
PREMIER WYNNE'S REMARKS AT CANADIAN CLUB OF TORONTO

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Speaker(s): Premier Kathleen Wynne

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Thank you over there. Thank you everyone. Thank you very much. It's wonderful to be here. Good morning Bonjour, Bojo, Ahni. Thank you Jennifer for that introduction. 84 years ago and the only woman in the room. Awesome. That is awesome. It's great to be back at the Canadian Club and as I wrote in the in the book, thank you for allowing me to be part of your history. It is-- It's a real privilege to be here and I appreciate it. And I appreciate all you brave humans who got up so early to come for breakfast. Thank you very much.

As many of you know I always begin by recognizing that Toronto has been a gathering place for the people of Turtle Island for many generations. Hundreds of years after the first treaties were signed, they're still relevant to our lives today. So I want to show my respect for the contributions of indigenous people and recognize the role of treaty-making in what is now Ontario.

[Speaking French]

[Speaking English] So thank you all for being here. I know from my own years of juggling work and family life that this can be an exhausting time of year and it is a dark time of year, so you've come in in the dark, you're going to go home in the dark and I appreciate you being here. We're in the homestretch, however. It's almost the 21st, which means on the 21st the days start getting lighter. So that's it. That's a good thing. And in a few weeks, most of us, I hope most of you, will get a little break to catch up with friends and family and spend some time.

This is a this is a season of reflection. It's a time when we look back at the year that was, and certainly in politics it has been quite a year. I think we can agree. And not even just talking about Canada. Of course the biggest story actually wasn't in Canada. It was the biggest story of 2016 was the U.S. election. Not just the outcome but the whole campaign was pretty unprecedented, it was extraordinary. And I bet, I'm not a betting woman, but if I were, I would bet that it's going to continue to be the big story because North America is now just entering those uncharted waters as we can see there on the screen. It's still the early days of an uncertain post-Brexit Europe as well.

So this is the context in which we head into 2017. This is the global context. And I am not going to dwell on the world beyond our borders this morning, but just to say that I just came back from Korea and Japan and at every meeting I was in, these were the questions that that people are confronting. They are looking at what does what does all of this mean to the globe and to their ability to trade.

But this morning I want to talk about the way forward that I see for this province, for all of us, and it's in that context, but I want to talk about the unique circumstances that we're confronting.

You know, each of us has a story about why we do what we do. Why we run businesses, or why we choose a particular profession, how we contribute to our community. And for some of us why and how we got into politics. I wasn't born into political life but my family would spend a lot of time analyzing and arguing over the political happenings of the day. I was raised to believe in the power of government to be a positive force in our lives. That was the underpinning of those those discussions that government existed to correct injustice rather than just to let people fend for themselves; to lift people up and to inspire them, rather than to divide them. And then later in life as as a mom with my three kids I was concerned about what was happening in their schools. I was-- they were in elementary school, and the government of the day was stripping resources out of the public education system. And I-- I had a strong and sustaining belief in the importance of a publicly-funded education system and the reality is that 95 percent of children in Ontario are in the publicly-funded education system so as Ursula Franklin used to say it really is the thing that has allowed us, because it is equitable across the province, it is the thing that has allowed us to forge this relatively-- and it's not perfect, I get that-- but relatively harmonious, diverse society that we live in.

But at the time that my kids were little, I was worried about children being left behind because resources were being taken out of the system. I could see it happening. And so I ran to be a school board trustee. And from the moment that I stepped into public life, that value that I was raised to believe in, that government must be a force for good, has been my guiding light. It continues to drive me I continue to believe in that.

In practice that has often led to making tough choices. Choices that point to what I am finding to be my biggest challenge as premier, and that is to find ways to invest in what I know we have to do to create opportunity and security for people in the long term. But at the same time make sure that we're providing the necessary supports for everyone to live healthy and productive lives today. It's that balance that is the challenge every single day.

Now electricity prices I think are the prime example of what I've been wrestling with recently. I know this will come as a huge surprise to all of you who live in this province. But, you know, we have to be frank and acknowledge that at the turn of the century this century Ontario's electricity system was in a mess. Blackouts and smog days were a serious threat to our economic security and to the lives, the quality of lives of the people in the province. The system was broken. And we had to fix it. And we have fixed it. We didn't have a choice about that. We had to tackle it. Today electricity is clean, it's reliable because of the work that we've done, because of the investments that we've made. There are no more blackouts or smog days and closing our coal plants for good still stands as North America's biggest step in the fight against climate change. Bar none. [Applause] Exactly.

And you are right to be proud of that fact. People are right to be proud of the fact that we did that, especially now that others are following our lead. Look across the country, look across the globe and you can see jurisdictions struggling with how to do that.

But the cost of the changes that we have made has put a burden on people in every corner of Ontario. People have told me that they have had to choose between paying their electricity bill and buying food or paying the rent. That is unacceptable to me. That cannot go on. And I have committed to fixing it.

