couple of questions give us the Coles Notes on what you discussed yesterday.

PREMIER WYNNE: So what we discussed yesterday was that people from around the province have said to me and to us, to members of my government, everything that you've done has not been enough. So even you know the 8 percent reduction that people saw on their bills as of January, not enough. People are still struggling to pay their bills and they need relief now. They need it to go to everyone and they need it to last. You know they need relief not to be put in place this month and be gone in a few months or even a year. They need it to last. So that's the plan that we've brought forward which will take on average 25 percent off people's bills by the summer and people who live in more rural and remote communities they'll see an additional reduction because we're going to take costs off their distribution charges.

HOST 2: Okay, so one of the biggest questions that we're seeing from a lot of our listeners posting on our Facebook and Twitter pages is this is a major issue why exactly did it take so long to address this issue? Why did it take so long to get things started?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well that's a that's a good question. And as I said, we've been trying to make some changes and what we what we got to at the end of last year was that with all the changes that we've made it still wasn't enough. And so that's why we're making a more dramatic, a more fundamental change because the changes that we had made weren't addressing some of the fundamental structural issues that people were facing. And so for example we've made billions of dollars of investment in a system that was really degraded you know. And this isn't a partisan comment but NDP governments, Liberal governments, Conservative governments had not made the investments over the last 40 years that needed to be made. We've made those investments. We've got to pay for them. We're going to stretch the costs of those payments over a longer period of time. That's a structural change and it will allow us to reduce people's bills in the immediate term.

HOST: Yeah but to that point - again we're speaking with Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne - is this not just kind of a four-year band-aid solution? I mean this is going to push costs to future generations; it could be billions of dollars.

PREMIER WYNNE: Here's what it is; it's like a mortgage you know what-- the reason that people mortgage their homes is that they can't afford to pay for their homes in one fell swoop or even in a short period. They need a longer period of time. That means that of course it takes longer to pay off and there is a premium. You know there are payments that are higher because of interest over that period of time, but the payments are manageable and that's exactly what this is. This is making the payments on the investments that have been made in electricity to make it clean and reliable; making those manageable over-- rather than over 20 years, over 30 years. And so you know this generation today shouldn't have to bear the cost of the neglect that came before and the usage that's going to-- the benefit that's going to come next. So we're saying you know what, let's share that cost because the assets are going to last for decades to come.

HOST: But isn't there a way we can fix the root of this problem before going through all of that?

PREMIER WYNNE: But the root of the problem is that there hadn't been investment in the system for decades. I mean part of it is, and I you know I know that there are challenges around some of the contracts that we have put in place for renewable energy, but that's only one piece of it. The root of the problem was that there were transmission lines that needed to be built. There were generation capacity. So for example upgrades at Niagara Falls that needed to be built, towers that needs to be built in the north. That kind of investment is billions of dollars. Had it been done over the last 40 years and had the system been maintained then we wouldn't have had to play catch up. We have had to play catch up. That's the root of the challenge. And so now we've got to make sure that the payments are fair over a decent period of time and that's how we're going to be able to give people a reduction by asking the next generation to share in the payment for an asset that they're going to benefit from.

HOST: Once again, we're speaking with Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne. Yesterday they announced the Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan.

HOST 2: So we were talking, we heard you mention a few minutes ago that it's a 25 percent discount being added to people's bills. I have seen some numbers broken down and it's looking more like about a 17 percent discount because of the 25 percent includes that 8 percent HST rebate that we got earlier this year, right?

HOST: That already happened in January.

PREMIER WYNNE: So it's on average 25 percent. But here's the thing, as I said a lot of the people who are listening to you live in rural communities where the distribution charge is much higher than in an urban center. So they will get on top of the average 25 percent, they'll also see a reduction in their distribution charge and that will give them another 10, 15 percent reduction. So for some people it will be much higher than 25 percent and that's to really target the issues that are the most burdensome for people.

HOST 2: Okay, just so it is clear, that 25 percent does include the 8 percent? Oh that's right.

PREMIER WYNNE: Yes it does.

HOST: Once again, it's Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, and Kathleen how do you respond to those that say you may be addressing this hydro issue now because your approval rating with the government is down and the next election is about 15 months away?

PREMIER WYNNE: What I would say is that I'm addressing this electricity situation now because people are in need around the province. That's the reality. We had tried to put some supports in place, put some relief in place. You know we put the Ontario Electricity Support Program for low income families. All the things we had done were not enough. That's what people were saying to me. And so there's more that needed to be done. Of course there's a political component to this and you know that will continue to be discussed. But the driver of this is people's need. It is unacceptable to me that people in this province would be choosing between, you know buying groceries and paying their electricity bill. It's just not acceptable.

HOST 2: Absolutely.

PREMIER WYNNE: And so we knew what we knew we had to do something more.

HOST 2: But I mean that's been an issue for years.

PREMIER WYNNE: Well it's become more critical. It's become more critical in the last couple of years because electricity bills have gone up. If you look at the changes there have been some real spikes over the last few years and that's why this has become such a critical issue. And as I said, we've been trying to put some supports in place over the last few years but they just haven't been enough. And so we needed a more fundamental change and that's what this is.

HOST 2: Okay so, just sorry Brian to cut you off there. Switching to kind of looking at an election track. There have been several online petitions and calls even for measures as extreme as your resignation. What would you say to those and do you think you are the best leader for the Liberal Party heading into an election?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well here's the thing, I made a commitment in 2014 when we were elected to build this province up, to invest in infrastructure, to make sure that young people had access to post-secondary education; you know free tuition for low income kids is starting in September. We are doing those things. We are delivering on those commitments. And my job's not done and I'm going to continue to work to make sure that we continue to build the province up. That's my responsibility and I'll be leading my colleagues into the election in 2018.

HOST: So this hydro announcement is just more of a coincidence. It was just something that had to be done now, not the timing with an election coming up.

PREMIER WYNNE: It had to be dealt with.

HOST: Okay.

PREMIER WYNNE: People were struggling, are struggling, and they need to see this relief and they'll see it by summer.

HOST: Well I do know that you know a lot of our listeners will say they you know agree to disagree but we most certainly thank you for taking the time to share some of your views and run through some of the process with Ontario Hydro and Ontario Premier Kathleen, thanks very much we appreciate the.

PREMIER WYNNE: My pleasure. Take good care.