

Speech from the Throne

**STRENGTHENING
ONTARIO'S ECONOMIC
ADVANTAGE**

Address of

The Honourable James K. Bartleman
Lieutenant Governor of Ontario

on the opening of the Second Session of the
Thirty-Eighth Parliament of the Province of Ontario

October 12, 2005





INTRODUCTION: ONTARIO'S ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, people of Ontario.

The Speech from the Throne is one of our best-known parliamentary conventions.

And yet, with your indulgence, I begin today in an unconventional way: with a personal expression of gratitude to the many Ontarians who supported and continue to support my ongoing efforts to champion literacy and mental health among Native youth in Ontario's north.

Ontarians donated more than 1.2 million books in a book campaign, now over, for native communities. They supported the twinning of 100 native schools with public and Catholic schools. And this past summer, five literacy and mental wellness camps were launched in remote areas of the province.

I intend to push ahead with more summer camps in the coming year, which, I hope, should cut into the shocking number of suicides among native children.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

As Ontarians hail from every corner of the world, Ontarians are affected, and Ontarians respond, when tragedy strikes around the world.

Your government has pledged to work with the federal government in aiding the victims of this past weekend's massive earthquake in South Asia, and urges us all to consider donating to relief and rebuilding efforts to help the millions left homeless, as we pause, now, for a moment of silence, out of respect for the thousands who have been lost.

This is the Year of the Veteran, in honour of the men and women who have sacrificed their youth, or made the ultimate sacrifice, so we could live in peace and freedom.

Your government and Ontario drivers show their respect and gratitude with a special veterans' licence plate that bears the poppy.



This Assembly is marking the service and sacrifices of our veterans with a new Veterans' Memorial — the first memorial to be built on the actual grounds of the legislature in 65 years.

Today, we are privileged to be joined by Major-General Richard Rohmer (Ret.), a veteran of the Second World War, who served with the Royal Canadian Air Force as a fighter-reconnaissance pilot from 1942 to 1945 and took part in the D-Day operation.

I ask him to stand, and I ask all of us here, on behalf of 12 million Ontarians, to show our gratitude to him and all veterans.

I want to extend my personal best wishes to former Speaker Alvin Curling, who has served his province well, and is about to serve his country equally well, in a diplomatic role.

I know you join me in finding it slightly ironic that someone who has generated so much warmth would be leaving us for the Dominican Republic now, when winter is fast approaching.

I also congratulate and welcome the new Speaker of this Assembly, a man who possesses both good cheer and an exemplary record of public service.

This chair, that I have the honour of occupying today, is in good hands.

Since I last delivered a Throne Speech in this Assembly, Ontario has lost 11 former MPPs: Joseph “Gaston” Demers, Dominic Agostino, Gordon Mills, Joseph Earl McEwen, John L. Brown, Robert Boyer, Joseph Albert Belanger, Donald William Ewen, Gordon E. Smith, Thomas Alfred Wardle and Allister Johnston.

For most of us gathered here today, it is the name Dominic Agostino that triggers the most vivid memories.

We remember his passion for this place and this province.

But a deep dedication to Ontarians was displayed by each of these men, each in his turn, and we honour them all today.



While this is a Speech *from* the Throne, it is first and foremost a speech *for* the people of Ontario: the millions of Ontarians who get up and work hard every day to reach higher, to build a better life for themselves and their children, and a brighter future for their province and their country.

This speech belongs to them.

And we gather for this session of parliament to work on their behalf.

We do this work at the beginning of the 21st century, a time of tremendous challenges and limitless opportunities.

This speech is about strengthening Ontario's economic advantage, so we can meet these challenges and seize these opportunities.

We know Ontario can compete and win in the modern world.

Our foundation is strong, our people industrious and ingenious.

Ours' is a proud tradition.

And ours' is a bright future.

And yet, our fate is influenced by countless events beyond our borders.

We belong to a very complex, truly global economy — an economy subject to events as profound as war and peace, as volatile as international politics and commerce, as unpredictable as human nature and even nature itself.

