



Ernie Eves
Premier



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Ernie Eves
Ontario's Premier



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Friday, May 16, 2003

Speech from the Throne - September 27, 1995



SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

**Address of
The Honourable Henry N. R. Jackman
Lieutenant Governor of the
Province of Ontario**

**on the opening of
The First Session of the
Thirty-Sixth Parliament of the
Province of Ontario**

September 27, 1995

Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislative Assembly, ladies and gentlemen:

I have the honour of welcoming you to the opening of the first session of the Thirty-Sixth Parliament of the Province of Ontario.

Today's speech could have been among the shortest in Ontario history. The agenda is already clear, and it might suffice to say simply, "Your government is doing what it said it would do, and it will continue."

It will continue, because...

People want jobs for this generation and the next.

Ontarians want value for their tax dollars and an end to government waste.

Families want safe communities.

We all want a sound health care system.

Parents want schools where children learn.

We want every Ontarian to have a fair chance at a productive, independent life.

June 8, the people of Ontario voted for major change. The new government accepts that responsibility, and will deliver. It does so, mindful of the enormous and difficult task ahead.

Over the past decade, Ontario has lost its way. Workers fear for their jobs; the jobless despair for the future. Public debt and deficits sap the strength and vitality of our economy, and threaten the legacy we leave to our children. Taxes are too high government spending too great yet services have deteriorated.

This administration is charting a new course. Setting priorities and sticking to them. Restructuring to ensure we can live within our means. And making major change, fundamental change, in the way government works.

Through these actions, spelled out in the Common Sense Revolution, the new government will restore prosperity, free the private sector to create jobs, and meet the challenge of renewing Ontario.

A Prosperous Province

The foundation of prosperity is jobs. Economists know it. Business knows it. People know it.

A good paycheque allows every person to provide for his or her family, and to save for the future. Consumer spending creates more jobs. Saving provides capital for new, job-creating enterprises.

Job creation requires dual action cutting taxes, and unshackling business, especially small business that creates most new jobs in Ontario.

Your government will encourage private-sector job creation by honouring its pledge to cut provincial income tax rates, starting with its first budget. Every dollar of reduced taxes is one more dollar the factory worker in Oshawa and the forestry worker in Cochrane can spend on their families... and in doing so they are reinvesting in Ontario's economy.

Working Ontarians share many of the same concerns like Lindsay Mason, who is here today in the chamber, and Greg and Cathy Hart. These people work hard to keep a roof over their heads, place food on the table, and put something away for the future. And like most Ontarians, they've tightened their belts, but wonder when government will start to do the same.

Ms. Mason and the Harts already have plans for the dollars the tax cut will return to them. For Ms. Mason, it's home improvements; for the Harts, it's replacing an appliance, or new clothes for their children. Their spending and saving, multiplied by that of millions of Ontarians, will provide a direct boost to private-sector job creation this province very much needs.

Another boost to job creation will be reducing payroll taxes on business making it easier for companies to create new jobs and hire more people.

Your government will stimulate job creation by eliminating the Employer Health Tax on the first \$400,000 dollars of payroll, reducing Workers' Compensation Board premiums by five per cent, and abolishing the annual corporate filing fee.

Ontario's economy will also benefit from the new government's commitment to freeze the average rates charged by Ontario Hydro for five years.

During this session, your government will initiate a "red-tape review" of regulations affecting business. Restrictions that cannot be justified will be eliminated within 12 months of the review.

These measures will stimulate job creation across Ontario and bring renewal and growth to all regions of the province. While many keys to prosperity are the same province-wide, your government recognises the distinct character and needs of each region.

The government will work to ensure the needs of all Ontarians urban and rural, east and west, north and south are accommodated in the delivery of services, and that all Ontarians share in renewed economic opportunity and jobs.

To demonstrate its commitment to northern Ontario, your government will give northerners a greater voice by refocusing the mandate of the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines to reflect more local input.

A Climate for Job Creation

Prosperity depends on a cooperative environment that encourages job creation and new investment. To trigger economic growth in Ontario, your government will introduce legislation to repeal the previous government's labour legislation, Bill 40.

Gradual evolution over a half-century established labour laws that struck a careful balance between the legitimate rights of employees, trade unions and employers.

