
PREMIER WYNNE'S REMARKS AND AVAIL AT HEALTH SCIENCES NORTH

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Speaker(s): Premier Kathleen Wynne; Glenn Thibeault, Minister of Energy

Remarks

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Thanks very much Glenn. And it is great to be here. Bonjour, tout le monde. I'd like to just, I'd like to just start by saying that I want to acknowledge this horrible attack that happened in Manchester. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and all of the victims, the wounded, the families of the people who were killed in the attack in Manchester and with the British people.

PREMIER IN FRENCH: I was disappointed to hear about the death of 22 people, including many children, in Manchester. My thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends affected.

PREMIER IN ENGLISH: It's a terrible situation and our thoughts and prayers are with the British people. I am very happy to be back in Sudbury. I'm happy to be here in this, in this terrific place. I've had the opportunity to see the site of the new PET scanner. I've had the opportunity to visit families here at NEO kids and I want to just thank all of the staff and all of the team here at Sudbury Health Sciences for all that they do. It's a great opportunity to hear the specific challenges that are confronted by the north. And I want to acknowledge that we're on the (inaudible), here on traditional territory in the home of many First Nation and Metis people and to acknowledge the generations that have been here before us. I am always happy to come to the north. I told a story at (inaudible), the northeastern municipalities meeting last week. In 1978 I was twenty five years old and I got in my little Honda Civic and I was volunteering for the Department of Indian Affairs at the time and I drove up through Timmins and to Hearst and stayed in Hearst for about a month. Actually I was on Constance Lake reserve for a month and I -- before that point I really hadn't been north of Algonquin Park. I spent a lot of time in Algonquin Park but I hadn't been north and so that was the first. So 1978 was really when I got a sense of the differences between the challenges in the north and the challenges in the south and got a sense that those of us who grow up in the south; I grew up just north of Toronto, really we didn't always have a clear idea of life in the north. Even though I believe that part of our identity as Canadians and certainly as Ontarians is that we see ourselves as a Northern people but many of us who haven't had an opportunity to live in the north don't have that clear sense of the differences. So the challenges in the north are unique. I believe strongly that Ontario is one Ontario, that we share a value system, that we share concerns and caring for one another. I can feel the same caring here in NEO kids as I do in hospitals and kids wards, kids units in the south. But, but we have different challenges in terms of transportation. Geography always plays a role. So it is great to be here.

PREMIER IN FRENCH: Northern Ontario has unique needs. As Premier of Ontario, I am always working to address the concerns of the entire province.

PREMIER IN ENGLISH: I've always believed that the government exists as a force for good. Governments exist to do the things that we can't do on our own. And so when I have the opportunity to present to the people of Ontario a balanced budget for the first time in nearly a decade, what that is for me is an opportunity to be able to do the things that we know are needed across the province; to invest in the people of this province and to make sure that the challenges that they're confronting are ameliorated by the government. We're living in a very uncertain time. The economy and the global economy is uncertain. In Ontario and in Canada we are affected very much by what's happening south of the border and so we need to do those things that will help to provide more security for people. And that's what I was saying to the parents this morning; that providing more security, helping them with the challenges in their lives because not everyone is benefiting equally from the progress that our economy is making, the growth that our economy is seeing. So that means that we need to go back to our core values and we need to ask what kind of society do we want to live in. What kind of society do we want to create? And so the answer to that by our government is that we want to live in a society that is inclusive. We want to create an economy that's inclusive that allows everyone to benefit. So whether it is today, the release of the Changing Workplaces reviews that lays out concerns and some recommendations that we need to look at going forward to deal with an evolving and changing workplace or whether it's those things that we have already put in place; so free tuition for students starting in September. For students who would have a challenge covering their tuition otherwise will see free tuition in September for college, university or training programs. Or whether it's 25 per cent off people's electricity bills, off their hydro bills. The Fair Hydro plan is about addressing those costs that are making it difficult for families to make ends meet and people will see that full 25 per cent on average this summer. Or whether it's the Basic Income pilot that we are putting in place in three communities around the province to look at whether there's a better way to support families in an economy that is changing rapidly and is confronting changes, not just the pace of change, but also the technologies are changing. And so is there a way for us to provide better support for people and the basic income is about that kind of question and finding answers to that. But I think the best illustration of our shared values in this country and in this province; I think few would argue, that it's our health care system. And in our health care system we really see the assumption that in this country we believe that looking after one another is our number one priority. And so those values of fairness and equality and compassion I think are best expressed in our health care system. So it stands to reason then that in this budget that we have just introduced, that is balanced, that demonstrates that our economy is growing, we tackle some of the challenges that people at their most vulnerable are confronting. And so having a sick child, having a child that needs medication or just being in a situation where it's tough to make ends meet and having to pay for medication throughout a winter; as I met a woman who has five children. She had a bad winter. The kids all got ear infections and paying for medication through that winter was a challenge for her. So what we have done in our budget is we have introduced OHIP Plus. So it is OHIP Plus pharmacare. And what that means is that starting in January of 2018 children from 0 to 24, so children in youth from birth until their 25th birthday will be able to access medication free in Ontario. And that will mean that families will not have to worry if they're not on a plan. They will get their medication covered whether they're on a plan or not. And families who are -- who have a plan who have that kind of benefit, and it's not the majority of people in the province who do, but they will also have their medications for children and youth covered. Some people have asked us why 24, why not 18? What we know is that when young people leave their families and set out on their own, those years between 18 and 24 can be a challenge because they're no longer covered by their family support. And so we have used the United Nations definition of youth and have extended to the age of 24. This means that 4,400 medications will be covered. It will be up front. There's no co-payment, there's no means test. It embodies the principle of universality; the OHIP plus pharmacare plan.

