

# Updated: Wynne, Snyder discuss auto sector, Great Lakes



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Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne and Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder address the media on March 13, 2017 in Detroit. Snyder and Wynne stressed that they want their voices heard as President Donald Trump demands a negotiation of trade policies between the United States, Mexico and Canada. *CARLOS OSORIO / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS*

The elephant in the room — U.S. President Donald Trump — might have been largely avoided, but a

meeting between Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne and Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder in Detroit Monday was all about increasing cross-border ties between two countries.

“This is just good, smart stuff to do — they’re just great neighbours, let’s not make this too complicated,” Snyder told reporters after the two leaders met. It was his response to questions about Trump’s pledge to reopen trade talks and to suggestions of new border taxes.

Trump has said he wants the North American Free Trade Agreement reopened as part of his plan to create more jobs domestically. U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said last week both Canadians and Mexicans “know, everybody knows, that times are different ... and they all know they’re going to have to make concessions.”

Wynne said it’s at the subnational level where “the rubber hits the road.” She pointed out that Ontario is Michigan’s top customer worldwide and that about 259,000 Michigan jobs are supported by trade with Canada, more than 91 per cent of which is with Ontario.

“I think part of the exercise as we go through this discussion on NAFTA is for people to understand how integrated and how interdependent that we are,” said Wynne.

Preserving and expanding Ontario and Michigan’s strong automotive manufacturing linkages, along with environmental stewardship of the Great Lakes, were the main topics of discussion between Wynne and Snyder.

Last summer, the two leaders signed a first-ever Memorandum of Understanding on auto manufacturing (<http://domain.com///Users/djschmidt/Downloads/MOU%20Canada%20August%202016.pdf>) designed to increase cross-border efficiencies and create jobs.

As Republicans in the U.S. Congress push for a 20 per cent “border-adjustment tax” on all imports — to help pay for a corporate tax rate cut to 20 per cent (from 35 per cent) and to raise a US\$1 trillion over a decade to pay down debt — Wynne pointed out that some automotive products cross the Ontario/Michigan border up to seven times before final assembly.

“Continuing our strong partnership and ensuring a seamless flow of materials between our regions is key to both Ontario and Michigan,” Wynne and Snyder said in a joint statement issued after their meeting. “We are advancing our ability

to develop new cutting-edge automotive technologies and improve the efficiency and reliability of our supply chains.”

Windsor and Detroit will be jointly hosting a Great Lakes Governors and Premiers Leadership Summit in October. “This event will reaffirm the importance of healthy Great Lakes to our environment, economy and society,” the leaders said in their statement.

Politicians and scientists on both sides of the border reacted with alarm last week to reports that federal cost-cutters in the Trump administration are looking at a 97 per cent cut to the US\$300-million annual allotment to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

Snyder, who described the Great Lakes as “one of the world’s greatest assets,” said he’d like to see the current GLRI commitment maintained. The Republican governor said “we’ll have to wait and see” on whether those cuts are actually implemented.

Trump will be visiting the Detroit area on Wednesday to visit the American Center for Mobility, a non-profit testing and product development facility for future mobility, including intelligent and autonomous vehicles.

With his membership “watching very closely” at what might emerge from Washington, Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce president and CEO Matt Marchand described as important the tone set now from leaders such as Wynne and Snyder.

“Automotive is a very, very important sector of our economy, and Ontario and Michigan are the leaders of that in their respective countries,” said Marchand.

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