

TV Transcripts: Focus Ontario - December 24, 2017

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Focus Ontario: Year-End Interview With Premier Wynne

Source: GLOBAL
Dec 24, 2017 11:30 AM (1)

Voiceover: From downtown Toronto, this is Focus Ontario with Alan Carter.

Alan Carter, Host: Welcome. Merry Christmas and happy holidays. We have a big show to cap off 2017. Our Queen's Park panel; Rob Benzie from the Toronto Star, Allison Jones from Canadian Press are going to be here. They're going to pick the big Ontario political stories from 2017, and we're going to predict what we'll be talking about in 2018. But first, a conversation with Kathleen Wynne. And as the calendar turns to 2018, what does the Premier think the ballot question will be in the upcoming provincial election? Here's my interview with the Premier.

Alan: We're actually walking out of your office now, and this is the Premier's Office where all the portraits of the premiers are.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: It is.

Alan: So your painting is going to be on here.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: I say good morning to Premier McGuinty every morning.

Alan: Considering that six months from now we go to the polls, are you reflecting on that this could be your last Christmas here?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well as I said I have always found it an awesome place to be. So I take it very seriously. I think that the work that we do here is critical to the lives of the people in the province.

Alan: With what the issues are in the province, what do you think is going to be the ballot question in 2018?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: The thing we're struggling with in this province is really something that people are struggling with all over North America and beyond, and that is an economy that's changing and people feeling like they're not sure what's coming next you know? I think that uncertainty is – that's the environment that we are operating in.

Alan: Does Ontario need change?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well we're making change you know? We are tackling some huge issues, and I think if you're asking me do we need a political change, well the people of Ontario will decide that. Do we need change? Absolutely. We need to keep up with a changing technological world, a changing global economy, and as I said that's why we are making big changes in Ontario.

Alan: The People's Guarantee, the Progressive Conservative platform, it promises a great deal of things that you promised. The Fair Hydro Plan they're going to keep, daycare, pharmacare. What's the real difference between you and the Conservatives anyway?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well the big difference is we're actually delivering those things. We are delivering the biggest expansion of medicare in a generation starting January 1st with OHIP+, so kids from

birth until their 25th birthday will get free prescription medication. We are delivering the Fair Hydro Plan, people have seen reduction in their electricity bills. The fundamental difference with the Conservative platform is that they at the same time are saying they will take \$12 billion out of the economy – they will cut by \$12 billion.

Alan: And they are going to hand that money back in tax credits. So it becomes this fundamental difference, especially –

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Yeah but you can do it all. You can't cut \$12 billion, give it all back in tax credits and deliver the things that people really need. And so we, our plan, actually delivers those changes that people need.

Alan: If Ontario decides that they want a minority in the next election and you're not running the government, would you stay on?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: If I am elected back into office I will do my very best to deliver on our plan, whatever the configuration of the Legislature because I believe in what we are doing. And so I will work with whomever is in the Legislature to make that plan happen.

Alan: If you look back at 2017, it does strike me that last year when we had this conversation we were talking about would you even lead the party into the election. Your polling numbers were, let's say, low. They are still not huge, but do you feel that you have made some progress in changing that narrative in the last year?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well as I said to you last year, some version of I am going to run, I am committed to the work that I am doing for the people of Ontario. And you know we were just at that point where we were going to balance the budget, we have done that, and we have some flexibility to do the things that I just talked to you about, to help people – kids – with their prescription medications, to put in place free tuition. I mean those are all things that people need. Increasing the minimum wage, making sure that workers have more certainty in their workplaces. I believe in that work. That is why I am in politics and that is why I told you I was going to run, and I will. I think that we can make Ontario an even fairer place with even more opportunity for everyone.

Alan: What is 2018 going to hold for Kathleen Wynne?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well it's going to be a very exciting campaign, we're going to be travelling the province. You know I am continuing my habit of talking to people in all venues, including town halls.

Unidentified [clip]: Does Ontario have a balanced budget?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Yes we do.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: I am really, really sorry that you got caught in the middle of this.

Premier Kathleen Wynne [clip end]: Does anybody roughly know the population of Ontario?

Alan: Is the point of those town halls to get you out in front of that anger and confront it head on?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: The best way of getting a sense of what people are thinking is to actually sit in a room with them and hear from them, and so I have never shied away from having those conversations.

Alan: Premier, all the very best for the season. Thank you so much.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, all the best to you and your viewers.

Alan: Thank you so much.