Bill 40 upset that balance, replacing it with uncertainty and tension between labour and management. Bill 40 drove jobs out of Ontario, stifled expansion, and discouraged employers and investors from locating here in the first place. To ensure strong economic growth, that delicate legislative balance must be restored.

As part of the process, the new government will introduce legislation to empower individual workers by ensuring their democratic right to a secret ballot vote prior to certification, contract ratification, or strikes.

Recognising agriculture's importance to the provincial economy, the legislation will also protect family farms by repealing the Agricultural Labour Relations Act, Bill 91.

These steps come as no surprise. The new government's intentions were announced during debate on Bill 40 in November 1992, again when the Common Sense Revolution was released in May 1994, and again during this year's election campaign.

The people have spoken, and this government will deliver. Business and labour must respect the will

of the electorate, and work cooperatively to ensure stability and labour relations harmony. Only in this way will everyone benefit. Only in this way will Ontario's economy be strengthened and grow.

Your government will also reform the Workers' Compensation Board. The Board was created to protect injured workers, but as a result of poor organization, inefficiency and an unfunded liability of over \$11 billion, these original objectives have been lost or forgotten.

Ensuring safety in the workplace is a key priority of your government. A reorganized and solvent board will better protect Ontario's workers. At the same time, it will allow the government to reduce WCB payroll taxes, in order to encourage job creation.

These measures, and others, will send a positive message across the province, through the nation, and around the globe: Ontario is open for business again.

Value For Taxes

Prosperity also depends on a healthy economy offering confidence to the investor and encouragement to the business owner considering expansion.

Each year, interest payments on the accumulated provincial debt consume billions of dollars of taxpayers' money. Public debt interest has grown, on average, more than \$1 billion a year for the last five years - diverting billions of dollars that otherwise could be spent on programs. The burden of debt has damaged Ontario's credit rating, and threatens the province's ability to attract investment and stimulate the economy.

People know that it does not make sense to borrow more money just to pay the interest on money they already owe. Yet that is what Ontario is doing.

Parents know that growing government debt endangers the security of their children's future.

We must get government spending under control. We cannot ignore the threat to our children's future, to our province's future. To balance our books, Ontario must continue the spending cuts begun in July.

Your government's expenditure control will enable it to balance the provincial budget by fiscal year 2000 - 2001, and put Ontario back on the road to sound financial management.

When families are short of money, they make hard choices so they can pay the rent and keep food on the table. They live within their means. Now government must do the same.

To rescue this province from the trap of debt - to renew confidence in the economy - government must make hard decisions about what lies at the core of its responsibilities.

For example, government must ask whether Ontario taxpayers really need to own and operate their own TV broadcast network.

Government has no business using your tax dollars to lead the seventh-inning stretch at major league baseball games.

This government will not spend millions of taxpayers' dollars funding groups whose only purpose is to lobby for the expenditure of even more borrowed dollars on narrow vested interests.

Already, your government is assessing which of its activities are unnecessary, and which others are best left to individuals, communities, or business.

It will pursue alternatives such as partnerships between government and private businesses, and opening government operations to outside competition.

Two-thirds of our provincial budget consists of transfer payments. A large part of these transfers fund services delivered by institutions other than the Ontario government. These organizations which spend more provincial tax dollars than Queen's Park have the ability and the responsibility to restructure, to control their own spending, and to reduce costs. This is the only way Ontario can get its finances in order.

The new government invites its partners in the broader public sector to identify the tools they will need to increase flexibility, improve efficiency, and reduce costs.

Your government is committed to introducing a new Municipal Act, and this session will launch consultations with municipalities. It also intends to dismantle Bill 163, the Planning and Development Reform Act, eliminating red tape, expediting the planning process, empowering municipalities, and balancing economic and environmental interests.

Your government is serious about reducing its own size and cost. This year \$1.9 billion will be saved, but even after these savings, the province's deficit for 1995-96 will be \$8.7 billion. The new administration has only begun to meet the challenge of reducing the size and cost of government; much more remains to be done.

As it reduces costs, the government will move to reduce internal duplication, offer one-stop access to services, and improve delivery.

