

**LEADER'S SPEECH | RURAL ONTARIO MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION (ROMA)
TUESDAY JANUARY 23, 2017 | TORONTO
STRICT 14 MINUTES | 1,440 WORDS**

Good morning everyone!

Bonjour tout le monde !

I want to thank Chair [Ron] Holman and the Board of Directors for the invitation to join you this morning.

Let me also acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional territory of the Ojibway, the Anishnabe, and the Mississaugas of the New Credit.

And let me thank you all for your service and your dedication to your communities and to our province.

ROMA is the voice of rural Ontario.

Rural Ontario **matters** to our entire province.

And I believe, passionately, that together we *can* build a vibrant and prosperous future – where every community in this province shares in the benefits of our prosperity.

[CONNECT]

I love Ontario.

And I know that rural Ontario is filled with opportunities to grow.

The success of rural Ontario means maintaining unique, rural cultures and passing them on to the next generation.

The success of rural Ontario means food on the table, not just for rural families,

but for millions of people across this province and around the world.

And the success of rural Ontario means the continuation and growth of a powerful economic engine that drives our entire province...

... from local food start-ups and innovation in the agricultural sector...

... to the forestry and mining operations that support good jobs...

... to the local businesses that are the very backbone of your communities.

There is no question in my mind:

The success of rural Ontario is absolutely vital to the success of our entire province.

And as local municipal leaders, I know that you have a vision for your communities.

You want *more* people to come live in rural Ontario.

You want *more* businesses to invest and create good jobs in your towns, villages, townships, and counties.

You want to provide the services that people are counting on – and make sure they are sustainable for the long run.

And because of your vision, your leadership, and the incredible people who live in your communities,

it is absolutely clear to me:

Great things are ready to happen in rural Ontario!

So... just think how much more we can do

with a provincial government that shares your vision and your optimism for rural Ontario.

Imagine a partner in government that listens to you

and focuses on the things that really matter to the families you serve.

And just imagine a new government that steps up to be the partner that your communities need –

and the champion that rural Ontario deserves!

This is what our province needs!

And this is exactly what I am offering the people of Ontario.

[CONTRAST]

For so many folks today, life is getting harder as a result of the decisions that the current Premier is making.

Two decades of cuts to health care have left us with

dangerously overcrowded hospitals,

record-long wait times,

and rural health services that are constantly under threat.

Local communities like yours are also seeing the tragic impact of the opioid crisis across Ontario.

And so you need much *more* support for health care, not less.

Many of your communities have also been forced to close local schools,
shutting down the very heart of the community
and making it harder than ever for young families to raise their kids in rural Ontario.

You've suffered cuts to the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund,
seeing less and less funding year after year.

And on top of those cuts to public services and municipal funding,
life keeps getting more and more unaffordable for everyday families.

Hydro rates have gone up 300 percent in the last 10 years.

Rural families and businesses are being hurt.

And Premier Wynne's sell-off of Hydro One

– and her 40 billion dollar hydro borrowing scheme

– will leave our families, and our children's families, paying even more for hydro.

Bills will go up **again** after the election – and keep going up!

It's just not right.

I think of my conversations last winter with the Mayors of Echo Bay, Desbarats, Bruce Mines,
Hilton Beach and the Township of St. Joseph.

Hydro costs are so high they threaten to force those communities to shut down local arenas,
the very heart of your towns, where people come together.

Just imagine having to explain that to the kids...

[pause]

My friends, it doesn't have to be this way.

It absolutely does not have to be this way!

Together, we can change it.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, *What comes next for Ontario?*

What kind of leadership do we need to move our province forward

– and make sure every community shares in the benefits?

Because there is a real choice.

Il s'agit d'un vrai choix.

On one hand, there is a party that will keep cutting and privatizing the services that people count on.

A party that shut down 28 hospitals the last time they were in office.

And we all know that's not the right answer for rural Ontario.

Cutting and privatizing public services

– whether it's shutting down the Northlander, closing hospitals, or closing schools – does not make life easier in rural Ontario.

It makes it harder!

So let's do something about it.

Let's deliver change that actually works for people.

And give our rural communities and small towns the support they need to thrive!

[SOLVE]

I got into politics to help people.

And that means I won't change what's already working for folks...

... But I am absolutely determined to fix what's NOT working in Ontario today!

I have a plan that offers hope for people.

Nous devons permettre aux gens d'espérer dans un avenir meilleur.

Instead of ignoring the needs of rural communities,

it's time to deliver the stable and predictable infrastructure funding that you need.

That's why I am committed to fully-funding one-third of repair costs for municipal social housing in your communities.

I am committed to investing in our roads, bridges and culverts, and expanding broadband access.

Instead of wasting money on P3 projects that the Auditor General says have already cost Ontario 8 billion dollars more than they should have.

And I am committed to working with you to bring vital public services like winter highway maintenance back in-house.

Because when companies like Carillion collapse,

you shouldn't have to worry that your highways won't be safe to drive in the middle of winter.

Instead of closing local schools,

I will work with your communities to keep schools open as community hubs.

Instead of squeezing our hospitals,

I will make sure that hospital funding always keeps up with growing costs

– including the unique needs of small, rural, and remote communities.

Instead of leaving families without drug coverage for essential medications,

I will deliver a prescription drug plan for everyone, regardless of how old you are,

with my plan for universal Pharmacare.

A plan, by the way, that will save employers, including your municipalities, over 800 million dollars on employee drug costs.

Instead of leaving families to worry sick about our loved ones in long-term care,

I will expand the public inquiry into long-term care –

so that we find and fix the problems that have robbed so many seniors of the care and the dignity they deserve.

Seniors in rural Ontario shouldn't be stuck on wait lists for the care they need now.

And married couples that have been together for fifty or sixty years should never be torn apart.

Ontario's seniors – and our own aging parents – deserve more dignity and respect than that.

And instead of letting hydro bills soar, I will lower hydro bills for everyone by about 30 percent.

Electricity is not a luxury. *So it shouldn't be priced like one!*

With my plan, rural families and businesses will pay the same delivery charges as urban customers.

We will bring Hydro One back into full public ownership and control.

And we will end mandatory time of use pricing.

Because families should be able to cook dinner at dinner time without being punished!

[pause]

I am working for the people of Ontario.

I am determined to deliver change that works for the families that you and I serve.

And the plan that I am offering to Ontarians is a plan that offers hope to everyday families.

We *can* deliver better public services.

We *can* create opportunities for our young people.

We *can* have leadership that respects rural Ontario.

And together, my friends, we *can* build a vibrant... and prosperous... and hopeful future for everyone in rural Ontario.

Where every community in our great province shares in the benefits of our prosperity!

This is the change that Ontario deserves.

And, if I have the privilege of serving as the next Premier, I look forward to working with all of you to make it happen.

And to make life easier for the people of this province.

Thank-you very much! *Merci beaucoup. Meegwetch.*