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Subject: Premier Lays Out Plan for Fair Workplaces and Better Jobs for Ontario Workers



Statement

Premier Lays Out Plan for Fair Workplaces and Better Jobs for Ontario Workers

May 30, 2017

Premier Kathleen Wynne gave the following speech today about the government's responsibility to create more opportunity and security for workers with a plan for Fair Workplaces and Better Jobs:*

"I want to begin today by showing my respect for the contributions of Indigenous peoples and recognize the role of treaty-making in what is now Ontario. For generations, this land has been home to peoples of Turtle Island. The first treaties were signed long before Confederation. Today, 150 years later, the treaties are still relevant to our lives and I want to just acknowledge that as we're gathered here today.

Thank you all for being here. As I sat down to think about what I wanted to say today, I found myself reflecting on some of the changes that I've seen -- that we've all seen -- over the past few years. One stands out in particular. And it comes up in conversations that I have with people all across our province. Whether I'm in London, as I was two weeks ago, or in Elliot Lake as I was on Friday. Or whether we see it in our own families -- I see it in mine. People are anxious about their jobs and they're anxious about their futures.

With all the change and uncertainty in the economy and the nature of work itself, it's tough to feel as though you are getting ahead right now. Even as our economy recovers, it's tough to feel confident that your job will still be yours -- or even still be around -- in 10 years, or five, or even less. And people are worried about what jobs are going to look like as their children become adults -- a world of global competition, reduced benefits, and more and more part-time employment.

Our plan to date as a government has been straightforward:

- Focus on economic growth
- Eliminate the deficit
- Support new jobs

- Invest where it makes the most sense and has the most impact -- in health, education and infrastructure ... with new schools, new hospitals, new roads, bridges and highways.

The evidence tells us that we are making progress. Unemployment is at its lowest point in 16 years. Our economy is growing faster than that of any other province in Canada. Our budget is balanced. Ontario is outperforming most of our neighbours in Canada and the United States. That's encouraging. But we know it isn't enough.

We are being tested in new and unique ways. New technology and automation are putting existing jobs at risk. And while our businesses are expanding and creating wealth -- not everyone is feeling it in their own lives.

Then there is trade and -- let's face it -- the question mark there is President Trump. Trade is essential to our prosperity. It supports good jobs. But as we're seeing in the U.S., the movement to embrace protectionism is growing. There's no doubt -- this is a time of heightened volatility and change. And with this uncertainty we have to protect our people as best we can. Our answer must be bolder and better.

In other words, I believe that government has a responsibility to step up. To take action. To protect the wages and the well-being of our people by being bold and inventive. And I don't mean being active for the sake of it. But being active with a clear purpose, a clear goal: ensuring fairness.

We have to work harder than ever to build and preserve our fair society. If we make the right choices now, we can help the people of Ontario navigate this turbulence and set our province on a course toward long-term success. Now, there are some who look at this new world and say that government should just step back and stay out of it. Let the market sort it out.

Their idea of a solution is to cut back on public services, reduce taxes on the wealthy, slash regulations on corporations and hope that the results will trickle down. Frankly, that does not add up. In this version of our future, some would do very well -- especially those who were already doing pretty well to begin with. As for everyone else -- all those who are working harder than ever to make ends meet -- well, tough luck.

So that is one path we could take. But that is not my way -- and it never will be. Pretending everything is okay does not speak to the values that we share -- a belief in fairness and equal opportunity. It does not address the struggles of people across our province -- their frustration at working long hours and still barely getting by.

I believe it is the responsibility of government to take a stand, to play a role and do what it can -- do all it can -- to ensure that the people of Ontario are given every chance to thrive and achieve their potential during this time of dramatic change. Our plan takes dead aim at the challenges that confront us in this new, uncertain world. It puts fairness at the heart of all we do.

That's why we are creating 100,000 new spaces in child care -- so more kids can get a great start in life and their parents can work. That's why we recently introduced our Fair Housing Plan -- to make renting or buying a home more affordable. That's why we are launching a Basic Income pilot project -- to see if there's a better way of supporting and helping people to get ahead and stay ahead. That's why we announced in our budget a new plan to provide free

medication to everyone under the age of 25. And that's why we are making college and university tuition free for more than 200,000 students.

These are the kinds of ideas that we need right now -- bold, unafraid and unabashedly confident in the people of our province. We are acting on these ideas because doing these things will make a meaningful difference in people's lives and in our shared success. Doing these things will directly confront the uncertainty of this new era and take some of the pressure off families.

We have an opportunity before us and we cannot afford to wait. It is all about fairness. And one of the most important places we must protect fairness is actually in the workplace.

Change in the workplace isn't just on the horizon. It's here.

People are working longer, jobs are less secure, benefits are harder to come by and protections are fewer and fewer. In a time of change like this, when the very nature of work is being transformed, we need to make certain that our workers are treated fairly.

We started by fighting hard for better pensions -- to ensure that our workers can retire with security. We led the way nationally. We never gave up. And the improved Canada Pension Plan will pay out more in benefits for a lifetime of hard work -- it will mean a better retirement. But in this era of uncertainty, we need to do more to protect our workers long before they retire.

So two years ago, we commissioned a review of the changing nature of the modern workplace. The reviewers heard from hundreds of employers and employees. They examined the data and compared Ontario to other places. And they concluded, and I quote, that "there are too many people in too many workplaces who do not receive their basic rights." Frankly, that's just not good enough for Ontario.

So today, I want to tell you about our plan for Fair Workplaces and Better Jobs -- a plan that will help ensure that employees are treated fairly across the province. Our plan addresses a wide range of issues. I want to talk to you about five key elements.