No single government or institution can control the path of the world economy.

But your government is working hard to ensure Ontarians can take on the world.

It understands that everything — from the ability of our businesses to compete to our capacity to fund a caring society to the opportunities available to our children — depends on Ontario's prosperity.



So, your government is working with Ontarians to strengthen Ontario's economic advantage by strengthening the education and skills of our people ... by improving the health of our people ... by fostering innovation and leveraging our diversity ... and by ensuring we get the fundamentals right.

For two years now, Ontarians have worked together to achieve a remarkable turnaround in each of these areas.

We're making progress.

Now is the time to accelerate that progress.

STRENGTHENING THE EDUCATION AND SKILLS OF OUR PEOPLE

The brains and know-how of a highly skilled workforce are the economic edge of the 21st century.

So, when we strengthen the education and skills of our people, we strengthen Ontario's economic advantage.

Your government's plan for education and skills is focused on success, at each crucial stage of the learning curve, by ensuring that:

- Young children are ready to learn when they first arrive in school
- School children can read, write and do math at a high level by age 12
- Young people keep learning until at least age 18
- That they have opportunities to learn beyond high school in a university, college, apprenticeship or skills program that is of the highest quality.

This plan begins with Best Start, which will make quality child care and early learning opportunities more affordable for thousands of working families.



It will also fund 25,000 new child care spaces and assistance for thousands of low- and middle-income families.

It is a milestone — the product of years of hard work by people who have devoted their lives to our youngest Ontarians.

We recognize them by acknowledging, in our presence today, someone who epitomizes their passion, persistence and pursuit of excellence: the Honourable Margaret McCain.

Best Start will ensure our children arrive, on the first day of school, prepared to learn.

Your government's investments in smaller class sizes will ensure their chance to learn isn't lost in a crowd.

Twenty-one hundred schools now have smaller class sizes in junior kindergarten to Grade 3 — because of the hiring of 2,400 new teachers.

These are crucial years, when our children are developing the foundation — in reading, writing and math — fundamental to the skills needed in the 21st century.

So, your government will continue to reduce class sizes, driving towards the goal of having our youngest learners in classes of 20 students or less by 2007-2008.

And parents will be able to access up-to-date information on class sizes in their school, and across Ontario, through a new class size website.

Ontario wants our children to read, write and do math at a high level by age 12 — another critical point in a child's progress, when students are developing their skills and beginning to ponder their future.

So, your government has hired hundreds of specialist teachers in literacy and numeracy, trained thousands more teachers in the latest techniques of teaching reading and math and invested in additional resources for students including new textbooks.



For the first time, new Student Achievement Officers are working with our schools, making sure our students have what they need to succeed, and that the approaches that are working in some schools are being shared with all schools.

This sharing of best practices — this drive to student success — is fostered by a new Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, which brings together many of the best and brightest educators in our province.

Your government acknowledges the dedication of all our partners in education — teachers, principals, education workers and trustees — by now recognizing, here in this chamber, their colleagues Jim Spyropoulos, Principal of Newtonbrook Secondary School, where they are striving to improve student achievement, and Avis Glaze, the Chief Student Achievement Officer of the secretariat.

Your government wishes to thank the communities who support our schools, the parents who help with the projects and the homework and, most of all, the students who are striving to succeed, because together, we are making progress.

The percentage of students meeting the provincial standard in reading, writing and math went up eight per cent last year, and your government looks forward to the next set of results.

We need to work together to accelerate that progress, to strive towards the ambitious goal of at least 75 per cent of our children reading, writing and doing math at a high level by age 12.

And we know we can continue to work together, because we have achieved peace and stability for students by reaching unprecedented four-year agreements with our teaching partners. For the first time, the Ontario government will build a genuine partnership with Ontario's teachers, school boards, principals, trustees, students, parents and education support workers.

The government will also work to expand that partnership into the general community, so that the public, non-profits and businesses will find it easier to play an essential supporting role for student success.



Just as the teen years are the link between childhood and adulthood, high school can mark a critical turning point in the life of an Ontarian.

