

NDP LEADER ANDREA HORWATH'S REMARKS AND AVAIL AT START OF SPRING LEGISLATIVE SITTING

February 17, 2017

Time / Location:

10:00 a.m. / Media Studio, Queen's Park.

Speakers:

Andrea Horwath, MPP and Leader of the Ontario NDP.

Media Attendance:

Print – 5

TV – 4

Radio – 0

Media Outlets:

Jones – CP; Rushowy – Star; Jeffords – Sun; Nanji– QP Briefing; Bliss - CTV Ontario; Morissette – TFO; Cruickshank – iPolitics;

Statement:

It's great to see you all. Over the past couple of months, so many people who have inspired me in this great province have given me a little bit of their time. I've talked to them about their daily lives. I've heard their frustrations, and almost everywhere I've gone, so many people have told me that their family is at a breaking point. I think of meeting Adele in Cambridge just before Christmas. Adele's a single mom with three kids, and the feelings she described to me, the feeling of having her heart in her throat every time she has to open that hydro bill. It's heartbreaking. I think of Valentina in Branford. Her family has been managing so far, but she described to me an uncomfortable uncertainty that's making her life stressful. With hydro bills like we've got, what if she gets sick and needs to take some time off work? How is she going to manage the bills with the prices still rising? That's a feeling too many Ontarians are familiar with. I think of Sharon in Sault Ste. Marie who's a retired nurse. Sharon spent her life caring for other people, but now she's 80 years old, her husband's passed on, and she's all alone struggling with a hydro bill that's hitting \$300 a month. Whether you're a senior living on a small pension or a young family raising your kids, paying for outrageous bills like that is just not possible. Kathleen Wynne doesn't get that. It's just not possible. But most of us see what's really happening across the province. Ontario is at a tipping point. From hydro bills that make it impossible for families to get ahead, to soaring housing prices in some communities, to crushing student debt levels that this government continues to profit off, it's getting harder and harder to build a good life here in Ontario, especially for young people.

But instead of helping, we see the current premier making things worse by putting her friends and the Liberal party first, no matter what it does to ordinary folks. It's like Kathleen Wynne hasn't had to open her own hydro bill in the past five years. The premier acts like she has – has no clue whatsoever of what's going on in people's lives, no clue what's happening at kitchen tables across Ontario. The Liberals are still driving this province in the wrong direction. The premier is still selling off Hydro One and selling out control over our hydro assets. Instead of supporting good jobs, the Liberals have stood by as people are forced into low-paying part-time work that doesn't make ends meet. And instead of protecting our kids' education, the Liberals are robbing our schools of the supports that they need. Nobody voted for that.

[Speaking French] Nobody voted for that.

The Premier has shown that not only does she not share the priorities of ordinary people, it's looking more and more like she doesn't even get what everyday families are dealing with. And as for Mr. Brown, after 17 years as a conservative politician, most people have no idea where he stands or what he's proposing to do. But people know that conservatives cut and they privatize. And they know that cuts and privatization are not the answer for what's ailing Ontario.

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It's become clear that Ontario needs bold change, a bold agenda that's focused on the needs of people, not politicians. So this session I will bring the voices of Ontario people into the Legislature, and New Democrats will ensure that working people, young families, and students cannot be ignored. We will ratchet up the pressure to stop the sell-off of our public hydro, and talk about real hydro relief for families and businesses. And by the way, we are not going to let Premier Wynne or Patrick Brown play politics with the disconnection of electricity in winter months. I will be immediately moving to sever that section of Bill 27 when we return to the Legislature next week, and will do whatever it takes to make the premier understand that real people cannot live in a home where heat and power have been cut off in the middle of a Canadian winter. We're also going to push this government to support good jobs and higher wages that families need, including a \$15 minimum wage. We'll force this government to answer for the cuts that they are making in our hospitals and in people's lives. We'll stand with thousands of moms and dads who are fighting the premier tooth and nail to keep their local schools open. And each and every day New Democrats will be focused on a positive vision for change.

