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PREMIER WYNNE'S REMARKS AT OAKVILLE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Date: January 13, 2017
 Length: 25:00 minutes
 Speaker(s): Premier Kathleen Wynne

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Thank you very much. It's lovely to be here with all of you this afternoon. Bonjour, bojo, ahni. Thank you, Ken, for that introduction, and those grandchildren, last night I was at the child care that all of my grandchildren have gone to in Orangeville, in my pyjamas, reading to a group of children in their pyjamas with their mothers and in their pyjamas, that was that was a great event. Those are the things that keep a person grounded. And it was-- it was lovely.

So it's great to be here with all of you with the local and Burlington chamber. Thank you very much all for being here. Happy New Year. And I wanted to acknowledge the people who aren't in the room. There are some people outside who have had some concern, and I always feel that it's important to acknowledge that they can be there saying what they need to say because we live in a strong democracy, and I value what they have to say. I am aware of what some of the issues are. And so, you know, it is my responsibility to have this conversation with all of you and also to acknowledge that there are people who have concerns that need to be addressed. So I just wanted to acknowledge that.

So 2017 is a big milestone year for Ontario. On July 1st our province, along with our country turns 150.

[Speaking French]

[Speaking English] And this year will be a big celebration of our shared history and of the diverse, dynamic society that we're building. But we know that the past hundred fifty years only tells part of the story. Witness the people who aren't in this room, and I acknowledge their concerns. I'm not sure exactly what her issue is, but I will endeavor to find out. So 150 years tells a part of the story but it's not the whole story. Oakville and Burlington were thriving communities long before Confederation and for many, many generations before that this land was the gathering place of people of Turtle Island, many different groups. And as many of you know I began my speeches by recognizing that we're on traditional indigenous territory and the first treaties were signed long before Confederation, and today, 150 years after the Confederation those treaties are still relevant in our lives. So I begin this way to show respect for the contributions of indigenous peoples and to recognize the role of treaty making in Ontario's past, present and future. So on our 150th anniversary, I think all of that takes on an added importance. Ontario 150 is not only about our past it's an opportunity to unite around a shared vision of our future and to talk about what it means to be an Ontarian.

So I look forward to that conversation. It also gives us a chance to talk about the sort of province that we're building for our children, for our grandchildren, and for their children. And I see Oakville and Burlington as leaders within Ontario. I am inspired by the things that you are doing here to build your communities up and to add to the quality of life of all of the people who live in this city and this region.

There are many many examples of the the LEED-ertified buildings that businesses like Siemens and PCWC have built or the investments that you're making your waterfront, your park, the hundreds of acres of trails and bike paths, Eleanor, the bike paths. Remember (inaudible)? The livable, sustainable communities you're building are exactly what we need to attract the workers and the businesses who are driving the economy forward. That's what people are looking for. And I know that both Kevin and Eleanor, not just Eleanor, but both Kevin and Eleanor are so proud of every one of your achievements and I see it every day in the way that they represent you at Queens Park. So I just want to-- I just want to take this opportunity to recognize them for being great champions for all of you and the people and the businesses that care that you represent. They bring your passions and your challenges and your solutions with their tenacity to the table every day and we need that.

Our plan to. Build Ontario up takes the leadership and collaboration of everyone in this room. There isn't one single person who can do all of that. So make no mistake we are doing what we are doing together. We can't do that building without all of you.

And the results of what we're building are beginning to show. A few days ago, some of you may have seen it, there was a Globe and Mail article that was titled For Ontario, Everything is Coming Up Trillion, and it was about the strength that we're building all across our economy. We created more jobs last year than the rest of the country combined.

Our economy is estimated to have grown by about 2.5 percent. So we're one of Canada's top performers. And for 2017, analysts expect us to break out into the lead. So what's happening is people are moving here from other provinces because of the opportunities that your businesses are creating. I'm not under any illusion that that's all government, it is the work that you are doing, and the investments you are making in combination and in partnership with government that's creating that environment. The innovative things that are happening in businesses like (inaudible). These are two Burlington-based agrifood companies. They're carrying the region's proud agricultural traditions into the new century. They're adapting to meet evolving consumer needs and they're innovating to find more sustainable ways of growing and processing our food. And as a result of that they're growing and they're hiring as they expand.

