



Ernie Eves
Premier



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Ernie Eves
Ontario's Premier



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Friday, May 16, 2003

Speech from the Throne - April 19, 2001

"21 Steps Into the 21st Century"



Address of
The Honourable Hilary M. Weston
Lieutenant Governor of the
Province of Ontario

on the opening of
**The Second Session of the
Thirty-Seventh Parliament of the
Province of Ontario**

April 19, 2001

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Members of the Legislative Assembly, citizens of Ontario:

Welcome to the 2nd Session of Ontario's 37th Parliament.

Today, on Yom HaShoah, we pause to remember victims of the Holocaust. We join citizens around the world in pledging, "Never again."

Since the Assembly last met, Ontario has lost three distinguished public servants.

Ellen MacKinnon, the first female legislator from Lambton County, cared deeply about our education system and devoted herself to building a better society.

Wilf Spooner was an accomplished cabinet minister whose commitment to the people of the North, including residents of his hometown, Timmins, earned him the nickname "Mr. Northern Ontario."

The sudden loss of Al Palladini reminded us how fragile human life is. We remember his sense of humour, love of life, compassion for others and desire to give back to a country that gave him so much. He will be missed.

Those who have gone before provide the inspiration to move forward and build a brighter future for all.

Since 1995, your government's plan to improve the lives of Ontario families has been consistent and clear. The plan is to strengthen the economy by cutting taxes, reducing red tape and eliminating barriers to economic growth.

Your government's goal is ambitious, yet achievable: that within 10 years Ontario will enjoy the best-performing economy and the highest quality of life in North America.

Economic strength and quality of life are inseparable. Only a strong economy provides the means to support important services such as accessible health care and quality education. Only a strong economy supports assistance for children, the elderly and the most vulnerable in our society. Only a strong economy offers hard-working families the promise of a better life.

The plan is working. The people of Ontario have seized new opportunities, yielding remarkable results: More than 822,000 new jobs. More than 578,000 people escaped welfare.

In the last two years, Ontario's economy outperformed that of each G-7 nation ... growth unseen since 1985.

The successes of yesterday do not, however, obscure the challenges of today.

Ontario faces real and pressing tests. The world economy is changing at a rapid pace. Local economies that fail to adapt or cannot compete will be left behind.

Responsible choices must be made if our province is to remain competitive and strong.

Amid global uncertainty and change, the provincial economy continues to grow, but slowly.

Responsible choices are required to keep the economy growing, and to determine spending priorities among competing demands that in total would far exceed the growth in revenue.

Health care spending has increased at a dramatic pace: 27 per cent in five years, 19 per cent in the past two years alone. Yet spending does not equate to quality. Is Ontario's health care system 19 per cent better than two years ago? The United States and Canada lead the world in health spending; do they lead the world in health care?

To increase spending without improving quality is unwise. To increase spending unsupported by economic growth is unsustainable. In recent years, even as Ontario's "red hot" economy grew at an historic pace, health spending grew faster. At the current rate of increase, within five years health spending would consume 60 per cent of the Ontario government's operating budget -- up from 44 per cent today and 38 per cent since the government was first elected.

Other provinces face the same challenges. In Saskatchewan, government health care spending is projected to increase faster than government revenue, leading to a gap of \$300 million at the end of four years. In Nova Scotia, within 10 years, rising health costs could consume the entire provincial government budget.

Responsible choices and tough decisions are needed not merely to sustain, but quite literally to

save, Canada's health care system.

To meet all the challenges of the 21st century, your government has chosen to focus on three priorities:

Growth;
Fiscal Responsibility; and
Accountability.

Growth -- growth in the economy, growth in jobs -- remains your government's top priority. It will act with speed and conviction, pursuing a pro-growth agenda that will protect jobs, keep families financially secure and maintain the strength of all communities.

Sustained growth is essential to protect the gains that have been made. Sustained growth is essential to continued support for health care, education and other services that people depend on.

Fiscal responsibility begins with the prudent use of tax dollars -- a focus on priorities such as health care, education, environmental protection and infrastructure.

