

# High stakes at the ballot box

Dear Community Health Professional:

The outcome of this election may determine your future workload, your family's access to health care, the hours you work, who you work for or **whether you will have a job at all.**

These are very high stakes, and as OPSEU community health professionals, we need to think carefully about the choices before us.

Both leading parties are promising to stem the rate of increase in health spending, the Tories pulling the reins a little more tightly than the Liberals. The NDP is so far silent on specific spending targets.

Ontario's Auditor General, has issued a pre-election review of the government's cost assumptions for the next three years.

He describes the government's spending control targets as "optimistic and aggressive rather than cautious." This applies particularly to health care, where the rate of increase is expected to be much less than the pattern set over the last eight years.

The Liberals plan to increase health care spending by 3.6 per cent per year for at least the next three years. Their long term target is to reduce the rate of increase to 3 per cent per year. This is despite government projections that revenues from personal income taxes will increase by 6.2 per cent annually over the next three years. Federal health transfers are also scheduled to

increase by 6 per cent per year until at least 2014. The Tories' plan calls for \$6 billion in spending increases over the next four years – requiring them to reach 3 per cent almost immediately.

The difference between the two parties is about \$1 billion over the next term of government.

## **Slowing spending on home care, and long term care**

The average annual rate of spending growth for CCACs and home care has been 7.2 per cent over the last eight years.

The McGuinty government has budgeted for an annual growth rate of 2.3 per cent for home care despite cutting hospital increases in half. Part of the justification of cutting hospitals is the expectation that more patients will migrate sooner to home care and long term care. But where will these resources come from?

Long term care costs have averaged 8.6 per cent over the last eight years. Nursing homes can expect to see the rate of increase cut by more than half to 4.2 per cent.

## **NDP takes on competitive bidding**

The NDP are the only party promising to take on the dysfunctional competitive bidding system, noting an Ontario Health Coalition study that suggests at least 30 per cent of home care costs are taken up with administration under the present system. They say they will conduct a review of home care with the goal of bringing back a publicly-owned and accountable system. They would also fund one million new hours of home care over the next four years – a modest promise given nearly 30 million hours of service are presently rendered.

The Tories are promising that home care clients can choose to stay with the provider they have now, or pick a new government funded home care provider who better meets their needs. It is not clear how this will work if the agency providing service loses the next competition for work? The Tories also make a vague promise to increase funding, but offer no details.

## **Health care or tax cuts?**

While both the Tories and Liberals plan to dramatically stem the flow of money into health care, they have no intention of turning off the taps to private corporations. Both have committed to continued tax cuts.

This is despite the lack of evidence to suggest there is any connection between the rate of corporate investment and the taxes they pay.

According to the Federal government, every dollar spent on corporate tax cuts generates 30 cents in economic growth. Every dollar spent on public services generates an economic output of \$1.40 for every dollar invested. Promising to roll back recent corporate tax cuts, the latest NDP radio ads say they will instead tie corporate tax cuts to job creation.

## **Attacking your wages**

Tim Hudak is clear in his *Changebook* that he intends to make workers compete

for jobs – jobs that they already have. This is despite a lack of evidence to suggest competitive bidding in home care has saved money or improved quality. In fact, most studies suggest the opposite.

It's clear what the goal is: *Changebook* claims the Tories will "bring public sector paycheques in line with private sector standards." He has even suggested that unions should be part of the competition, pitting public sector wages against those of non-union private sector workers.

## **Interfering with the arbitration process**

The Tories intend to challenge the independence of arbitrators, claiming recent awards have been "excessive" even though most don't even cover the present rate of inflation.

"We will require arbitrators to respect the ability of taxpayers to pay and take into account local circumstances," the Tory platform says.

## **No planning**

The Local Health Integration Networks have not worked well. The NDP promises to replace them. The Tories plan to cut them without any replacement, which raises the question of how public consultation will take place, who will do local planning, or how decisions will be made. Do we want a health system entirely run from Toronto?

In addition to tightening the screws on health care, the Hudak platform includes a promise to gag unions from openly engaging in the electoral process – something he doesn't intend to balance with similar rules in the corporate sector.

How you vote October 6, 2011 will make a difference. Many ridings are won or lost by very small margins. Your future may depend on it.

