

A SUBMISSION TO THE 2020 PRE-BUDGET HEARINGS OF THE ONTARIO PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Dear Committee Members, I value this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts regarding the financing of the province. I am grateful for whatever time you spend reading, considering and, maybe, acting upon what I have written.

I want to begin by advocating for increased funding for the Ontario Rape Crisis Centres which includes The Halton Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services [SAVIS] It is thirty years since the Montreal Polytechnique massacre and yet, according to figures researched by Statistics Canada and provided by the Ontario Rape Crisis Centres, sexual assaults in Ontario saw a year over year increase of almost 19% between 2016 and 2018, from 7,434 police reported instances to 10,634. Sexual Assault Centres took over 48,000 crisis line calls and supported over 16,000 individual survivors of sexual violence. 37 women in Ontario died as a result of partner violence. These are figures provided by the Ontario Police but we know there are always many more cases than those reported to the police. Everyday in Ontario women experiencing violence attempt to access emergency shelters but are turned away because of lack of safe accommodation and many seeking counseling at Sexual Assault Centres have to be placed on waiting lists.

Last year the Provincial government gave a one time additional 1\$Million to Sexual Assault Centres .It must be remembered that this amount had to be shared between 47 centers, which works out to about \$25,000 per center, which would be insufficient to fund one full time staff person. I urge the Provincial Government to return to the commitment of the previous government. That may be the kiss of death to my request, but I ask the Provincial Government to increase the funding of Sexual Assault Centres belonging to the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres by 30%, over three years so that one of the most vulnerable, endangered people in our province can have access to the safety, respect, compassion, counseling and support that they desperately and eminently deserve.

Next I want to make some comments about health care. Despite the vast majority of Canadians highly valuing public health care, the continual under funding of the health care system by successive governments undermines ones confidence that the parties that have been in power are really committed to a one payer, free at point of access, universal, healthcare system. This is particularly the case in Ontario, one of the richest provinces in Canada , yet where the proportion of budget allocation for healthcare has decreased year after year so that fewer dollars per person are spent on health care in Ontario than in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island or New Brunswick. Our per capita funding of hospitals is the lowest in Canada, and almost the lowest among all OECD countries. Our expenditure on Public Health is the third lowest in Canada. Ontario has the lowest Registered Nurse to population ratio of any province in Canada. As I understand it, in the financial year 2020, this government plans to raise the dollar amount in the budget for health care by 1% .This is below the rate of inflation and does not take into account population growth overall and the significant increase in the senior population. It is, in real dollars, another cut. Added to that there are numerous health care services such as coverage for health care expenses incurred in the USA, the defunding of Chronic Pain Management Clinics, ear wax removal and the providing of sedation for colonoscopies; cuts in funding for cancer screening programs and cancer research, plus stem cell research, and the 'Leave The Pack Behind' program to help teens quit smoking. These cuts in financing either make health care more expensive for individuals

who may not be able to afford the additional costs, or it curtails the advancement and availability of improved understanding and treatment of serious health problems.

These cuts of real dollar amounts for our public health system may seem wise and necessary when trying to reduce the Provincial deficit. However, like so many government actions they are motivated by a certain political assumptions and attitudes which are ultimately shortsighted as regards long term social prosperity. A healthy population is a productive and peaceful population. If you want to avoid increasing unpopularity, renounce your planned cuts and increase the real dollar amounts spent on health care in all its aspects, general physicians, specialists, hospital care, specialised clinics and research.

I consider the proposed reorganisation of Public Health to be mistaken. I cannot see any advantages to the delivery of services. In fact, I can only see disadvantages. It needs to be firmly fixed in the government's mind that public health measures have done more to promote healthy societies than any other form of health care. It is Cuba's emphasis upon public health that results in it having an infant mortality rate considerably lower than that of the USA. The proposed reorganisation can only be a cost cutting measure to a service that most people are unaware of most of the time, but a service that ensures the healthiness of our air, water and food; that organises our protection and recovery from epidemics and provides services to prevent and reduce obesity and addictions. It is of enormous importance to first time pregnant women and mothers. It provides linkage between health and the education and justice systems and connections with both general practitioners and hospitals and thereby completes the public health care system. These kinds of services to be effective, need to be provided locally so that they can be appropriate to local needs of local populations, otherwise they become so 'one size fits all' that they really are not fitted to the specific needs of specific persons at specific times. All true health care is personal. This proposal is extraordinarily short sighted and will only result in greater future unhealthiness, expense and discontent.

I have had an interest in pharmacare for sometime. The Federal Government will almost certainly bring forward proposals aimed at advancing a universal program of this kind. I hope very much that the government of Ontario will recognize the benefits of this addition to our health care services. The cost benefits to the Province, employers and individuals that come from the economies of scale in purchasing medications and of only purchasing new medications of significant proven worth, will be considerable. It will also stop the practice of retailers adding the cost of being supplied by manufacturers and of doctors being given financial inducements to prescribe new and, sometimes, only slightly changed medications. Employers would not have the expense of paying insurers the ever increasing cost of pharmaceuticals which continue to rise because insurers have no incentive to prevent higher pharmaceutical costs. The Provincial Government would not have to allow employers providing health benefits as large a tax deduction. Even more importantly, the needier sections of our population, particularly seniors or persons with chronic health conditions such as diabetes or Crones or asthma, would be able to access necessary medications regularly, and take them in their prescribed amounts. Again, a pharmacare program is not a money loser but a money gainer, because it will keep more people from visits to doctors, procedures and stays in hospitals and fewer days absent from work along with greater physical and mental fitness when they are there. A healthy population is a more prosperous population.

The Closure of Pickering Nuclear Power Station is going to occur in the next few years and so the question arises from whence will this power be replaced. I urge the government to make hydro generated electricity from Quebec a priority for replacing the loss of power from Pickering. No form of power generation has a zero effect upon the environment. However, after the construction of the dam,

generators and the installation of the grids, hydro electric has practically no negative environmental impact, unlike carbon based alternatives, such as natural gas. What is more, in the case of hydro electricity from Quebec, the cost of developing the grid to carry the extra power would not be as expensive as the development of a new large nuclear power station or a number of smaller ones. Even the grid bringing Quebec hydro into Ontario is in place because 8 of the 15 Quebec Hydro lines to neighboring utilities pass through Ontario. I also understand these grids have significant unused capacity. Hydro bills in Montreal are half of what they are in Toronto. Why not choose the cleaner, cheaper, available option?

Finally some remarks on the basic cause of why Ontario is not moving ahead in providing its citizens with the improved, healthier, more prosperous lifestyle of which it is capable. Basically it is because of the government's belief that what is most important in the life of any society is the creation of business wealth. To make that happen certain characteristics must be in place. The first is that where ever possible private business should provide all the goods and services of a society. Second, to make this possible, taxes on businesses should be kept low. Third there should be little government regulation of business activity. The present government is clearly committed to these beliefs. However, with comparable corporate tax rates to that of the other provinces of Canada, which would be 12.5% rather than 9.9%, the Ontario deficit would be eliminated and government finances would be able to pay for the universal services which would be affordable and accessible to all the provinces citizens. Continuing on the economic path that the government has chosen will result in enlarging inequality in health, safety, prosperity and satisfaction among Ontarians.

The corporate tax rate should be raised 2%, along with a concerted effort with other provinces and the Federal Government to prevent the loss of billions of tax dollars because of business profits and savings from large incomes being transferred to companies of convenience in off shore tax havens. Such behaviour by businesses and executives should be named as a form of state robbery and treachery, against which strong action must be taken if a government is, without hypocrisy, to truly be 'a government for the people'.

Respectfully submitted

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