Fiscal responsibility requires that everything government does, it does efficiently, while offering citizens best value at lowest cost. Yet it also demands that government make clear choices about what it cannot and should not do. The principle of "doing better for less" is important, but it only applies to functions government should perform in the first place.

Accountability is required, not just of Ontario's government, but of all governments and indeed of all institutions funded by taxpayers.

Government is the servant of the people, not master. Citizens are more than "customers" or "clients"; the entire public sector belongs to them. Citizens are entitled to transparency in the operation of public institutions, including openness about how they spend and reporting of their performance and results.

Growth, fiscal responsibility and accountability: These priorities underlie an action plan outlining the new ideas and decisive steps essential to protect the economy and sustain Ontario's quality of life. An action plan of 21 steps leading into the 21st century.

The first part of the action plan is presented in this speech. The remainder will be outlined in a series of daily announcements, culminating in the provincial budget, May 9.

The steps of the plan are clear and measurable, allowing citizens to hold their government accountable for its commitments. The government will provide regular progress reports to the people and the legislature..

- A new task force will measure and monitor Ontario's productivity, competitiveness and economic progress compared to other provinces and the U.S. states. The independent task force, led by Roger Martin, Dean of the Joseph L. Rotman School of Management and one of Canada's leading experts on competitiveness, will report to the public on a regular basis.

**Step 1:
Removing Barriers to
Jobs, Investment and
Growth**

Ontario must remain competitive with the rest of the world. Taxes must be competitive. The regulatory climate must be conducive to investment and job creation.

Barriers to economic growth threaten jobs, the standard of living and opportunities for future generations. Removing them is the first step of the plan.

To remove barriers to jobs, investment and growth your government will:

- Honour its tax-cut pledge.
- Apply a new business impact test to proposed policies and regulations that might adversely affect competitiveness or jobs.
- Open the electricity market to help meet the province's long-term electricity needs, while ensuring a safe, reliable and affordable supply of power. Monopolies do not operate in the best interest of taxpayers. Open, competitive markets are more efficient and fair, they help keep costs low for consumers over the long-term and they encourage innovation.

Additional measures to help remove barriers to jobs, growth and investment will be announced April 23.

**Step 2:
Paying Down Debt**

The second step of the plan is to pay down the province's accumulated debt. The budget will outline the next steps.

**Step 3:
Smaller Government**

The third step is renewed efforts to reduce the size and scope of government.

- The government will sell businesses it should not operate and assets it should not own. The first in a series of privatizations will be announced in the budget.
- Proposed legislation would mandate "sunset clauses" for new programs.
- The government will apply the zero-based budgeting principle to ministries and agencies.
- It will ensure that taxpayers' dollars intended for programs to help people are not diverted to lobbying and advocacy.
- The government will strike a panel to make recommendations on the appropriate role of government in the 21st century: what its businesses should and shouldn't be; where it belongs and where it does not.

**Step 4:
More Efficient
Government**

Step 4 is to streamline government and make it more efficient.

**Step 5:
Improved Customer
Service and
E-Government**

Step 5 is continued improvement in customer service and expansion of electronic government.

Details of these two steps will be announced April 23.

Remember, though, that efficiency and alternative service delivery are inadequate responses in areas where the government does not belong. Functions that government has no business providing should be eliminated.

**Step 6:
Preparing for the New
Economy**

Preparing for the new economy is the sixth step. Your government will make Ontario the preferred jurisdiction for those seeking to do business in the digital economy.

- It will introduce broad privacy legislation that protects individuals and propels Ontario to the forefront of the information economy.
- The government will introduce modern consumer protection laws that make Ontario a trusted destination for electronic consumer spending.

**Step 7:
Promoting Growth
Among All Regions and
Industries**

Some regions, including many rural communities, have not shared equally in recent growth and prosperity. A new approach and fresh ideas are needed.

Step 7 of the plan is to support economic growth in rural Ontario, the North and other regions of the province, and to encourage the growth of industries of special regional significance.

On May 7, the government will present its detailed plan for regional economic development.

**Step 8:
Holding the Broad
Public Sector
Accountable to
Taxpayers**

The broad public sector, including all levels of government, consumes 37.7 per cent of the province's gross domestic product.