## **What you can do**

1. Talk to others. Face-to-face contact is the most effective means of communications. That means bringing these issues to your family members, to your colleagues and friends.
2. Visit our special web site **www.whatwillyoudo.ca** and watch our home care music video on competitive bidding. Share the video on Facebook, Twitter, by e-mail or through other forms of social media.
3. Make sure others in your workplace have received a copy of this leaflet. Ask them if they have read it?
4. Don't be afraid to speak up when you hear others trashing public sector work, including your own. Post comments to on-line stories in the media and write letters to the editor.
5. Attend all-candidates debates in your home constituency. Use our sample questions or make up your own.
6. Choose the candidate with the best health care platform and support them by taking a sign, giving them money, or working on their campaign.
7. Watch the Health Care Divisional Council BLOG – **Diablogue** – for updates and more information during the election. There is already considerable information there regarding this election, including a review of statements made so far by the parties on health care. Subscribe and encourage others to do the same. To find the OPSEU Diablogue, either click the link from **www.opseu.org** or go directly to **www.opseudiablogue.wordpress.com**. Don't forget to subscribe – it's free.
8. Come to the Ontario Health Coalition rally September 13<sup>th</sup> at 12 Noon in downtown Toronto.
9. Don't forget to vote, and encourage others to do so too.

## All Candidate Questions

Both Liberals and Tories are advocating further cuts to the corporate tax rate even though the Federal government estimates a 30 cent return in economic growth, a fraction of the \$1.40 in economic growth that would be generated by investing that money in public services. The NDP would tie tax cuts to job creation. Is your choice corporate tax cuts or health care?

In *Changebook* the Tories plan to bring public sector paycheques in line with private sector standards. One of the main reasons for the difference between private and public compensation is the more widespread application of pay equity in the public sector. Are the Tories planning to reduce the wages of women in the public sector as a way to bring wages in line with “private sector standards”?

The government plans on reducing funding increases to hospitals by transferring patients out of hospitals and into long term care and home care. However, the Ontario auditor notes that the government may be optimistic in its forecast to reduce these costs given it is practising even greater restraint on the home care and long term care sector. How does this work?

There is much frustration across Ontario with the Local Health Integration Networks.

How would you improve or replace them? And for the Tories, if you cut them without replacing them with anything, does that mean all health care planning and funding decisions are to be made in Toronto?

Tim Hudak plans on making public sector workers to compete for their existing jobs. Should it be the role of government to make the workplace less secure and set an example for all employers on how to reduce the wages and standard of living for all Ontario workers?

Competitive bidding in home care has been a failure. Administrative costs are conservatively estimated to be 30 per cent. The lack of job security has meant an exodus of professionals. In many regions only the most acute patients are receiving care. What would you do to fix home care?

Tim Hudak says he wants paycheque protection, allowing unionized workers to opt out from supporting causes they don't believe in. Given unions are democratic organizations much like government, does he also plan to allow all taxpaying citizens to “opt out” from government causes they disagree with?

The PC platform calls recent arbitration awards “excessive” even though most have been below the current inflation rate of 3.1 per cent (June 2011). What

is your idea of “reasonable,” and would your government interfere with the independence of the arbitration process to arrive at such a figure? Should it be a goal of government to reduce the standard of living for its workers?

Cuts to the public sector in other countries have led to double-dip recession. Why would we want to do the same through a stepped up austerity program here in Ontario?

In the event that health care professionals face the transfer of their work to the private sector or to another public sector agency, will you maintain the right of workers to transfer with that work, taking with them their existing wage rates, seniority, vacation, benefits and union representation?

### Resources

Pick up a copy of “Challenging Austerity: Questions and answers for supporters of good jobs, quality public services and health unions in Ontario.” There are copies available at your regional office or contact [rianson@opseu.org](mailto:rianson@opseu.org) to order some for your local.

OPSEU Diablogue: For updates on election issues: [www.opseudiablogue.wordpress.com](http://www.opseudiablogue.wordpress.com)

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## This is the time to make a difference! Health Care Rally

Tuesday, September 13 / 12 Noon  
Queen's Park

Non-partisan, this Ontario Health Coalition rally is intended to use the election period to pressure politicians of all stripes into making a commitment to protect our public health care system. It can only be effective if we all take the time to stand up and be counted.



[www.whatwillyoudo.ca](http://www.whatwillyoudo.ca)