As you know next month every electricity bill will be reduced by 8 percent. And that's the provincial portion of the HST. And that, that does make a difference and it will make a difference. A new program to provide additional relief to those most adversely affected in rural

and northern households. that will make a difference too and will allow about 20 percent to come off those bills. But it is still not enough.

So I've committed to finding more ways to lower rates and reduce the burden on households and we're going to do that in the weeks and months ahead. I don't know exactly what that's going to look like, but we've made that commitment. We're going to work across the system and we will get there and that is my commitment to ensure that government is making a positive difference in the long and in the short term.

For the past two and a half years we've been honouring that commitment we've been honouring that long term and short term commitment with a plan that's building the province up, it's strengthening communities, and it's strengthening the economy that supports them.

Before I go into the details of that plan I want to just talk about inclusive growth and that's something that I think helps to differentiate Ontario from other parts of the world. And what I mean by inclusive growth is growth that creates real everyday benefits for workers and their families. Inclusive growth means things like more retirement savings, it means a faster commute or a little more left over at the end of every month.

And that kind of growth, that kind of inclusive growth, doesn't just happen. It doesn't happen naturally. We've seen how economies in other parts of the continent are leaving some people behind. So in Ontario we need to work together to guide growth down that more inclusive path because it's always been a defining characteristic of who we are as a province. And it needs to remain so. Many of you have heard me say that there is an imperative in politics often to deal with one part of our economic reality and then deal with another, and to do it in sequence. So we're going to balance the budget and then we're going to tackle poverty. That's not how it works.

That is not how it works because what happens is it's really hard to get to that second part. And so what I have said from the time I was in government is that we've got to be able to do those things together. We've got to be able to find ways to balance our approach.

So that's what our plan is about and government plays a very important role in guiding that kind of inclusive growth. We look at our infrastructure plan it's a key part of our overall economic plan and anyone traveling through Ontario communities these days is starting to see a transformation.

Now that may look like irritating construction, but our mantra is we love construction. We love infrastructure. It means that the province is being built up. So new and rebuilt roads and bridges, new transit options, new and renovated schools and hospitals, and these are essential to our future. In addition, this unprecedented infrastructure investment is providing thousands of good jobs right now. So there's that balance.

Last week I was at a skilled trades training center to announce a really landmark declaration and program. It sets a goal that 10 percent of all trade hours building the Eglinton Crosstown LRT will go to people living along the transit line who are facing barriers to employment. So that declaration is about making sure that as we invest those dollars, as we do that building, people in the immediate community who might otherwise not have a job, who might not otherwise have that training opportunity, will get that. It's community benefits model that we intend to use as we deliver many of our other signature projects that are part of that largest investment in infrastructure in Ontario's history.

So to give you a sense of the scale of that infrastructure commitment, over the next decade, Ontario is investing an amount comparable to what the federal government has allocated for the entire country. So, that's the scale of what we're doing here. The federal government is our partner, as our municipalities, and we are thrilled to work with them. But make no mistake; we are taking the lead on this. We saw this as our path to that inclusive growth that I was talking about. We're also in the lead on building a nimble highly skilled workforce and we're making investments there too in order to anticipate the ongoing changes in the job market. We're investing in the best school system from full-day kindergarten right through to Grade 12. We're making college and university more affordable so that more families can send their kids to get the education that they will need.

You know, I knew that there was a gap between young people who are growing up in low income families and young people growing up in higher income families, but I don't think we realized exactly how big that gap was. And so, we need to see every one of our young people in Ontario to see Ontario as a place that's been set up for them to succeed. But right now, kids from middle class families are taking on a lot of debt to graduate and that's a deterrent and it limits their options. Kids from more modest income families are only a quarter as likely to go to college or university as kids from higher income families. That gap is not sustainable. We have to have everyone at their best. We're just not a big enough jurisdiction not to have everyone at their best. So, we're going to change that.

Starting next year, we're making tuition free for about 150,000 students, free tuition for college or university. And we're making it so that about 80 percent of OSAP, or student assistant recipients, will graduate with less debt than before. So, we're spreading that across the lower income, middle income families. By making it more affordable to go to college or university, we're actually building on our biggest competitive advantage in the global economy. That's the talent and the skills of our people. We're building a more inclusive economy, where more and more young people can get and can also create the good jobs of the future.

An inclusive competitive economy is one that knocks down every barrier and we just talked about one barrier. Another barrier in our economy is affordable, available child care. It's why we're also creating 100,000 more licensed childcare spaces and that's for families struggling to find care, and that bill, that investment means that those spots are going to change those young families' lives. These are spots for the 0 to 4 year olds, because with full day kindergarten and before and after school care those kids who are in the education system have, they've already got that care, but it's those little babies before they go to school, that we really have not included in a systematic way.

It's also going to remove one of the biggest barriers preventing women from fully participating in the economy and it's why in our gender wage gap report, that we got from the experts who were looking at that, child care was at the top of the list. And so that's why we're moving on that.