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thanks Alan.

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Focus Ontario: Panel Discusses Top Ontario Political Stories Of 2017 Pt. 1

Source: GLOBAL

Dec 24, 2017 11:38 AM (2)

Alan Carter, Host: Welcome back. As you sit back and ponder the year that was, what stands out in Ontario politics? To answer that, our Queen's Park political panel returns. They don't have anything better to ponder. Allison Jones from Canadian Press. Rob Benzie from the Toronto Star. Let's go over our top three stories of 2017. Allison, you're first up with the issue that has dogged all Ontario governments and that is hydro.

Allison Jones, The Canadian Press: That's right. We saw in 2017 start off with everybody getting that 8 per cent rebate on their hydro bills, but as the Liberal government quickly learned, that was not going to cut it to sort of quell the anger that was out there over the rising hydro rates. So then in March, we saw them announce a further 17 per cent cut to bills which they bill as their "fair hydro plan" for a grand total of 25 per cent.

Alan: 25 per cent. If not 25 per cent, it's 17 plus 8 but let's not go over that again. How do you think that has done politically for them, Rob?

Rob Benzie, Queen's Park Bureau Chief, Toronto Star: I think it has been helpful in the sense that this time last year, we were talking about hydro and hydro. MPPs were telling us that they were getting calls from angry constituents. I've talked to some MPPs who said they have not heard a peep out of people on hydro in months. So it's fair to say that you can bribe rate payers with their own money.

Alan: And interesting to notice that the Progressive Conservative platform, which has been released, essentially takes the same thing.

Jones: It does. They sort of take the Liberal plan, continue it and build on it a tiny bit. Even though the fair hydro plan has certainly dampened a lot of the voter anger out there over hydro bills, it's brought some problems of its own. With the auditor general and the opposition raising concerns about the accounting of it and the fact that it means ratepayers are taking on billions and billions of dollars of debt in order to finance this rate cut in the short-term.

Alan: How can the Conservatives rail against it when it is in their plan anyway?

Benzie: They voted against it and their own platform, the people's guarantee, has another 12 per cent rate cut on top of 25 per cent. They used the numbers that are the Liberal members even though they dispute them and side with the auditor general on her numbers.

Alan: The basic premise is to take OPG and you inflate it as a debt carrying vehicle basically, and then just hand that off to another generation. The Conservatives said yeah, well sign us up. As for the NDP, how much mileage are they going to get with their continued push to make Hydro One public again?

Jones: They certainly have the voters on side with the anger over the sale of Hydro One, over the partial privatization. It seems like the majority of Ontarians were not on board with that. But at the same time, I'm not totally sure that the majority of Ontarians are going to be on board with their plan to buy it back either. It is going to cost billions of dollars. They say it's all going to be financed through the dividend that the province is currently getting. But that is going to take some time and it may be a hard sell to voters even though they don't like the privatization.

Alan: Let's move to people's guarantee, we touched on that briefly. Rob, I think a surprise for a lot of pundits and a lot of people that not only did the Conservatives lay out a very detailed platform well in advance of the election but also had moved hard to the middle of the road.

Benzie: Yeah. It is a very carefully crafted plan. It's not necessarily a Conservative plan – small C conservative plan, although there is a little bit of red meat for Tory - traditional Tory voters like middle-class tax cuts. But most of it is small L and big L Liberal plan in terms of more money for mental health funding. \$1.9 billion in additional funding over the next decade. Things like money for child care or tax credits for child care, things like that have not traditionally been in PC platforms. So they've looked at the electorate, seen that this is a Liberal province, small L and big L probably. You look at the results of the federal election in 2015 and I think they know that they couldn't go to the hard right having seen what happened in 2014 when they promised 100,000 job cuts.

Alan: Does this completely change the game next year in terms of what we thought this election was going to be fought over?

Jones: It certainly seems like the Liberals are kind of trying to find their feet in terms of how to attack the platform. Like Rob said, there is no kind of central hundred thousand job cuts to attack. Instead, they're going after a line of a value for money audit where the Tories say they will find efficiencies while Liberals

are saying that's just going to mean cuts. I think it does mean that next year, the debate will be a little bit more nuanced than the hundred thousand job cuts, religious schools, that we have seen in the past.

Alan: Here's the thing that concerns me is that the basic premise of the people's guarantee in terms of the tax cuts and where the money comes from is a move away from cap and trade, and a change to the back stop program federally on carbon cap and that is incredibly complicated. And I don't know how the people of Ontario, the general public, are going to analyze it or will they at all?