This is when your son or daughter decides whether to reach higher — or drop out.

No decision is more critical to his or her future — no moment more important to Ontario's future prosperity.

And too many young Ontarians are making the wrong choice: nearly one-third of them are dropping out.

So, no initiative is more essential to Ontario's economic advantage than your government's plan to ensure our young people keep learning — in a classroom, apprenticeship or workplace training program — until at least age 18.

Your government will introduce legislation that would make learning to age 18 mandatory in Ontario.

Ontario won't give up on its youth.

Instead, your government will challenge and engage young Ontarians by making learning more relevant to them.

Your government will introduce an alternative secondary school diploma, one that gives prominence to the ability to develop a skill or trade.

This diploma will set a different standard — not a lower one.

The hiring of 1,300 new high school teachers will ensure each school has at least one Student Success Teacher devoted to ensuring students have the support, programs and experience they need to be successful.

There will be improved resources for programs that help students who have left school return to a classroom, apprenticeship or skills program.

And investments will be made in special projects to help students who are struggling to succeed, or need extra help to learn English-as-a-second-language.



We will continue to address the unique challenges faced by Ontario's French-language school boards by forming a permanent francophone education task force to promote French culture, reduce assimilation and help retain our francophone students.

Enabling our students to step up, instead of drop out, will require the combined efforts of Ontarians from all walks of life: students, educators, parents and, in particular, employers.

To dramatically increase the number of co-op and job placement opportunities for our young people, your government will reach out to Ontario business, big and small.

Your government will set clear benchmarks for increasing the percentage of high school students who achieve their diploma.

Students who continue to climb the ladder of opportunity deserve the best Ontario has to offer.

That's why the Reaching Higher plan will invest \$6.2 billion more in postsecondary education and training over the next five years.

It is one of the most ambitious economic initiatives ever in our province.

And it is proof of Ontario's determination to strengthen our economic advantage by strengthening the education and skills of our people.

It has three goals: higher quality, greater accessibility and more accountability.

Quality means improving the experience for students, increasing graduation rates and expanding research.

Accessibility means ensuring no qualified student is denied a higher education because of his or her financial circumstances.

Accountability means showing the public that new investments are achieving meaningful results.

Where you start out in life should not determine how high you can reach.



Already, 135,000 low- and middle-income families are getting assistance they would not have received before Reaching Higher was announced.

This year, 32,000 first- and second-year students are receiving grants, instead of loans — the first time this has happened in over a decade.

Ontario's progress has long been fuelled by each generation's desire to see the next generation go farther.

In recognition of this, your government will establish the First Generation Plan, designed to help those students striving to become the first in their family to seek a postsecondary education.

It will launch initiatives designed to improve access for people who have been under-represented in higher learning, including Ontarians with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples and francophones.

Your government will continue to work to expand the number of apprenticeships available in the skilled trades — this year, next year and the year after that — because in today's economy, knowledge plus skills equals prosperity.

In the coming year, your government will work with its partners to implement the Reaching Higher plan in a way that delivers quality, accessibility and accountability.

IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF OUR PEOPLE

Ontarians value our system of universal, publicly funded health care, provided on the basis of the treatment you need, not how wealthy you happen to be.

Medicare reflects two of our most timeless values: fairness and compassion.

But in the 21st century, medicare is also an important part of Ontario's economic advantage.



Medicare helps us attract investment and jobs: employers who choose Ontario do not have to fund expensive, U.S.-style health insurance for their employees.

And excellent health care, available to all, keeps our people healthy, and that makes our workforce more productive.

So, medicare provides us with a two-sided competitive edge: lower costs and higher productivity.

To sharpen that edge, we must improve the level of care for patients, and ensure medicare is strong enough to care for Ontarians for generations to come.

This is why your government is reducing wait times for key medical procedures by providing:

- Eight per cent more CT scans
- 11 per cent more cancer surgeries
- 16 per cent more cataract surgeries
- 17 per cent more cardiac procedures
- 28 per cent more hip and knee replacements
- And 42 per cent more MRI scans.

These represent some of the largest increases ever.