These are the ingredients of an inclusive fairer and a more competitive economy, an economy that serves all Ontarians. I really believe that. These are not partisan political policies. These are the well-grounded beliefs and values that we have seen play out as good for all of us. So, there's huge enlightened self-interest for all of us in making these investments. I meet all sorts of people across the province and like everyone in this room; they know that the quality of life that we enjoy here isn't only about jobs. In everyone I meet there, there is this desire to be proud of where they live, their community, their neighbourhood, their province. As Ontario's provincial government, we're entrusted with that stewardship. That's why we're tackling climate

change, to make sure that our kids and grandkids have a healthy planet and a low carbon globally-relevant economy. We lead the way on improving retirement security and we persuaded the rest of the country to come along with us. We're transforming healthcare by putting more resources into frontline care that puts patients first. But, we've not been reckless in our determination to invest in both today and tomorrow and in fact, we've been just the opposite.

And it's, again, it's that balance that we've had to find. This coming spring, the Minister of Finance will table a balanced budget, as promised, without having raised taxes on the middle class or having slashed services for those who need them most.

We've chosen a balanced way to invest in the future and at the same time we've worked hard to ensure fairness. Our economic strength is proof positive that the plan is working. And here's a quick snapshot: Ontario created the most jobs in Canada this year. We grew faster than most G7 countries. We have the second highest concentration of tech companies on the continent after California. Global businesses like General Motors, Thomson Reuters and General Electric are making big moves into our province. They're creating thousands of exciting new jobs. Our province is Canada's top place for new business investment. So, why are so many companies coming to Ontario? Why are they choosing Ontario? They tell us, literally, that it's because of our highly skilled people. Our quality of life and the opportunities that they see for growth here and that is incredibly encouraging to me because our plan is building on every one of those strengths. So, I want to celebrate these strengths. They are absolutely what we have been working towards what we're investing in, and I want to celebrate the successes. And I do, but I want us to keep in mind that the recovery in the province is still uneven whether we're talking about regionally or whether we're talking about certain groups of people. Even here in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area, which is Canada's economic engine, people's experiences of the economy are vastly different. Work is changing dramatically for a lot of families.

Jobs are being lost and new ones are created, but the people who were in those jobs are not necessarily able to move seamlessly into the new jobs. So, there are gaps and we need to provide training and retraining opportunities and find ways to support workers and new businesses. We all need to engage in this together because we cannot sustain an economic recovery that isn't being more broadly shared. It's just not sustainable. At this time of year, and I know the other MPPs in the room, members of my team, we all have the privilege of attending the holiday concerts of the schools in our communities. And for me, listening to those kids, talking to their beaming parents, sharing in the joy of the holidays with people from all over the world, it doesn't just make me feel young and remember when my kids were little, although that is part of it, but the joy in those rooms, really, is the highlight of my year. This year, with everything that's happened around the world, these concerts put all of that into perspective. Our province is a wonderful place to raise a family. It's a wonderful place to build a business and to invest in the community that binds us.

You know, I have had the experience so many times of knocking on doors, thousands of doors, and every now and then I'll get to one where I spend a long time, and you know, the team is yelling come back you've got to move on, but I'm trying to convince this person who's had a bad experience of, I don't know, education or health care, and there comes a point in the conversation where I will say, "So, where would you go? Where else would you go? Where is it better?" And then they're, "Oh, no, no. I didn't mean that. Here's best. Here's the best place." Okay, let's put it in perspective because it sounded kind of like you thought there was a better place somewhere.

This is the best place. We live in the best place. Absolutely. It's not perfect, and so, now, I think, is the time to recommit ourselves to that shared future that we are building. We're building it together. You know, there is strength and opportunity across our economy and in our communities. You know that. You live that. Let's, together, ensure that no worker, no region and no family is left behind. So, here's the "ask." If you're ending the year with strong financials, I want to know if you can take on some co-op students in 2017. Or whether you've thought about hiring someone with a disability? If every business with more than 50 employees hired one disabled worker in this province, the problem of disproportionately high unemployment for this talent pool would go away. It would disappear. One disabled worker. Or, you could invest in the services of one of the thousands of brilliant low carbon or clean tech start-ups in Ontario. Could you do that? If you could, that would make a huge difference. So, I guess what I'm saying is let's work together. Let's work together to make sure every region in this province is unlocking its potential.

[Speaking French]

[Speaking in English] I want to hear your thoughts and ideas. I want to understand better how we can work together. What is inclusive growth mean to you? Is that a concept that you can get behind? Is it something that you have seen? That you can support? What do we need to do to thrive? What do you need to thrive? How can we better work together and what is it that government is doing that is supporting you or is getting in your way? How can we make sure that no one is left behind? That's the fundamental question. So, thank you all of you again for being here dark and early. I so much appreciate it. I want to continue to work with you in partnership as we have. I commit to you that our government will continue to work to find ways to support your communities. Now, let's open it up to questions. Thank you very much. Merci. Meegwetch.