During this session, the new government will also launch a review of public agencies, boards and commissions. Agencies will be put to the test: bodies that no longer provide value for tax dollars or whose mandate is obsolete will be eliminated.

Working people have seen the value of their paycheques dwindle over the past decade, and know that politicians should not be exempt from sacrifices. Your government agrees, and will lead by example.

Starting here in this chamber, the new government intends to reduce the number of politicians in Ontario. It will introduce legislation so that, in the next general election, voters will elect a much smaller legislature. Your government's goal: to reduce the number of seats from 130 to Ontario's representation in the House of Commons, currently 99. This session, the government will initiate talks with the federal government about common boundaries.

Your government will also introduce legislation based on the recommendations of the recently-announced commission on MPP compensation. This reform will scrap the gold-plated MPP pension plan, eliminate tax-free allowances, and take responsibility for setting MPPs' pay away from politicians.

As it restructures and reduces costs, your government acknowledges that Ontario is not alone in this exercise. Canadians everywhere recognise that the status quo is not working for them any more. Canadians everywhere seek major change.

To our fellow Canadians in all parts of the country: Ontarians want to be part of a national solution

to the current economic and fiscal challenge.

To our fellow Canadians who are also Quebeckers, citizens of our sister province: We appeal with an open heart and with generosity of spirit to remain within Confederation so that we might continue to work together for prosperity and equality of opportunity for all.

Safe Communities

A "justice system" that forgets victims of crime is unworthy of the name.

Feeling unsafe in our homes and on our streets makes victims of us all. There are too many stories like that of Mr. Pat Haghgoo, who is here today. Mr. Haghgoo is a Toronto convenience store owner who has been robbed more than a dozen times.

He puts in long hours and works hard to serve his customers and succeed in his business. He asks little of government, but he does expect government to make sure that the streets are safe and the punishment for lawless behaviour fits the crime.

The new government is committed to shifting the justice system's focus away from concern only for the criminal, to include concern for the victim. It will ensure that our justice system is up-to-date, is more efficient, and concentrates on serious crime.

As the first step in righting the balance between those who live outside the law and those who depend on the law for protection, this session your government will introduce a Victims' Bill of Rights.

A Sound Health Care System To the office worker, the pensioner, the single parent, the farmer to all Ontarians a sound health care system is fundamental to the quality of our lives.

Everyone knows that simply throwing more money at health care is not the answer. The public and professionals who work in the system agree that the government does not need to spend more on health care; it needs to spend dollars far more effectively.

Within the health care budget are the potential for savings and opportunities for reinvestment. We will continue to redirect savings in ways that maximise outcomes and provide the greatest benefit to people.

Already, this government has reinvested in improved dialysis treatments for kidney patients. We will improve access to care for northern and rural Ontarians who have faced the reduction or loss of hospital emergency room coverage. We will take the lead in coordinating, streamlining and better integrating the delivery of cancer care services in Ontario.

Your government will reinvest in targeted public health measures, such as immunization of children against early childhood diseases, that will keep people healthy and out of hospitals and doctors' offices.

To achieve savings and permit reinvestment, government, hospitals, providers and private sector partners must work together to manage the system efficiently, work within resources, prevent duplication, eliminate waste and combat fraud.

A Fair Chance

In the past ten years, the number of people trapped in the welfare system has nearly tripled, while

welfare expenses have quintupled. Businesses continue to receive government handouts, though businesses say they don't want them. And employment equity legislation enforces discrimination and hiring quotas in the workplace.

Previous governments spent billions of taxed and borrowed dollars on these programs, and sank deeper into debt, while jobs disappeared and the economy dragged.

Ontarians know this is wrong. They want a welfare system that doesn't create dependency, but ends it. They want businesses to grow through hard work and creativity, not tax-funded freebies. And they want equal opportunity in the workplace, not legislated quotas.

Your government has already initiated changes designed to give all Ontarians a fair chance at a productive, independent life.

In July it announced that social assistance rates will be adjusted so that on average they are 10 percent higher than the average of the other nine provinces. To encourage initiative, current recipients will be able earn back the difference between the old and new rates without having this income clawed back.

Your government promised to support the most vulnerable in our society; welfare benefits for seniors, persons with disabilities, and their families have not been reduced.