PREMIER IN FRENCH: Beginning next year, the OHIP Plus Pharmacare Plan will offer to kids and young people 24 and under free medications without conditions.

PREMIER IN ENGLISH: So that is the announcement that I made with the families today at NEO Kids. It's a very important initiative for people and families across the province and we are thrilled that it is going to help families who are struggling at those very vulnerable times with kids, especially kids who need a lot of medication. I talked to one woman who her child is 11 and over the course of the next years until he is 25 they will save \$50,000 as a family because he takes medication every single month and the costs are exorbitant. So that is a huge benefit to that family and to that young person who will be able to have a different start to his future. So I look forward to my time here in Sudbury and in the north over the next week. It's very important to me that the conversations that have been begun and continue; that I'm able to be part of those as we move to make sure that people across the province have the support that they need. And I'll ask Nathalie Des Rosiers to make a couple of comments and then we'll take your questions. Merci.

Avail

Q: [Inaudible] Do you support the NEO Kids project and will funding be forthcoming for this project this year?

PREMIER WYNNE: So I'm going to let the Minister speak to what's happening locally but let me just say that I support good ideas and what I've seen here today is a really good idea. And there's been a lot of great foundational work done already. I said to the families that, you know, having a place where they can get a continuity of care over time that their kids are familiar with is really, really important. And I know there's work going on locally and I'll let the Minister speak to that.

GLENN THIBEAULT, MINISTER OF ENERGY: Thanks Premier. So as the premier said, there's great work going on both with the foundation, with Patricia and team and with Dr. Murray. I've been working with them as much as I can. I've been working with the ministry and the first step that we're doing is looking at getting a planning capital grant and that's the first phase that we need to do and of course we'll continue to advocate and support this project and the great work that's happening. But that's where we are in this phase and we don't want to get too far ahead especially from where the NEO Kids Foundation is, but as the premier said, it's a great idea and of course the government supports great ideas. So I'm happy just to continue to advocate on behalf of the community.

Q: When do you see this project going ahead?

PREMIER WYNNE: So I think it's premature to put a date. I think that you know the foundation has been built, there's a planning process that the community is seeking right now. I, having seen NEO Kids, I will certainly be supportive of the work that Glenn is doing at Queen's Park.

Q: Premier Wynne, in reaction to the attack in Manchester, what is Ontario doing to assure that Ontario are safe summers around the corner; festivals, sport events.

PREMIER WYNNE: So our officials at the provincial and the federal level are working together constantly. There are security protocols and protections that are in place on an ongoing basis

and so those will continue and I'm sure that as a result of what's happened in Britain that there will be extra vigilant, but that is an ongoing process.

Q: In French please.

PREMIER IN FRENCH: Officials continue to work together on security as always and it's a process which continues and very vigilant.

Q: What's going to be your best-- Isaac Cohen from CTV in Sudbury. How do you gauge success from the announcement today over I guess the short-term and the long-term?

PREMIER WYNNE: In terms of the OHIP--

Q: Yeah, the OHIP announcement.