Your government will work with medical experts to spell out the appropriate length of wait times for these procedures, how long the wait really is and just how much progress is being made when it comes to reducing wait times.

It will launch a new integrated information system and website that empowers patients to see for themselves how long wait times are at their local hospital, and whether a procedure is available sooner at another hospital.

This is unprecedented transparency, accountability and care.

Sixty-nine new Family Health Teams — that will provide improved family care for more than one million Ontarians — are taking shape across the province. Over the next year, the government will announce 80 more teams.



These are teams of nurses, nurse practitioners, dieticians, pharmacists, mental health workers and doctors — doctors who can see 52 per cent more patients because they're working as part of a team.

To further remedy the doctor shortage that affects too many Ontario communities, your government is expanding the number of medical school spaces by 23 per cent while doubling the number of spaces available to international medical graduates, and opening the new Northern Ontario School of Medicine, the province's first new medical school in 30 years.

There are 3,000 new jobs for nurses — and the number of nurses working full-time, according to the College of Nurses of Ontario, has gone up from 51 to 59 per cent, over the past two years.

This means better care, more consistent care, for patients. The government will continue to work with health care providers and nurses to achieve the goal of having 8,000 new nursing positions and 70 per cent full-time employment.

Nurse Julie Longhurst is a recent graduate from Ontario who has accepted a full-time position at Toronto East General Hospital. She will work in the family birthing unit and help ensure happy, healthy beginnings for Ontario families.

By acknowledging Nurse Longhurst, we recognize all the hard-working men and women who care for Ontario patients.

With a 10 per cent increase in funding for long-term care, your government is building a system worthy of the seniors who built this province. New legislation for long-term care will be introduced to build upon this investment.

Your government is also empowering communities by establishing 14 Local Health Integration Networks that will plan local health care. Your government will introduce legislation that, if passed, will fund the delivery of that care.

The adage about an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure has taken on new meaning in the 21st century: health care costs are rising, the population is aging and growing and the need to keep taxation levels competitive has never been greater.



That is why our plan to strengthen health care places great emphasis on keeping people healthy.

For the first time in our history, your government has a Minister of Health Promotion who is leading an ambitious agenda to promote healthy and active living in Ontario.

This agenda includes: legislation making enclosed public places and workplaces smoke-free, the stupid.ca campaign to discourage young people from smoking, the ACTIVE 2010 plan, designed to promote physical activity, and the province taking on a larger share of the costs of public health.

Having removed junk food from elementary school vending machines, Ontario will now require grade schools to provide at least 20 minutes of daily physical activity each school day.

Your government is determined to protect Ontarians' health by cleaning up the air they breathe and protecting the water they drink.

It will replace coal-fired electricity generation with cleaner forms of energy, with the last coal-fired plant slated to close in early 2009.

It will protect drinking water by introducing legislation, as recommended by the Walkerton Inquiry, that would protect water at its source.

It will improve the environmental assessment process by making it more transparent and efficient.

And because a healthy lifestyle includes activity in the great outdoors, it will introduce legislation that would ensure our precious provincial parks are protected forever, while pursuing our strategy to map and sign 64,000 kilometres of Ontario trails.

To symbolize the value we place on our natural environment ... and the power of people to make a positive difference, your government will be creating a new park in the Rouge Valley — the Bob Hunter Memorial Park.



To his children and his wife Bobbi, we say: Bob's passionate defence of the environment blazed a trail and left a legacy. It will not be forgotten.

INNOVATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: DEVELOPING SECTORS, REGIONS AND IDEAS

To fully develop our economic advantage, Ontario must be first in the innovation race.

The first to discover new ideas.

The first to turn them into new products and services.

And the first to market those products and services to the world, so they generate jobs and prosperity for our people.

The Premier has established two goals for the new Ministry of Research and Innovation he is leading: to support the process of innovation and to create a culture of innovation.

He has said he wants innovation to be more than possible in Ontario.

He wants it to be inevitable.

By aligning initiatives that had previously been spread across nine ministries, and working to develop new ones, your government is ensuring that, for the first time, Ontario will have a clear plan for research and innovation.