The new government is implementing waste and fraud control measures, including tighter requirements for eligibility. Welfare eligibility for 16- and 17-year olds has been curtailed and will be phased out.

The centrepiece of this government's strategy to convert welfare from a hand-out to a hand up is mandatory workfare and learnfare - a reform to which your government remains as committed today as ever.

During this session, the new government will begin to require able-bodied welfare recipients, except single parents with young children, to perform community service or enrol in work or training programs in exchange for their benefits. Those who refuse to participate will lose their benefits.

Condemned to a life of hopelessness, the children of welfare are the greatest casualties of the system. To ensure a brighter future, your government will establish programs, including a school nutrition initiative, to provide children the support and encouragement they need.

To restore fairness in hiring, in this session the legislature will be asked to repeal legislated quotas, including the *Employment Equity Act*. To help employers maintain discrimination-free workplaces, the new government will implement a non-legislative equal opportunity plan that supports education and training, the elimination of barriers to equal opportunity, and sharing expertise and experience among workplace partners.

In the longer term, your government will reform the Ontario Human Rights Commission to ensure the Commission fulfils its mandate to help victims of discrimination effectively and efficiently.

A fair society protects the interests and autonomy of vulnerable people, and treats them with dignity. This must be done without unduly burdening service providers and families, or creating a costly, complex bureaucracy.

Your government will introduce legislation to repeal the *Advocacy Act* and to streamline the *Substitute Decisions Act* and the *Consent to Treatment Act*. A new and better system will support the interests of vulnerable people.

Ontarians are a generous people. Today, thousands of volunteers, from Cornwall to Kenora, work to make their communities better places to live. The Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier will lead a government initiative to promote and encourage this volunteerism in our province. Neighbours helping shut-in seniors, corporations sponsoring nutrition programs for children, service clubs funding community projects, private sector employees and executives volunteering for public service - this is the spirit of Ontario. Your government will support and nurture that spirit. All members of the legislature are invited to participate.

Excellence in Education and Training

Ontario taxpayers annually spend more than \$14 billion on elementary and secondary schools. But the quality of our education system ranks behind countries such as Japan, Ireland and Germany.

We have too many children who can't read, too many children who can't use a computer, too many children who don't have the skills required for today's jobs.

Recognising the importance of education to Ontario's future, your government is committed to providing value for parents and taxpayers, while ensuring excellence in teaching.

As promised, the new government will honour its commitment to classroom education. However, funding this priority means school boards must make responsible choices in allocating their resources.

By restructuring, working cooperatively at local levels, streamlining top-heavy administration and bureaucracy, reducing the number of politicians, and removing waste and inefficiency, school boards will be able to reduce overall costs while maintaining high-quality classroom education for students.

For its part, your government will give communities the flexibility they need to make these choices and improve efficiency. This session it will introduce legislation to restore junior kindergarten as a local option, starting in the 1996-97 school year.

Within the classroom, the Harris government will ensure a demanding core curriculum, regular testing of students, and standardized report cards.

Renewing Our Pride

The decisions made by your government since the election have not been easy, or taken lightly. But action will continue as long as necessary to restore prosperity through a balanced budget and job-creating tax cuts.

The new government has been open about its intentions. It wants to work cooperatively with all Ontarians to build a better future. Greyhound bus mechanic Earl Smith, who is here today, spoke for many voters when - two days after the election - he reminded Mike Harris that people expect this government to live up to its promises, and will be watching.

Your government acknowledges this, and invites everyone to become a partner in the agenda for change. To obtain a copy of this speech outlining the new Government's direction, Ontarians can call 1-800-668- 9938.

Your government's goal is to make Ontario a place in which we can once again take pride.

Ontarians won't get there by clinging to the status quo. We stand at a decisive moment in the province's history. Major change points the course to a better future.

The path to a renewed province is difficult and demanding. But this government is prepared.

Prepared to work hard.
Prepared to give total commitment.
Prepared to set priorities and stick to them.
Prepared to lead by example.

Today, your new government rededicates itself to the restoration of hope and prosperity to Ontario - rededicates itself to the *Common Sense Revolution*.

May Divine Providence attend your deliberations. In our Sovereign's name, I thank you. God bless the Queen and Canada.

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