[Speaking French] Our priorities are clear. Our priorities put people first.

I'm going to offer solutions, concrete action to make life easier on people; commitments that will give the next generation the opportunity to build a good life for themselves right here in this province. I think we all know that this province has a great deal to offer. We have the potential to give families much more security in their lives today, and give young people every opportunity they need to succeed tomorrow. To do that we need a government that's focused not on what's best for itself and its friends but what's best for families today and for the next generation. Thank you very much. Those are my formal remarks and I'll take any questions.

Media Questions:

Q. Jones: Andrea, Thibeault says that the disconnection issue can be solved faster by just getting Bill 27 passed. So why go the severing route?

Look, I think everybody realizes now that Bill 27 is a Harper-style omnibus bill. And I think it's – it's disgusting frankly that the Premier is using Harper-style tactics rather to push through this kind of omnibus legislation that includes things like the sell-off of more public assets like Ontario Place. The best way to get this dealt with is to sever that section of the bill, that very, very small section, and have it dealt with independently so that opposition parties can do their due diligence on an omnibus bill which is Bill 27.

Q. Nanji: Will you still support Bill 27 if that section remains in the bill? I know you guys have an issue with the Ontario Place schedule.

Well look, I mean, let's face it, that bill touches 17 different acts. It's a 158-page piece of legislation, so it needs to go through due process. But when all three parties – when the government claims that it wants to end winter shutoffs of hydro – winter disconnections, and when myself as leader of the NDP and the leader of the conservative party all say that we want to stop the disconnection of electricity in the winter months, then we can get that done as early as by Wednesday of next week. So there's – there's no reason to wait for this bill to go through the due process when we can sever that piece of the bill and have it dealt with by Wednesday.

Q. Rushowy: What kind of supports would you like to see in schools? The government has just signed contracts with most of the unions (inaudible) a lot more jobs.

Look, we've seen the schools take a lot of hits over the last number of years. We've seen education funding be reduced. We see a total crisis in supports for special-needs kids. We see a lack of supports for particularly the kind of staffing that you need in early learning, like the all-day kindergarten situation is quite a mess frankly in terms of the number of

	supports in the classroom for those youngest of children. There's a lot of – a lot of attention that needs to be paid to the supports that kids need in school. And I hear this from educators and education workers day in and day out. Kids are – families are stressed. Kids are stressed. That comes into the school and teachers need much more supports to help them address the needs of children. We also are quite disappointed frankly with the way that the Liberals have continued to close schools in communities across Ontario. We have situations where we – where if a school in a particular community closes, that means kids will be left on buses for literally hours every day. That's not the kind of education system I think that parents want to see for their kids. And so we need to have a hard look at the kind of cuts that the government's forcing on the boards and what it's doing to the quality of education in Ontario.
Q. Jeffords: Andrea, I don't know if you've seen the Mainstreet poll that was in our paper today. The good news for the NDP is that your personal approval rating, people think – 62 per cent of people say that they like the job that you're doing, but it doesn't seem to translate to the party's popularity. The NDP are in third, about 27 per cent support. I'm wondering why you think there is that disparity there.	Well, you know what? I mean, I don't tend to comment directly on polls but what I can tell you is being out in Ontario, you can feel the frustration. It's palpable out there. People are looking for a change. People are very unhappy with the Liberal government. Kathleen was certainly – Kathleen Wynne is certainly not the premier she said she was going to be. And people are worried about the future and they want to see that there is somebody out there that's paying attention to them and that understands that their – that their problems, their concerns, need to be addressed. And I believe that that's what New Democrats have been doing and we're going to continue to do that.
Q. Jeffords: What do you think you need to do in the next year to really get your message to sink in with Ontarians and allow them to I guess feel that the NDP are ready for prime time?	Well you know, I think it's – it's pretty clear that New Democrats are bringing solutions forward. I mean when you – when you look at Mr. Brown, I mean he's – he talks a lot but he hasn't brought a single solution forward. I mean he's good at criticizing but nobody knows what his plans are. People will be watching over the next year, lead-up to the next election, and we will be bringing concrete plans forward to bring hope back to people's lives, to show people that things can be different here in Ontario.
Q. Bliss: How would you – how would you lower hydro prices?	We actually have a plan coming. We have a full plan that we are working on now and we'll be making a formal announcement in that regard. And it can be done. I have no doubt in my mind that it can be done. But one of the things that we have to realize, that we talking a lot these days about the winter disconnection issue, but we know that the priority is to get those hydro prices down and to get them down in a sustainable way so that families can get some relief and we can still have a reliable, you know, green power system for Ontarians.
Q. Bliss: Overall, you talk about schools and health care and caring for seniors and hydro prices. How do you pay for the added resources that would be required?	You know what? It's really all about priorities, and so as we get closer to a campaign of course we'll have a full platform. But it really is all about priorities. And what we've seen for far too long here in Ontario is a premier and a Liberal party