There are a lot of similar examples. But what I want to say about that is that although we're starting the year in a very good position and we're committed to helping businesses build on this momentum, we all have to acknowledge that people are having an uneven experience of the growth that we're creating. Not every worker, not every family is feeling better off or is feeling able to get ahead.

And many of the people I talk to who are doing better are worried about holding onto those gains so they feel that it's tenuous because they look around and they see uncertainty globally. And so they're worried about what a slight shock would do to their retirement savings or they're concerned that they won't be able to stay ahead because the cost of living is rising faster than their paycheck.

So today I want to talk about what government can do for the economy and for businesses but also for families. For people who are living their lives and wanting to feel secure in their ability to look after themselves and their families. So I want to talk about how a balanced plan to build Ontario up for everyone is about understanding this relationship between the economy and the day to day lives of Ontario families, because there actually isn't a separation. People are living their day to day lives in the context of that economy.

So to set that up I want to tell you about what I see is probably my biggest challenge as Premier and I confront it multiple times a day. And that is how to find ways to invest in what I know that we need to do

to create opportunity and security for people in the long term. But at the same time make sure that we're providing support for everyone to make immediate gains so that they can live those healthy and productive lives that we want everyone to be able to live, right now. It's that tension. Finding that balance is a challenge every single day. And we are working actively to find that balance.

I'll give you three quick examples. First of all, child care. There simply are not enough spaces. So in September we announced that within five years we'll help create 100,000 new licensed child care spaces for infants to 4 year old. It's that zero to four year old age group that that is facing the most challenges.

That is going to ease the burden on families. And at the same time make it easier for more women to participate in the economy. Actually childcare was the number one issue that the group is working on the gender wage gap has highlighted for us. It's also going to mean our kids are going to get the very best possible start in life. It will set them up for success as they go through the education system and then go out into the world. So that's one of-- that's one of the things that we are actively working on to find that balance.

The second is the cost of college and university. Our number one strength in Ontario, bar none, is the talent and skills of our people. That is what makes us globally competitive it's why businesses come. I hear it from you and your colleagues in business all the time. I hear it on trade missions all around the world, it's our educated workforce. But right now there is a stubborn gap in terms of college or university attendance, participation between young people who are growing up in low income families and young people growing up in higher income families, and that means that not everyone is able to be at their best. And we don't have, as a society, we don't have access to people who have been able to fulfill their dreams because they haven't had access to education. In Red Lake, last year, a mom quietly pulled me aside. She asked if there was anything we could do to help her daughter with tuition costs so that her daughter could go to college. And she didn't know at that point yet about the changes we were making to tuition. And so I was able to say to her that yes we're doing that. We're starting this September. We're making college and university tuition free for over 150,000 kids. That builds on the 30 percent off tuition grants so that more families will have an easier time sending their kids to post-secondary.

I just came from Brock University. I talked to a young man there who who said to me you know because of this change that we're making he won't have to stop his education, go and work for a year or more, and come back. He'll be able to continue which is what he wants to do. So these changes will mean that an estimated 230,000 students will graduate with with less debt, will be supported. Many of those will have free tuition. And that is going to make a real difference in people's lives today, of course, but it's going to make even more significantly a huge difference to the economy in years to come.

The third active initiative that we're taking is public infrastructure. And many of you have heard me talk about the investment that we're making, the new roads and transit systems, new hospitals, renovating schools, and as was already said, we're making a record, historically-significant investment in public infrastructure. \$160 billion dollars over 12 years. Those numbers are huge. The reality is, to put it in context, over the next decade Ontario is investing an amount that's comparable to what the federal government is allocating for the entire country. So proportionately it's a huge boost to infrastructure in this province. So that's the scale of what we're doing.

That's how we build transformational projects like the GO Regional Express Rail, faster more frequent service on the GO rail network, including electrified and express service from Oakville to Union Station. And I appreciate the work with CN on being able to work together with them, but it's those kinds of partnerships that make this possible.

