

Federal jobs grant program and infrastructure program will be key issues for Wynne next week

BY JOANNE CHIANELLO, OTTAWA CITIZEN JULY 19, 2013

Premier Kathleen Wynne and Ottawa South Liberal candidate John Fraser tour and meet with students at the Employment Services section of the Youth Services Bureau in Ottawa.

Photograph by: Chris Mikula, The Ottawa Citizen

OTTAWA — When Premier Kathleen Wynne meets with her counterparts from across the country in Niagara-on-the-Lake next week, she'll be looking to cement a united front on two major issues: changes to the federal jobs grant program and a national infrastructure program.

"There's a lot of unanimity on the concern around the jobs training program," said Wynne when asked if she had support from other premiers on her two priorities. "And there's no doubt that infrastructure is an issue for everyone. Exactly what that will look like and where we'll land, it's not clear."

The leaders of the 13 provinces and territories created the Council of the Federation in 2003, "as part of their plan to play a leadership role in revitalizing the Canadian federation and building a more constructive and co-operative federal system," according to the group's founding agreement.

In other words, it's a way for the provinces and territories to try to agree on what they're going to demand from the federal government.

In its 2013 budget, the federal government announced it's changing how it contributes to job-training programs, and already the 13 premiers have issued a press release calling for it to work "collaboratively" with the provinces and territories. The provincial leaders charge that the federal government's proposed changes would "take funding from programs that help the most vulnerable people."

"It's really important to me that the provinces have flexibility to deliver the program when and how and where they need them," said Wynne. "We need to make sure we're speaking with one voice."

Getting to an agreement on what a national infrastructure program might look like is expected to be more challenging.

On the one hand, all the provinces and territories want infrastructure funding.

"I keep hearing it across the country that infrastructure is an issue, that there's a backlog of infrastructure needs in every province," said Wynne, who was in town Friday to help Ottawa South Liberal candidate John Fraser campaign for the upcoming byelection. (The premier was travelling on "the party's dime," she pointed out.)

But there is likely to be disagreement among the 13 premiers about what sort of infrastructure funding they'll want from the federal government. Wynne, for example, is expected to argue in favour of —

while not exclusively for — greater and more reliable transit funding.

“I believe transit funding, for example, needs not to be ad hoc, that there needs to be some way of predicting how it’s going to flow and what those partnerships are going to be over time,” said Wynne.

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