A new Ontario Research and Innovation Council will provide advice to help ensure more strategic investments follow.

Your government has already invested in the MaRS Discovery District, to help support the discovery, funding and marketing of new ideas, all in the same location.



Your government recognizes that key sectors of the Ontario economy must innovate if they are to compete with the world and employ our people, well into this new century.

The Ontario Automotive Investment Strategy has been tremendously successful in attracting leading-edge investment — investment in the next generation of jobs.

Agreements with Ford, GM, Toyota and Navistar have leveraged more than \$4.5 billion worth of investment in Ontario — including the first greenfield plant in Canada in over a decade, to be built by Toyota in Woodstock.

Your government is continuing discussions with several companies to build on this success.

Our \$30 billion agri-food industry is essential to our economy — especially in rural Ontario.

This is why your government moved quickly to deliver assistance to cattle farmers hurt by the U.S. ban on Canadian beef ... why it continues to act on concerns regarding the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization Program ... and why it is requiring an average of five per cent ethanol in all gasoline sold in Ontario by January 2007, and supporting the construction of ethanol plants here in Ontario — to create new markets for our farmers, clean up our air and provide a hedge against volatile gasoline prices.

Beginning with the Premier's Agri-Food Summit, your government is working with leaders in this sector to develop a common vision for the future.

The focus is on three priorities:

- Innovation: your government will support research and development that helps create new markets and ways of doing business in agri-food
- Marketing Ontario food: your government will work with the industry to develop a new branding and marketing strategy



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- Farm income: Ontario is working with the federal government to improve our system of safety nets.

The forestry sector that is so important to Ontario's economy, and northern Ontario in particular, faces enormous challenges.

Globalization of this industry is causing profound change worldwide, including consolidation and job loss.

Your government is responding with more than \$680 million in support — funding that will help this sector invest in the innovative transformation required to compete in today's market.

To further enhance the northern economy, the government is supporting economic development through Grow Bond loans, supporting job creation through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, attracting anchor investments through the GO North strategy and investing in northern infrastructure.

To share in Ontario's economic prosperity, your government is working actively on a number of initiatives to close the socio-economic gap between Aboriginal peoples and other Ontario citizens. We have embarked upon a new approach to Aboriginal peoples and we are developing proposals to enable Aboriginal peoples to share fairly in the benefits of natural resource development.

Ontario will continue to champion international trade that is open — and fair.

Unfortunately, our competitors do not always play by the rules.

Massive agricultural subsidies in Europe and the U.S. are hurting our farmers and making it difficult for them to compete.

Our competitors are ignoring trade rulings on softwood lumber and slapping tariffs on our products.

And our auto sector is hampered by trade policies that make it difficult for Ontario-made cars to be sold in markets overseas, even though automakers in those markets have broad access to Ontario's market.



We know our people and products can compete with the world and win — as long as the playing field is level, and the same rules apply to everyone.

Your government strongly urges the federal government to take action to ensure fairness — and to heed today's lessons when negotiating tomorrow's trade agreements.

LEVERAGING OUR DIVERSITY

Our diversity is a tremendous source of strength.

Our people come from some 200 countries.

We speak more than 130 languages, practise every faith and embrace every culture.

Our diversity fosters a wonderful view of the world, where there is no us and them: there is only us.

But it's also an economic advantage because it enables us to do business with the world.

We understand every market, have ties to every investment community and can communicate with any customer.

We can leverage our diversity into investment and jobs, but only if we continue to attract the best and the brightest from around the world, and provide them with the opportunity to make the best and brightest contribution to Ontario.

Our desire to truly welcome newcomers to Ontario has stood at the forefront of the Premier's campaign to narrow the \$23-billion gap.

That is, of course, the gap between what Ontarians contribute to the federal government and what they receive back in spending.



It's a gap that was reflected by the federal government spending, on average, \$3,000 more on the settlement and integration of each newcomer in Quebec than in Ontario.