Now, I don't have to tell any of you in this room how badly that transit is needed. You spent time sitting on the QEW or crowded onto those trains and building this much needed infrastructure, it's creating tens of thousands of good jobs right now, but what it's doing is making sure that our economy can compete going forward.

It makes a difference in people's lives every day whether it's your commute, whether it's renovations to your child's school, to Oakville's new hospital, or the new patient tower opening at Burlington's Joseph Brandt hospital this fall. For families in all those contexts, and particularly in those last ones for families caring for sick loved ones, that is going to make an enormous difference. And, you know, every every one of those examples that I used and so much of what we are doing is government, if you follow the track down, you look at the investments, you look at the work that we're doing, it comes down to families, it comes down to those people around us who we want to support who we want to see succeed, who are the people we love in our lives and that is that is significant for all of us.

It never changes. Every day I have many many issues that come across my desk, decisions that have to be made on a whole range of subjects if you can imagine, and always at the forefront of my mind, and at the forefront of the conversations, is putting it into the context of family and people in their lives trying to support each other. So when I think about small business owners, I'm thinking about what can we do to help those companies grow and hire workers so that they can then provide for their family. When I think about our health care system, I think about the families who are relying on it at this very moment as we speak.

Earlier this week, I visited Stella's Place and I met a mom who had been moving around the province, around the continent actually, she'd been traveling around the continent trying to find the right supports for her daughter who lives with mental health issues. And Stella's Place is the first organization where she feels that she has found that safe environment and has been able to make progress.

So what we need to do as government then is now work with them to see how we can expand their services to campuses where we know our sons and daughters are confronting mental health challenges of their own. The student union at Brock talked to me about that story and it's about building a health care system that provides the best possible care for our loved ones so that-- that's the vision that we have as we make these investments.

When I'm at holiday concerts at the elementary schools in my community and I meet young parents who are bursting with pride. Many of you have been at those concerts, and it doesn't matter what's happening at the front of the room you're proud of those little kids who are up there. And I think about how those moms are doing day to day. Are they worried about how they're going to cover the cost of field trips? Is their commute taking so long that they aren't able to be home for a bedtime story? Because they get themselves there into that gym, and they're proud, but their whole lives are affected by decisions that we make.

And when we think about family so many of us in this room also think about our parents and our grandparents. My parents are in transition. There's a whole generation dealing with that reality. So what are we doing so that people with busy lives, with kids of their own and aging parents at the same time, have the support that they need to care for all of their loved ones?

Those family concerns whatever they are. Those are the concerns that each one of us carries in our heart and that's what makes us human. It's been part of that circle of family and friends because there are people who don't have family and so what are we doing as a society to make sure that they have the support, if they don't have those immediate relatives.

So it means the government has an added responsibility. We need to bring people together to build communities where our families can thrive today and tomorrow. And the reality is that we're all busy. We're caught up in our lives. So while most of us agree that something like climate change is an enormous challenge that needs to be solved, we're more worried on a day to day basis about our own families and our own lives.

I get that, and that is fine. And it's actually where government can help. And I'm going to talk about electricity as a great example of this. And we need to have a frank conversation about that.

At the start of the 21st century, Ontario's electricity system was in a mess. We were having blackouts,

we were having smog days. The system was broken and we had to fix it. There wasn't a choice about that. We had to, as government, we had to fix that. We had to take that on. Today the system is clean, it's reliable, because of the work that we've all done to rebuild it, all of us together. In a little over a decade over \$50 billion dollars-- Fifty billion dollars-- that was needed, has been invested in Ontario's transmission and generation infrastructure. There are no more blackouts no more smog days. But the cost of the changes has burdened people across the province in every corner of Ontario.

I got a letter over Christmas to say that because of hydro bills, this one father wrote to me that they were having to scale back-- and their families scale back on the kids' Christmas presents this year. And that's unacceptable to me. So, you know, I am able to say, as I did yesterday, I had conversations with a number of people who had sent in their stories, whether it was about delivery charges or whether it was from a senior who was worried because he's living on a fixed income, I was able to say, so, on the first of this month, we've lowered electricity bills by 8 percent. The provincial portion of the HST. So as of January that 8 percent will come off.