	that's more concerned about themselves, about their own political well-being, than they are about the people of Ontario. And I mean I could go through the litany of scandals if you will that have cost the public purse billions upon billions of dollars, everything from the, you know, the high-octane ones like the gas plants to the day-to-day ones like the scandal with the way that the government contracts the P3 projects that we have being built here in Ontario. It'll cost us \$8 billion more than necessary. So there are lots of places that we can look to re-prioritize public money so that it actually reaches people and addresses the basics. I mean, here – here we have a government that's not even meeting the basics for people.
Q. Morissette: What is your priority for the Francophone community in the next session?	Well we've been pressuring quite a bit on the Francophone university. We've also been paying attention to the independent officer for Francophone issues, who is really concerned about the erosion of access to services in Ontario for Francophones, and certainly that's something that we're keeping on top of as well. So it's both the kind of – the kind of broader peace around having a university that meets the needs of Francophones as well as the day-to-day kind of necessity of making sure that our Francophone population is able to access government services in their own language.
Q. Nanji: Have you and Jagmeet Singh discussed his potential for a federal leadership bid?	Well, I mean, it's no secret that Jagmeet is – is kind of weighing his options if you will, but look, there's a reason why Jagmeet is deputy leader. I mean, there's – there's no doubt that Jagmeet is somebody who is a very talented person. He has been able to do great work in the region that he represents, in his own riding with his own community. But also he's been able to bring great attention from young people. I mean, he's really been able to engage young people in the political process. And for all of those reasons he's been a great deputy leader. It'll be up to him to decide whether he's going to, you know, look to other places to invest his talent and his skills, or whether he's going to continue on here. And that's – I mean, I can tell you one thing. I've told him I've got to be the first one to know when you – when you finally land on a decision and he's – he's made that promise, so we'll see.
Q. Nanji: Andrea, I haven't heard much from the NDP about the pension accounting spat that has been ramping up this week. What are your thoughts on the latest?	Well, I mean, it seems to me that this is yet another, you know, fight that the government is having with an independent officer. This is not the first time they've particularly gone to battle with – with this particular independent officer of the Legislature. I mean, I got to say, it's taking up a lot of time and energy when – when everyday people really just want some of the big problems that people are facing to be solved. People would rather have the government spending their attention on things like high electricity rates; on things like you know school closures that – that families and communities are facing; like a health care system that's failing people on every front. Those are the

	priorities of everyday people, and I think it shows how out of touch this government is that they're spending so much focus and energy on the battle of the accountants instead of the real issues that people are facing.
Q. Nanji: (inaudible)	Well again, look, I mean, I'm not an accountant, but I can tell you that I have a lot of confidence in the independent officers. I mean that's what her job is. That's what she's here to do – to represent the interests of the people of Ontario. And so that's where I put a lot of my – my faith frankly because that's her job.
<i>N.B.: Comments captured are not verbatim quotes</i>	

Prepared by:

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