

2020 Ontario Budget Submission

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Submitted by Gord Assman ,President Waterloo Regional Council of Union Retirees (WRCUR), Member at Large, Ontario Federation of Union Retirees(OFUR), Member OFL Pension Committee, President Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees

My name is Gord Assman. I am President of the Waterloo Regional Council of Union Retirees, which is a member of the Ontario Federation of Union Retirees (OFUR). Our organization is dedicated to the proposition that retirees, as free citizens, are entitled to secure and protect their mutual welfare and that of their families. Specific areas of focus include Health Care, Housing, Pensions, and Pharmacare.

As people who helped build our great province, we believe it is past time that we invest in our province's future, while providing assistance to those who helped build Ontario's great legacy.

HEALTH CARE and LONG TERM CARE

We believe these issues go hand in hand as they both have affects on each other. Evidence is clear that Ontarians are suffering from poor access to hospital care and long term care. Many people, including retirees, are at times unable to be admitted to hospitals when necessary or long term care beds. I personally experienced this last winter. I was hospitalized for three weeks; I initially spent two days tying up a bed in emergency, as no hospital bed was available. I was fortunate, as others were being treated in the halls. Once it was time to be discharged, I was in an extremely weak and vulnerable position, as I was bedridden for much of my stay. There was no alternative care bed available for me to recuperate to the point where I could fend for myself; the beds at the Freeport site were full. I am single and have no children. My brother and his wife work full time. I was fortunate that some dear friends took it upon themselves to allow me to convalesce at their home for three weeks until I was able to return home. I'm not sure what would have become of me if not for them. I must say that the last week in the hospital was my most trying time; although I was regaining my health, my future was so unsure.

It is time for the government of Ontario to do what so many governments of the past decade have failed to do – invest in our hospitals as well as create more long-term care beds. Previous governments have allowed our Public Sector Health Funding (both per capita and percentage of Provincial GDP) to fall not only below average, but to amongst the lowest in all of Canada. Furthermore, Canada now has the fewest hospital beds available per capita of all OECD countries except Chile and Mexico; Ontario is near the bottom in Canada. This is unacceptable, not only to retirees, but all Ontarians.

Universal Pharmacare is also something that needs to be funded. We can not count on the federal Liberal government to do this. Ontario needs to be a leader. Many polls have shown that most Ontarians **overwhelmingly** support Universal Pharmacare. When Tommy Douglas introduced Universal Healthcare in the 1960's, it was designed to eventually include prescription drugs. People should not have to decide between paying for prescription drugs and paying rent or putting food on the table. Universal Pharmacare would alleviate this. It would bring down the costs of prescriptions, as the province would be buying drugs en masse. It also would alleviate pressure on our healthcare system. For example, if someone has diabetes and it goes untreated, it leads to complications such as kidney disease and heart failure. As these conditions worsen, the treatment becomes costly – kidney dialysis, heart surgery to name a couple. Not to mention the person could become unable to work and earn a living. This not only puts undue burden upon the person, but our social support system. Universal Pharmacare would not be a cost, but an investment. Ontario must lead the way.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Too many people are unable to find suitable, clean, safe, affordable housing – especially retirees on fixed incomes. One of our members, a widow who is 80 years old, has had to relocate several times in the past several years. It took her over 5 years to find a place that suited her needs and was affordable. It was an extremely stressful time for a woman of her age, who is on her own.

Lack of affordable housing also places undue stress on the economy. People fall behind on mortgages and rent payments, savings diminish, debt increases and consumption spending decreases. None of this is good for a strong economy. I feel it is time for a government to stand up and take measures to invest to ensure that affordable housing is available.

PENSION

All people deserve to enjoy their retirement without financial worry. The Ontario government needs to take measures to ensure this. Measures need to be in place that seniors have a guaranteed minimum income. Furthermore, pension protection measures need to be put in place that if a company goes bankrupt employee pensions are guaranteed. Far too many people have worked their entire lives, and planned their retirement, depending on their pensions, which they have earned, only to have them stolen while executives are awarded bonuses when a company goes bankrupt. This government needs to put measures in place to ensure this doesn't happen.

MASS TRANSIT

It is long past time that the Ontario government makes a significant investment in mass transit to ensure future growth in our province. Previous governments have treated this like a slumlord; "it's not my problem – the next government will take care of it." It is quickly approaching crisis level. Massive amounts of productivity are lost each and every day as people and product sit at a standstill on our major highways. It has gotten to the point that several people I know will not travel to Toronto, or even through Toronto (on their way to another destination), unless it is a complete necessity or emergency. This can not be lost on current and future investors. It will have a negative impact on the economy of Ontario, sooner rather than later I'm afraid. We need a government to invest in our future today.

OUR ENVIRONMENT

The evidence is undeniable that our planet is undergoing climate change. Other economies are investing and encouraging green technology. It is not only time that the Ontario government recognizes this, but acts to encourage green initiatives. We can not afford to put the future of our planet in jeopardy, as well as our economy.

In conclusion, I would like to say that all of the above initiatives, although they will have an initial capital cost, are investments in making our province stronger in the future. I thank you for your time and consideration of my budget submission.

Sincerely
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