Ontario fought for and received a commitment from the Prime Minister of Canada to eliminate this disparity.

Your government recognizes that gaining language skills is the foundation of success for newcomers. That is why English-as-a-second-language will be the main focus of the newly strengthened Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

Increased funding will mean English-as-a-second-language training for an additional 30,000 newcomers to Ontario.

Your government will also work with partners in education to improve quality in language training.

Your government will also build on the success of bridge training programs that help newcomers gain skills and experience essential to practise in Ontario.

Your government is determined to break down the barriers that can prevent new Canadians from reaching their full potential.

It will ensure timely access to professions and trades for qualified professionals trained outside of Canada by ensuring regulatory bodies create a fair and transparent registration and appeals process.

Your government will launch the first Ontario immigration portal on the Internet, providing potential newcomers with up-to-the-minute information on Ontario's communities, labour markets, skills accreditation and other important information to successfully start their new life here.

It's important to tell Ontario's diversity story to the world, by reaching out to rapidly growing economic markets.

This November, the Premier will lead an Ontario trade and investment mission to Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing and Hong Kong.



And Ontario will open international marketing offices in Tokyo, London, New Delhi and Los Angeles by 2006 — located within existing Canadian offices such as consulates, to take advantage of cost savings and shared opportunities to promote Ontario's trade interests.

GETTING THE FUNDAMENTALS RIGHT

We strengthen Ontario's economic advantage when we get the fundamentals right — modern infrastructure, a reliable energy supply, efficient and effective public services and strong partnerships with the private sector and other governments.

Your government has launched a five-year, \$30-billion infrastructure investment plan called ReNew Ontario.

This features new and improved roads, major hospital projects, water system repair and sustained investment in public transit, including five-year funding for GO Transit capital and the Toronto Transit Commission, and funding for the Ottawa O-Train.

While we must expand our outreach to emerging economies, our biggest trading partner remains the United States.

Your government is investing in major improvements to border gateways in Niagara Falls and Sarnia.

And it has appointed Michael Kergin, the respected former Canadian Ambassador to the U.S., to accelerate dramatic improvements in Windsor, including a new border crossing.

Mr. Kergin is with us today, and when we acknowledge him, we acknowledge all the men and women who are working to modernize Ontario's infrastructure.

A reliable supply of clean energy at a reasonable cost is absolutely essential to Ontario's prosperity.

We have just 15 years to refurbish, rebuild or replace 25,000 megawatts of electricity supply.



In just two years, your government has brought more than 2,200 megawatts on line. It has advanced new generation projects that will provide us with another 9,000 megawatts over the next five years — enough power for 4.1 million homes.

And it is on target to meet Ontario's goal of renewable generation accounting for five per cent of our electricity capacity by 2007.

But there is much more to be done.

To ensure the necessary long-term planning takes place, your government has created the new Ontario Power Authority, and it will act on the best, unvarnished advice on what must be done next.

Commodity prices for new generation will no longer be subsidized or capped. Your government has taken the politics out of electricity pricing. The Ontario Energy Board now sets residential prices.

But your government is taking action to ensure Ontario's prices remain competitive — by achieving a diverse mix of supply, a reliable transmission grid and stability in the energy sector.

It will also give Ontarians the tools they need to better manage their costs, including the installation of smart meters in 800,000 homes and businesses by 2007, and every home and business by 2010.

Smart meters — which tell you what you're paying for electricity at each time during the day — will allow consumers to gear their energy use to when the price is lower.

Your government will introduce new measures — and new legislation — to encourage energy conservation.

We are making these changes in a way that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 megatonnes. This means cleaner air and healthier Ontarians. It represents 10 per cent of Canada's total Kyoto goal. We expect the federal government to recognize this contribution in their Kyoto plan.



Government itself must ensure its own house is in order, that it is delivering a high level of service and practising fiscal discipline.

Almost half of the ministries within your government have had their operating budgets flatlined, declining or held to increases less than the rate of inflation.

The \$5.6 billion deficit has been reduced to \$1.6 billion.