As step 8 of its plan, your government will introduce sweeping reforms to ensure that all public sector institutions are accountable to the citizens of Ontario.

- Proposed amendments to the *Audit Act* would empower the Provincial Auditor to ensure that institutions funded by Ontario taxpayers use that money prudently, effectively and as intended.
- Legislation to cancel the OHIP billing numbers of providers convicted of health fraud will be introduced.
- Running deficits is not sustainable and not acceptable. Your government, municipalities and school boards are now prohibited from running deficits. The budget will introduce measures that would require the entire public sector, including hospitals, to act in a fiscally responsible manner.

Further accountability reforms will be announced April 30.

**Step 9:
Smart Growth**

As Ontario's population and industries continue to grow, so will pressures on infrastructure.

"Smart Growth" is a vision that promotes and manages growth to sustain a strong economy, strong communities and a healthy environment.

The ninth step in the plan, Smart Growth, will help reduce gridlock, encourage the revitalization of abandoned or contaminated land and promote economic growth.

Details will be announced April 25.

Since 1995, the government has established provincial standards across the broad public sector. These changes were necessary to increase efficiency and accountability and to improve quality, but they should not result in expanded central bureaucracy or the imposition of "one size fits all" solutions.

While economies of scale and common accountability standards promote excellence and efficiency, so do innovation, competition, flexibility and choice. All must coexist. Provincial standards should not eliminate local responsibility. Queen's Park can lead without centralized micromanagement and control.

**Step 10:
Flexibility and Choice
in Education**

For example, 4,746 schools and 74,895 classrooms cannot be run from the Ministry of Education. Excellence among teachers, leadership by principals and the influence of parents make the difference.

Step 10 of the plan is to give parents, principals and teachers the flexibility and choice to do what is best for students.

- Proposed legislation would allow parents more choice to enrol their children in any available school within their system.
- Circular 14, the list of ministry-approved learning materials, will be replaced with provincial guidelines that permit local flexibility. For example, principals may choose to use phonics texts to teach reading.
- School boards will be encouraged to reward high-performing teachers and principals.

**Step 11:
High Education
Standards and
Performance-Based
Accountability**

The government's role should be to lead and set standards. A rigorous curriculum, clear report cards and standardized testing were only the start.

Step 11 is for your government to continue setting standards of excellence for schools, with an emphasis on performance-based accountability. Only performance measurement and the reporting of results will equip parents and students to make informed choices.

- The government will act to ensure that all students in Ontario have the benefit of co-instructional activities.

**Step 12:
Giving Our Children the
Best Start in Life**

Step 12 of the plan is to support parents and ensure children get the best possible start in life. The "Healthy Babies, Healthy Children" initiative laid a necessary foundation. The Mustard-McCain report on early learning painted a bold vision.

- Building on these initiatives, the government will establish a system of local "early years" centres, accessible to all children and families.

**Step 13:
Post-Secondary Access
for Each Qualified
Student**

The government will continue to ensure that every willing and qualified Ontario student secures a place in a post-secondary education program -- step 13 of the plan.

**Step 14:
Ensuring a Skilled
Workforce**

Step 14 is to address skills shortages -- including among the trades -- and ensure that Ontario boasts the skilled workforce necessary to attract investment and jobs.

- The government intends to establish an innovative new post-secondary institution that would link education and skills training with the needs of the marketplace. Details will be announced in the budget.

Details of the government's commitment to children, education and training will be announced April 26.

**Step 15:
National Leadership in
Health Care Reform**

Your government wants to ensure that all people have access to quality health care, where and when they need it.

It will increase health care spending for the sixth consecutive year. Once again, this year, spending will rise faster than the economy grows.

However, double-digit increases in health spending are no longer sustainable.

In the absence of fundamental reform, increased funding is no answer to the national crisis facing the health care system.

To quote from the recent report of Saskatchewan's Commission on Medicare:

"[P]ouring more money into a system with known inefficiencies will not improve it.... More money for an often poorly functioning health care system often means less money for education, job creation, and tax relief, all things that can contribute to improving the health of the people of Saskatchewan. Thus, spending more on the current health care system without addressing its underlying problems would be irresponsible."