First, we will raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour -- the largest increase in our province's history. Right now, 10 per cent of workers in our province earn the minimum wage of \$11.40. Thirty per cent earn less than \$15 an hour. That's millions of people, many of them supporting a family on a wage that just doesn't go far enough. They're raising children. Saving up for their education. Wondering if they'll ever be able to get ahead on the monthly budget, let alone own a home.

Increasing the minimum wage will make a world of difference in millions of lives. The increase will be phased in over the next 18 months. It will rise to \$14 on New Year's Day, 2018, to \$15 on Jan. 1, 2019, and after that it will rise annually with inflation as it does now.

It has always been a challenge to raise a family on a minimum-wage job. But in recent years, it has become almost impossible. And the reality is more and more people are having to do it.

I'm talking about the plant worker who's been laid-off. In her 50s, she finds herself staffing a drive-through window. Or the university graduate who is now years into a job where the pay has never gone up and shifts are still a scramble to piece together. We all know these stories because these are our friends and family. And they're having a harder time of it than ever before. On January 1st, that will all start to change.

The second element of our plan: We will ensure that part-time workers receive equal pay for equal work. The reality is that more companies are choosing to hire part-time employees. That in itself is not a bad thing. But it has in some cases created an unfair workplace in which some are paid less than others who do exactly the same job.

Paying people the same wage for the same work is the very essence of fairness. And that is what we as a government will insist on from companies and other organizations doing business in our province.

Third, we will increase minimum vacation entitlements. After five years with a company, an employee will be entitled to at least three weeks of paid vacation each year. You know, Ontario is behind other provinces in guaranteeing better vacation rights. It's time to do what's right and what's fair.

Fourth, we will establish fairer rules for scheduling -- rules that give greater certainty to workers while maintaining flexibility for employers. For instance, your employer will now be required to pay you three hours' wages if they cancel your shift with less than 48 hours' notice. Workers deserve a degree of certainty -- especially when you need these shifts in order to make it through the month. In an Ontario with Fair Workplaces and Better Jobs, that's the certainty workers will get.

And fifth, we will ensure that more workers -- not just those at large companies -- have the right to take up to 10 days of personal emergency leave each year, two of them paid. We all need to be able to respond to the realities of life, like an illness or the death of a loved one -- without worrying about losing our job.

There are other elements to our plan. We heard that enforcement is key to making this work -- so we're stepping that up. We will modernize the rules around creating a union. That includes the extension of card-based certification to three vulnerable sectors -- temporary workers, building services workers and home and community care workers. We are also giving both the union and the employer a fair opportunity to state their case to workers. And we will take steps to make certain that workers are properly classified -- and not incorrectly treated as independent contractors so everyone can get the benefits they deserve.

As a province, we are a leader in job creation. We are proud of that. I know that it's our businesses creating jobs in the province -- not government. Together, we work hard to attract good companies and business investment to Ontario. We create an environment in which they can thrive. And we will continue to work with business to do that.

I want to acknowledge that a lot of companies have already created fair workplaces because they recognize -- as we do -- that treating workers decently is actually good for business. Higher wages increase retention, they improve

productivity and mean that the people of the province can continue to purchase the goods and services that Ontario businesses sell.

I recently got a letter from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce that outlined business concerns about this review -- and one of the lines stood out to me. It said, "the goals of economic growth and improved employee rights are not mutually exclusive." And I completely agree.

We have to make sure that businesses have what they need to keep growing -- and we also have to make sure everyone in the province can benefit from that growth. We are committed to moving forward in a balanced way. We will work with those small businesses on main streets across Ontario from now until January 1 to make sure that they are supported as these changes come into effect.

And our plan rewards good employers. It helps ensure that responsible, law-abiding employers don't face unfair competition from businesses that skirt the law and take advantage of workers. But above all, it focuses squarely on making certain that workers are treated fairly and that their rights are respected.

As I've said -- our economy is in a good place. And we are confident in Ontario's ability to do even better in the future -- better in Canada and better in the world. But we need to ensure that all Ontarians see themselves -- their hopes and dreams -- reflected in the choices we are making and included in the growth we are creating.

We need to address the concerns of those who worry about falling behind, even as they work so hard to get ahead. We need to create the kinds of opportunities that will allow our young people to feel confident about their future.

And in a changing world where work is not the same as it used to be, we need to face the facts and strike a better balance. One that protects people, that discourages bad behaviour, and that builds a stronger Ontario economy because we have Fair Workplaces and Better Jobs.

I have always believed that government must be a force for good -- that it can make a positive difference in people's lives. That's why government exists. Today, there is a place for government -- a need for government -- to stand up and play an active role in building a fair society.

That's why you've been hearing a lot from us over the last several months. On free tuition for more than 200,000 university and college students. On how we're getting 100,000 more kids into childcare. On expanded Medicare with free prescription drugs for anyone under 25.

On Basic Income and how our Fair Hydro Plan and Fair Housing Plan will make life more affordable. And today on changes that will create Fair Workplaces and Better Jobs.

Because this is not the time for government to brush aside your struggles and cling to the status quo. This is the time to move forward toward a better way, a better life and a better future.

We have to double down on our strong economy and create more jobs. We have to take advantage of the hard work that got us to a balanced budget -- and use that balance to relieve some of the pressure that families are facing right now.

In moments like these, there are always loud and strong arguments for the prosperous and the well-situated. The arguments for those without that power or position, who have no platform, often go unheeded.

Government exists to seek those out and hear those voices. My purpose is to make real the vision of a fair Ontario. If there is anywhere in the world capable of creating that society, it is us. Right here, right now.

Thank you."

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