This is due to the hard work of Ontarians. It is a source of confidence. It is not a licence to lose focus. Hard-working taxpayers deserve a high level of service.

Your government remains focused on ensuring an ever-improving quality of service to Ontarians.

This commitment is shared by a public service that is truly second to none, one that demonstrates each day an exemplary work ethic and unfaltering professionalism.

Working with them, your government will unveil what is believed to be the first money back public service guarantee in North America.

Later this year, Ontarians who fill out birth certificate applications online, will get their certificate within 15 days — or they will get their money back.

Your government looks forward to announcing other types of service that will be delivered with a money-back guarantee.

The Drive Clean program includes newer vehicles that are passing emission tests more than 99 per cent of the time.

Drive Clean will be reformed to end this waste of Ontarians' time and money.

Your government's initiatives have successfully brought auto insurance rates down by an average 11 per cent rate decrease, since it assumed office, after years of rate hikes.

Your government will continue to implement the most sweeping and comprehensive changes to Ontario's consumer protection laws in more than 30 years, including stronger enforcement and higher fines.



Your government will continue to work with the private sector, including our small- and medium-sized businesses, which account for half the jobs in Ontario and 99 per cent of the firms.

A new online regulatory registry is the first in a series of steps to make it easier for small business to operate. The new Small Business Agency will continue reducing the paperwork and regulatory burden small businesses face when they interact with government.

A strong democracy is the basis of the work we do together. Your government will strengthen our democratic institutions by consulting Ontarians on electoral and political finance reform.

Your government will continue to seek effective partnerships with other levels of government.

It will continue to campaign to narrow the \$23-billion gap.

Ontarians are proud Canadians, who are willing to play our traditional leadership role within Confederation.

But we want the gap narrowed, because it compromises our ability to invest in our future prosperity, by investing in the education and health of Ontarians.

A strong Ontario means a strong Canada.

At the same time, your government continues to work with the federal government on Ontarians' priorities.

For example, your government will be implementing a new housing agreement that will provide 15,000 affordable units and up to 5,000 housing allowances for low-income households, including people recovering from mental illness, victims of domestic violence and people in remote communities.

It is forming strong partnerships, as well, with our municipalities.



Your government was the first to provide gas tax funding for Ontario public transit.

The proof is now on the streets and rails of Ontario: there are new streetcars, new buses and new levels of service.

Keeping our people moving is important. Keeping them safe is even more important.

Your government will work with our municipal partners to ensure there are 1,000 more police officers on the street by 2007.

The first Canadian province to require hospitals to report gunshot wounds to the police will continue to urge the federal government to toughen sentences for gun crimes.

And your government will expand programs for youth, so there are positive alternatives to guns and gangs and violence.

Ontario will be tough on crime — and tough on the causes of crime.

Strengthening Ontario's economic advantage must include measures to strengthen Ontario's largest economic engine.

Your government will work with municipal leaders to establish the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority.

And it will work with transit authorities to develop a single electronic ticket, good for a trip across the GTA.

A new City of Toronto Act will, if passed, treat Canada's largest city as a mature level of government.

And legislation will be proposed to treat all of our municipal partners with the respect they deserve.



CONCLUSION: WORKING TOGETHER FOR PROSPERITY

This is your government's plan to strengthen Ontario's economic advantage by strengthening the education and skills of our people ... by improving the health of our people ... by fostering innovation and leveraging our diversity ... and by ensuring we get the fundamentals right.

It is the right plan for Ontario at the right time. It is a plan that prepares Ontarians to meet the challenges, and seize the opportunities, of the 21st century.

Under this plan, Ontario is making progress.

The credit for this progress belongs to Ontarians.

The positive results we have seen so far — from higher test scores in our schools to shorter wait times in our hospitals to 193,000 new jobs — are the product of Ontarians working hard, working well and working together.

Now is the time to accelerate this progress.

Now is the time to strengthen Ontario's economic advantage.

And this plan is how we will fulfil the aspirations of Ontarians: to build a better life for our children, and our children's children ... to build a prosperous Ontario and a stronger Canada.

God save the Queen. God bless Canada.