*Caring for Medicare: Sustaining a
Quality System*

The Ontario government believes fundamental reform is necessary to save the nation's health care system. Your government is prepared to lead the process of change. This is step 15 of its plan.

- It wants an open, national discussion on the future of health care. The federal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada must be free to consider all aspects of the system and to explore all possible solutions. It should not be limited by a narrow mandate or by restrictions on discussion. Ontario wants to take part in a dialogue that is broad enough to identify real, lasting solutions to the sustainability crisis.
- Among other things, this national dialogue should examine how medicare should be funded by the federal and provincial

governments, having regard to historic contributions, the original 50-50 principle of medicare, and the tax base available to each level of government. The goal should be a full partnership, with each level of government contributing a realistic and fair share of health care costs.

- However, the federal commission will not report until November 2002. That is far too long to wait before acting to save medicare. On an urgent basis, the Ontario government will ask patients, nurses, doctors, hospital administrators and others with an interest in the future of the health system to identify needed reforms and to seek consensus on the best way to allocate the billions of dollars spent annually on health care.
- In addition, as health care costs are projected to grow significantly everywhere, a federal-provincial agreement on funding the annual increases in health care costs cannot wait until November 2002.

**Step 16:
Improving Health
Services**

At the same time it addresses the sustainability question, the government will accelerate reforms to improve the quality of Ontario's health care system -- step 16 of its plan.

More details of the government's health care plan will be announced April 24.

**Step 17:
Protecting
Environmental Health
and Safety**

By preserving Ontario's rugged beauty and protecting its rich natural resources, your government will help ensure that future generations inherit a clean, healthy province.

Step 17 is action to protect environmental health and safety. Here the government will be guided by the *Managing the Environment* report.

Details will be announced May 2.

**Step 18:
Helping People Off
Welfare and Into Jobs**

On May 3, the government will announce details of step 18, which is to help people get off welfare and into jobs.

**Step 19:
Enhancing Community
Safety and Victims'
Rights**

Ontario is blessed with many safe communities where children play, neighbours watch out for one another and people work together to solve problems.

Step 19 of the plan is the introduction of further measures to enhance victims' rights and keep streets and communities safe from crime.

Details will be released May 1.

***Step 20:
Equal Opportunity for
All Citizens***

Ontario is a diverse province. Not only is diversity cause for celebration, it offers a significant economic advantage.

Some in the community face special barriers, including those who live with physical or mental disabilities. Ensuring equal opportunity for all is the 20th step of the plan.

- The government will seek common ground and shared solutions to address the needs of persons with disabilities, and take action, including the introduction of legislation, to build on its commitment.

***Step 21:
Parliamentary Reform***

The 21st century demands that Ontario's democratic processes be modern and responsive.

The 21st step of the plan is support for parliamentary reform, particularly changes that enhance the role and responsibilities of MPPs.

- The government will propose that more issues, particularly those requiring in-depth examination and considered recommendations, be referred to legislative committees.
- The government continues to view only votes on the budget and identified confidence questions as matters of confidence, and encourages other parties to do the same.
- It wants to restore the importance of the process by which MPPs hold the government accountable through review and approval of its spending estimates. To this end, the government will not view the reduction or rejection of any line item in a ministry's estimates as a matter of confidence.
- It will propose that the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly explore other parliamentary reforms that would enhance the role of private members and expand the use of technology.

Conclusion

Today's commitments launch the action plan of 21 steps into the 21st century. Starting Monday, ministers will announce further details of these 21 steps.

Ontario extends far beyond Toronto. The business of this province takes place in every community, not just at Queen's Park.

Next week, the Premier will travel to each region of the province. He will speak to local residents, meet with community leaders and share details of this pro-growth, fiscally responsible, accountability-based action plan.

Members of the Legislative Assembly and citizens of Ontario:

The task ahead is not easy, but through courage and foresight and

determination, Ontario shall continue to make progress. This province can establish the strongest economy and achieve the highest quality of life in North America.

May God continue to bless Ontario and Canada.

May God guide all in public office, that they may use power wisely and well.

God save the Queen.

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