PREMIER WYNNE: Well, you know the success is long-term. The success is that kids will have a better start. Right now what happens if a family comes in and a child is given a prescription by a doctor and that family can't pay for that prescription, the child goes without that medication, the condition may worsen or there may be other side effects that happen. And so what we know is that this will give kids a better start. In the very immediate term, starting in January, families that are struggling to pay bills will have more assistance. That will be the short-term, immediate effect and that means that there's less stress on families. So both the short and the long-term are very important impacts.

Q: You announced 7-billion new dollars in the three upcoming years for health. We talked to parents of people who have kids who have autism and they're saying that they always have to send their kids to the South of the province because there is not enough in the North. How are you going to make sure that among the 7-billion the North will have its share?

PREMIER WYNNE: So, you know as we roll-out the new autism program that is a province-wide program and it is, you know, very important to me that as parents, for example, are able to access direct funding. That's not just in the South, that's in the North. One of the challenges is making sure that there are providers in all parts of the province and we will work with school boards, with community health providers to make sure that those resources are there. And I, you know, ideally in every community there would be exactly the resources that every family needed. We can't guarantee that, but what we can do is make sure that families have-- they have the financial support and that they have the option to get the service for their children.

Q: The Changing Workplaces Review published its recommendations today and in your view what is the single most important inequality you want to focus on when it comes time to change the law?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well it's a very comprehensive report and we, you know, what we are doing is we are looking at all of the recommendations and we will be moving forward very soon to address the challenges of the precarious workplace because that is the concern. That is what is driving this, is that people are finding it harder to find full-time work where they are paid at a living wage and so we need to-- it goes back to that question I had about what kind of society do we want to build. We want to build a society where people can earn a living, look after their families, look after themselves and be contributing members of their community. So we'll be looking at all the recommendations and we'll be moving forward in the very near future.

Q: Just a quick thought on the Sault by-election that's coming up. Where is the confidence level at right now at maintaining your seat?

PREMIER WYNNE: We have a fabulous candidate. Debbie Amaroso is terrific. Glenn Thibeault was there with her on the weekend and we've had lots of support. She is well-known in the community, she's well-connected to the issues in Sault Ste. Marie and so I look forward to a great contest. You know by-elections are always a challenge for the governing party, I get that, but Debbie Amaroso will be, would be a terrific representative for Sault Ste. Marie.

Q: On that note then, for the Sault Ste. Marie by-election and it came out in the review today for the workplace changes. There's a focus on unionizing and gathering and the OLG workers in Sault Ste. Marie have been trying to organize, a lot of jobs have been going south. How focused is the Liberal Party on helping those workers keep those jobs in Sault Ste. Marie?

PREMIER WYNNE: Well I've been very clear and I've said this in Sault Ste. Marie, I've said it with the mayor, I've said it on many trips to the North that I believe that having a strong cluster of expertise in Sault Ste. Marie around gaming is very important. I think the expertise is already there and so having those jobs there, I've had that conversation with the head of the OLG with the Minister of Finance, that I believe that we should have those jobs there. That we should have a good, you know a good ecosystem of jobs with gaming expertise in Sault Ste. Marie. The Minister of Finance knows that that is what I think we should be working towards. There are good proposals around clusters that are in the works and so my expectation and my hope is that as the modernization process goes ahead we'll see that cluster and we will see good jobs in gaming stay in Sault Ste. Marie.

Q: [Inaudible] question for the NEO Kids one. There were some parents in there whose children-- well they weren't sure if their children's coverage was going to be covered by the OHIP Plus. Are there-- I mean why just certain medications right now?

PREMIER WYNNE: So there's a there's a formulary and the way support for medication in Ontario Works now with seniors and with the Trillium Drug Program is that there are medications that are covered. All of those, those 4,400 medications will be covered. There are new drugs that come along that haven't been fully tested yet and are not on the formulary and so we need experts to make those decisions. And so this program, this pharmacare program will follow that same process. But there was another question about brand medication and so my understanding is that if a doctor recommends or prescribes a brand medication it will be covered.

Q: Quick follow-up for [Inaudible] on the workplace situation. Are you planning to introduce a bill in the next month, in the fall or before next summer?

PREMIER WYNNE: Stay tuned, we're going to be moving ahead, we're going to be moving ahead very soon. Remember this is a process that has been in the works for a couple of years and so we're, you know, we're ready to look at the recommendations and determine how to go forward. It will-- we'll be moving forward very quickly. Okay, thank you everyone. Merci.

MINISTER THIBEAULT: Thanks everyone.