Benzie: Well, and the Tory carbon tax, the Liberals argue will increase the price of fuel more than the cap and trade plan is currently increasing it. And it's also a tough sell with traditional Tory voters. Remember, there's the axe, the carbon tax movement that is made up of PC voters who are against Patrick Brown's carbon tax.

Alan: Where are they going to go? They're going to go to the Trillium Party I guess, that's the question.

Benzie: Or they don't vote.

Jones: That's true. It's interesting too that not only is the Tory platform selling essentially a new tax, they're also running on a deficit in the first year. So that's a...

Alan: Yeah. It is a world turned upside down. Let's talk about the other big story in 2017 - trials. Two trials for the Liberals and now an investigation for the Conservatives. Let's start with Sudbury.

Jones: Sudbury was an interesting time. Building up to it, it was such a huge deal. Probably still will be in the context of next year's election. The fact that we had two Liberals on trial, there is the lawsuit too, of course, the premier is suing Patrick Brown over what he said about it. It was unprecedented in recent memory anyway to see a sitting premier testifying as a witness in a trial. But then we got to the trial, heard the evidence, saw the witnesses, heard the lawyers' arguments, and it very quickly became deflated. And then of course we saw it end with a rare directed verdict, which the defence argued, there's not enough evidence for us to even bother presenting our case. The judge agreed and just dismissed it.

Alan: I was at the premier's office for my year end interview. Coming out of the office, Patricia Sorbara, who was back in in a senior role. What is, if anything, the lasting impact of Sudbury?

Benzie: Well, I think the lasting impact is that the increasing criminalization of politics in Ontario, and we are seeing this a lot more. The Tories want to call the cops on different - the Brampton gas plant situation, they want to call the police on that. We have the police doing a criminal investigation of the Progressive Conservatives over a Hamilton nomination race that is a big problem for that party potentially going into an election year. I think it's a situation where we have the cops being called and the Sudbury situation should have never gone to trial. It was a waste of taxpayers' money. The thing was paper thin from the get-go. It was unclear to any of us who listened to the tapes of the so-called crime that was committed, what was the crime? Basically, the Liberals said to a guy who had run and lost for them, we don't want you to run for us again. We're really sorry but we'd love to keep you in the fold. And that was blown up into a court case that was just ridiculous.

Alan: Our top stories of 2017 - hydro, the people's guarantee – the political platform of the Progressive Conservatives, and political trials.

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Focus Ontario: Panel Discusses Top Ontario Political Stories Of 2017 Pt. 2

Source: GLOBAL
Dec 24, 2017 11:49 AM (3)

Alan Carter, Host: Welcome back. What will we be talking about in 2018 in Ontario? Rob Benzie from the Toronto Star, Allison Jones from Canadian Press joining me to talk about Ontario politics and what we're going to see in the year ahead. Minimum wage and pharmacare, two big things that start Jan. 1.

Allison Jones, The Canadian Press: Yeah and I think since they are going to form such a huge part of the Liberal re-election platform in June, it really is going to sort of set the tone for the year ahead. They've obviously done this very deliberately with these two big – and relatively popular – promises kicking in January 1st. The minimum wage is going up to \$14. If the Liberals win the June election it goes up to \$15 the next year. So we're going to see people who make minimum wage get quite a raise and we will also see if the impact on businesses turns out to be what they've predicted, the fairly dire situation of job losses and jobs and businesses leaving the province that they've predicted. And on the other hand we've got

pharmacare which essentially gives free drugs, free prescription medications to people under 25 in Ontario.

Alan: And it's 4,400 of those prescriptions that will now be free. An interestingly enough, Rob, the Progressive Conservatives aren't going to tamper with either one of these programs.

Rob Benzie, Queen's Park Bureau Chief, Toronto Star: No I mean well the – on the minimum wage they're going to slow it down the increase. So they wouldn't go to \$15 until –

Alan: But they won't claw back from the \$14.

Benzie: Yeah they won't claw it back. There's a little kick-up to I think it's 2022 when it will be \$15 under their plan if they're elected in June. And they won't tamper with this expansion of medicare, the so-called OHIP+ pharmacare program that the Liberals... That is the signature platform of the Liberals. You talked to Health Minister Eric Hoskins about this. He hinted to you that it's going to be –

Alan: Expanded.

Benzie: Expanded. Even before it's launched, so presumably in their campaign platform it will be even more of a goodie for folks.