And that makes a difference. But it is still not enough. In conjunction with the other things that we have done it is still not enough. There's more that we need to do. And it's why my commitment is that in the weeks and the months ahead we're going to find more ways to lower rates and reduce the burden on consumers. I've heard the voices of the people of Ontario and it's the right thing to do. On top of the work that we have already done. And so that is the commitment that I've made.

But through all of that the fact remains that quitting coal was the right thing to do. We had to do that. Halton used to have the highest incidence of asthma in Ontario. I didn't know that. But Halton did, and that is now not the case. It's way down. Our children across the province are able to breathe easier. But particularly in Halton. And what we're seeing is that others are following our lead. If you look across the country and look across the globe there are jurisdictions that are moving in this direction, they're recognizing that they've got to take that pollution out of the air as well. And so we can see that other places are now trying to find ways of struggling with how to do what we have done here in Ontario.

So political winds will always blow in different directions. But fighting climate change is the right thing to do. It's the right thing to do for our families and it's the right thing to do for our economy. It's the right thing to do for today because we see immediate results, and it's the right thing to do for the future, and for tomorrow. We just need to be smart about it.

And it's precisely why we chose to cap emissions. Starting on January 1st of this year an emissions cap is the lowest cost way for families and businesses to transition to a low carbon economy, and that's why-- that's why we chose this system. That transition is not going to be without its bumps, it's not going to be uniformly easy. We all know that. So our emissions cap program helps to make the transition affordable for homes and businesses.

We've passed a law mandating that every dollar raised will go back to the people of Ontario and to the businesses of Ontario. To environmental programs and initiatives that will help cut emissions and help individuals, families and businesses cut emissions and make all of us more efficient. That is what that money will be used for.

I was at a private home in November to see how this can work first hand. Because we have already put in place a down payment on those revenues from emissions reduction, from cap and trade, and are putting that money into retrofits. So the O'Hara's are a young family, they took advantage of the home energy retrofit rebate program, and today they use way less energy to heat and cool their home. So that is the kind of change that we will be able to foster by putting this program in place. By fighting climate change, they're saving money every month and through our climate change action plan we're able to expand those rebate programs so that more people can do the same thing. We've also expanded the rebates for electric vehicles so more families can go green on on the commute. All of those things together will make a difference.

Something that I have learned in my time in public life about the way we think about improving our

communities, and I wonder if some of you have had the same experience, and it's this notion that in politics you have to do important things. And I, you know, sort of in quotations, important things like balance the budget and lower corporate taxes, which are important and then move on to, I guess what are less important things like child care, poverty reduction, access to education, and cutting emissions. I reject that premise. I believe that we have to do those things at the same time. I think we have to work on all of those together. I don't think they can be separated. Of course we need to balance our short and long term need. We have to help families and businesses today and we have to build the kind of future we know our children need. We have to do that together and that's what our that's what our plan is about and that's what it's doing.

So in just a few months' time Ontario will table its first balanced budget since before the recession and we've done that without slashing services, without raising middle class income taxes, because we recognize that would not be fair with the burdens that people are carrying today. Instead, we're balancing the budget while we're making the record investment in infrastructure that I talked about. We're doing it while we're building not just the fastest growing, most innovative economy in Canada, but an economy that grows inclusively.

And that means we're fighting for every family worrying about who's going to care for their new baby. We're fighting for every high school student who's worried about what comes next. We're fighting for every senior who's at risk of being left behind after they've worked for a lifetime and they've built this province up. And we're fighting for every father who's been laid off and is looking for work and is thinking about giving up. We're fighting for every small business that's looking to grow. And together we're making government that force for good that it must be. Otherwise why would it exist? Government is about pooling our resources to do the things that we can't do alone.

So on our 150th birthday, I am so proud of Ontario. We've got a lot more to do, but I know that we together are up to the challenge and I want to thank you all for being here. I want to thank you for the leadership that you show every single day. And the advice and guidance that so many of you give us, and I look forward to our conversation now. Thank you so much. Merci. Meegwetch.