

PO 07-862  
WT: mmg  
Sept. 27/07

To: Paul Bilodeau  
copy: E. Angelo  
R. Leung



September 26, 2007

Mr. Warren Thomas  
President  
Ontario Public Service Employees Union  
100 Lesmill Road  
North York, Ontario  
M3B 3P8

Dear Mr. Thomas:

Thank you very much for your letter and for bringing forward the questions and concerns of your members. We are very proud of the fine women and men of the Ontario public service and of the vital role OPSEU plays in the life of our province. I am pleased to have this opportunity to respond.

Upon coming into office, our government — in partnership with your union — has achieved a great deal since 2003. We are proud of our record of a renewed, collaborative approach to labour relations, one that fosters openness, mutual respect, trust and accountability. Some of these achievements include:

- Successfully negotiating a historic four-year collective agreement without conciliation or labour disruption.
- Honouring our commitment to restore successor rights to public sector employees, which the previous government took away in 1995.
- Concluding an agreement to ensure the safe and smooth transfer of the Central North Correctional Centre back into the OPS.

In addition, under the collective agreement, the Central Employee Relations Committee (CERC) has enjoyed a positive and productive relationship that has helped resolve a number of difficult issues.

Let me assure you that our government remains committed to building on the investments in our public service that have been made since we took office.

Like you, we also continue to believe in a strong, publicly funded health care system. We believe that public, universally accessible health care provides Ontarians with the best health outcomes. That is why we are so surprised by John Tory's plan to use public dollars to fund the delivery of OHIP services in

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private clinics and hospitals. This will open the door to full privatization and two-tier health care.

Four years ago, health care in this province was eroding. The Conservatives allowed for greater private delivery and had starved the public system of desperately needed funds. We have increased health care spending by almost \$9 billion since coming to office and have passed the *Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act*, which banned two-tier health care.

For years, the Conservatives failed to fund the true cost of the provincial share in the delivery of ambulance services. We have provided some \$150 million in funding to get the provincial share back to 50 per cent.

We have worked hard with hospitals to improve ambulance off-load times, but we recognize there is still work to do in our emergency rooms (ERs). That is why we will expand our successful wait times strategy — which has reduced wait times in the five key areas of cancer, cardiac, cataract, hip and knee surgery, and MRI/CT — to include ERs, children's surgery and general surgery. We will work with experts to set wait time targets for the ERs and we will meet or beat those targets.

While working on amendments to Bill 140, we met with many of your colleagues who advocated average standards of care. The standard-of-care provisions were removed by the NDP in the early 1990s and many people in the field felt this was a mistake. That is why we made an amendment that allows the government to set average care standards.

We have also committed to consulting with stakeholders, including unions, in defining average care standards and have appointed Shirlee Sharkey to conduct a review of staffing and care standards for long-term care homes. In the interim, we will continue our unprecedented investments in long-term care, like our 2007 Budget initiative to hire 1,200 registered nurse practitioners for long-term care homes.

We are especially proud of the progress we have made in the area of health professionals. Upon coming to office, we recognized the chronic worker shortages that were hindering our health care system. We increased the province's capacity to train health professionals and introduced many changes to the regulatory environment, enhancing the transparency and credibility of health

professional regimes across the province. We will continue to enhance the capacity of the system with investments in health care professionals and to maximize the potential of those professionals.

During the 2003 campaign, I was the only party leader who spoke of the importance of funding for mental health. That is why we have invested \$230 million in new funding — a 58 per cent increase — for the expansion of community mental health services, which will serve an additional 227,100 Ontarians. We will continue to make the necessary investments and improvements to mental health and addictions services.

Home care is a critical component of our health system. Currently over 600,000 clients receive home care services in Ontario. We invested some \$30 million to implement the Caplan Report recommendations, with a focus on stabilizing the personal support worker workforce. Our \$700-million Aging at Home Strategy will help provide more equitable access to health care by matching the needs of the local senior population with the appropriate support services.

All hospitals in Ontario are publicly owned and will remain so under a Liberal government. There are more than 100 new and refurbished hospital projects underway or in advanced planning stages — all of them are publicly owned.

With respect to corporate tax collection and audits, we remain committed to our corporate tax collection and auditing agreement with the federal government. The single administration of Ontario's corporate tax by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) will lead to one set of rules, one form, one audit, one appeals process and one point of contact. For small businesses this will deliver not only savings in administration, but also more time to grow a business or to spend at home with their family.

The agreement outlines employment opportunities at the CRA for Ontario staff currently involved in corporation tax audit, appeals and advisory roles, and describes how the two organizations will manage the movement of employees who accept job offers from the CRA. It provides for employees who accept job offers to begin working at the CRA on April 3, 2008. Operational employees are not receiving job offers. They will have an additional two to three years in which to make informed choices about future career opportunities.

We believe that the establishment of the Ontario Expert Commission on Pensions is an important step toward ensuring that Ontarians can rely on their pensions

and keeping the province's pension system sustainable. I can personally assure you that we take this issue and the Commission very seriously. We were especially pleased when Harry Arthurs agreed to take on the formidable task of chairing the Commission.

We have also made major progress when it comes to dignity for low-income Ontarians. We created 22,000 new child care spaces, 35,000 housing allowances for low-income Ontarians, and built nearly 20,000 new affordable housing units. Additionally, we increased social assistance rates three times. And, after being frozen for nine years, the minimum wage has been increased 17 per cent through four increases to \$8, and will reach \$10.25 by 2010.

But I am most encouraged by the introduction of something new: the Ontario Child Benefit. This benefit is helping 1.3 million children — children in families on social assistance and, for the first time, children in other low-income families. They are currently receiving \$250 per child and, when fully phased in over the next four years, these families will receive \$1,100 per child.

Since 2003, we have successfully recruited some 200 labour inspectors. In November 2004, meat inspectors were brought back into the OPS and into your bargaining unit. As a result, over 100 meat inspectors have been added to the public service.

We have reduced our reliance on consultants and have converted approximately 944 positions, 800 of which are now OPSEU members. We have also met our obligation to reduce the use of unclassified staff as set out in the collective agreement, and expect that trend to continue.

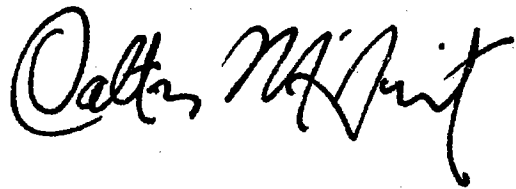
Regarding the Trade and Investment Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA), let me assure you that our priority when studying any potential trade agreement is to ensure it would increase jobs — good jobs — here in Ontario. We will not sign an agreement that would lower or would allow for the lowering of environmental, labour, health and safety standards for Ontario workers.

We will not sign an agreement without first consulting with labour and business.

Ontario prosperity not only depends on our continued economic growth, but also on maintaining a high quality of life through excellent public health, public education and public services. Strengthening those vital public services gives us a competitive edge in this global economy. The Ontario Liberals have a proven track record of doing this over the past four years.

Let me close by restating my belief that Ontario's public service is second to none, and has been recognized time and time again around the world for its professionalism and excellence. We value the co-operative relationship we have forged over the last few years and look forward to continuing that relationship in the years ahead.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dalton McGuinty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D'.

Dalton McGuinty  
Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party  
Premier