Alan: Yeah so it'll be interesting to see how this plays out in terms of does this help the Liberal numbers? We know these policies are popular but will that transfer to Wynne who has lagged so far behind her own party in popularity? Let's talk about cannabis, and now we have this confusion. Are we going to be able to get legal weed in this province come Canada Day? I have plans.

Benzie: I don't think you'll be able to get on Canada Day because remember it is the Ontario Cannabis Retail Corporation, the OCRC, they won't be calling the stores that, but the first 40 government-run stores will be up and running in July. It won't be on Canada Day or Cannabis Day as we've been calling it. But there will be – the Government of Ontario will be the biggest pot dealer in the province and they're going to have a monopoly just like they do on alcohol.

Alan: Let's talk about what the Liberal plan is on this. And I don't really hear any concerted opposition from the opposition parties about the way that the government is handling it – other than the Green Party, they're the only ones to really have a plan – but everyone else seems to be on board with the standalone stores.

Jones: They do, and I mean as you say the Green Party, and Jack MacLaren's Trillium Party of course, are advocating – as are the vast majority of cannabis advocates in general are advocating for some sort of private sector role. The government has pretty thoroughly shot that down so I don't think we'll see that. But I think the other wrinkle that we'll see next year is the question of whether the municipalities that get selected to host the stores are willing hosts because we've seen a few in York region in particular saying –

Alan: Is it Richmond Hill?

Benzie: Yeah Richmond Hill.

Alan: Richmond Hill saying they don't want it. But doesn't the legislation actually explicitly say you can't refuse it?

Benzie: And with only 40 stores, Richmond Hill is not going to have to worry. There's not going to be a store in Richmond Hill.

Jones: For the first 40 anyway.

Benzie: For the first 40 or even the first 150 I don't think they'll be – that will be downtown Toronto.

Alan: Do you think that the books are going to carry red ink on marijuana sales for the first couple of years? I mean that's sort of the suggestion.

Benzie: That is the biggest crock. I know the government's been saying oh it's not going to be a big revenue generator – yeah sure it's not. You're getting 75 per cent of the tax revenue on the \$10 a gram marijuana. It's going to be a cash cow for government, just like tobacco has always been and just like booze has always been.

Alan: Turns out it doesn't grow on trees, it just grows like a weed that money. All right, let's talk about obviously the thing that we're going to talk most about and that is the election. Rob I'm going to start with you. Lay it out for me in what you see come finish line in June.

Benzie: I think it's going to be a much closer election than some people believe. I know that the Tories have internal polls that show them 24 points ahead. I don't see any evidence of that from public polling and I don't see any evidence from anecdotal – the people that I'm talking to about how things are going. I think that if the election were today, you might see a Progressive Conservative minority but of course the election is six months away, a lot can happen. But the Liberals have been in power since 2003 and it is a long time in politics. And if people are up for some change they will be looking around things, they will say do I want Patrick Brown's change or Andrea Horwath's change?

Alan: Well the most recent Ipsos poll putting a 81 per cent desiring of change. But, you know, Kathleen Wynne was able to position herself as the agent of change in 2014. What do you see, Allison?

Jones: I don't know that she'll necessarily be successful in positioning herself as the agent of change this time. The messaging that we've seen through the second half of 2017 and that I think will carry through to 2018 you'll be hearing the words fairness and opportunity a lot. She says them at every turn. We've heard what probably will essentially be the stump speech already, and it's that the economy is doing really well in Ontario but the benefits are not being felt by everybody so we have a plan to create fairness and opportunity and there's a boilerplate graph that they've been putting in every single new release, saying our plan for fairness and opportunity includes increasing the minimum wage, more daycare spaces, free tuition and pharmacare. So that is the central message I think that we're going to be hearing ad nauseam until June.

Alan: Thirty seconds to go. The Premier of Ontario on July 1st when we're all smoking weed will be?

Benzie: I actually don't know. It will be one of three people. – look, until – Kathleen Wynne or Patrick Brown are the most likely to be the next Premier, but it's not beyond the realm that Andrea –

Alan: Yeah you're not putting Mike Schreiner of the Green Party on that list?

Benzie: Nothing against Mike even –

Alan: You've got 15 seconds.

Jones: I'm not walking into that trap either.

Alan: You're not going to take a shot at it? All right.

Jones: It's too close to call.

Alan: Too close to call. Thank you so much. Have yourselves a great holiday season.

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