

Confederation of Canadian Unions

Political Party Questionnaire for 2011 Ontario Provincial Election

NDP Response

Economics

1. According to Statistics Canada, economic inequality has been on the rise since the 1970s, and as of 2005, the richest 10% of income earners controlled almost 60% of all wealth. How will your party reverse this trend and reduce the growing levels of economic inequality in Ontario?

Ontario's New Democrats have announced a variety of policies to tackle economic inequality. We will raise the minimum wage to \$11 and index it to the cost of living. We will close loopholes in the Employment Standards Act and strengthen enforcement of the Act. We will follow through on the recommendations of the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario which are expected in 2012. In the interim, we will ensure that social assistance rates keep pace with inflation. We will also reduce the clawback of benefits from ODSP recipients when they're moving back into a job. Specifically, we will reduce the clawback on ODSP recipients – we'll eliminate the clawback on earnings up to \$300 a month for the first 12 months after people on ODSP take a job and increase the work-related benefit for all ODSP recipients with employment earnings from \$100 to \$150 a month.

New Democrats will make housing more affordable by implementing a new housing benefit for low-income tenants who pay unaffordable rents and build more than 50,000 new affordable housing units for Ontario over the next 10 years. Finally, considering a strong labour movement is an important part of any program to reduce inequality, we will implement comprehensive labour reform such as card-based certification, first contract arbitration, and anti-scab legislation.

2. Since 2001, the combined federal-provincial corporate tax rate in Ontario has been reduced from 44 percent to 25 percent, supposedly in order to "create jobs." Yet the unemployment rate in the province is higher today than it was ten years ago. What concrete policies will your party implement to actually create good-paying, full-time jobs in Ontario?

In our *Plan for Affordable Change* and in subsequent announcements, we have made a strong and clear commitment to creating jobs in the hard-hit manufacturing sector. We will restore the General Corporate Tax Rate to 14% and invest in companies that create jobs. We will offer a 20% tax credit (up to \$5,000) for new hires, a 10% tax credit for companies that invest in machinery and equipment, and a 20% tax credit (up to \$3,500) for companies that help their staff upgrade their skills.

Our Buy Ontario policy and our commitment to process our resources in Ontario will ensure that Ontario tax dollars create jobs in the province. We will create a Jobs Protection Commissioner position who will play an pro-active role in bringing workers, employers, creditors, investors, governments and community leaders together when good companies are threatened. Finally, we will make mid-size as well as large companies eligible for a reduced industrial hydro rate. In doing so, we'll strengthen Ontario's manufacturing and resource industries by ensuring that Ontario's hydro rate is competitive with neighbouring jurisdictions.

3. According to opinion polls, a large majority of Ontarians support greater funding for social services like health care, child care, housing and education. What will your party do to ensure these programs are properly funded in both the short and long term?

Making certain there is adequate funding for health and social programs is about priorities. Unlike other parties, the NDP will not waste billions of dollars on corporate tax giveaways that do little to create jobs or increase economic growth. Instead, we will invest in the social and economic programs that are fundamental to economic prosperity. We have made a 10-year commitment to increase the supply of affordable housing by 55,000 units. We have committed \$250 million over two years to keep child care affordable and accessible. We have committed to implement a new housing benefit that will make rent more affordable for 200,000 low-income tenants. Finally, Andrea Horwath and the NDP will fight for federal government support for housing, child care and poverty reduction, and will work to secure a fair and adequate 10-year extension to the Federal-Provincial health accord.

Labour

4. The Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) in Ontario is a regressive tax that makes low income and working class families pay a higher percentage of their income in sales taxes than wealthier Ontarians. What will your party do to end the HST and instead place the burden of taxes on those who can afford to pay them?

We will eliminate the HST from hydro, home heating, and reduce the HST on gas by half by 1%/year. We will also return the General Corporate Tax rate to 14% where it was for years until it was reduced in 2009.

5. Statistics Canada reports that on average, unionized workers in Ontario enjoy 29% higher wages than non-unionized workers in the same line of work, as well as stronger pensions, superior health and safety standards, longer vacation time, better health and drug benefits, and more rights in the workplace. Does your party believe that unions play a positive role in our economy? If so, what policies will your party implement to create a climate that is easier for unions to organize?

Again, we will implement comprehensive labour reform such as card-based certification, first contract arbitration and anti-scab legislation.

6. While corporate profits, productivity and GDP have all increased consistently during the past thirty years, Statistics Canada reports that real hourly wages have been stagnant since 1980. Why do you think this has happened, and what does your party propose to change the situation?

The NDP believes that workers are not getting their share of overall economic growth for the following reasons:

- Labour laws have been changed in favour of employers making it hard to certify bargaining units. The NDP would change this as described above;
- Increases in the minimum wage have not been aggressive enough. The NDP would immediately increase the minimum wage to \$11/hr.

- Under Dalton McGuinty's watch, Ontario has lost more than 300,000 good quality, good-paying manufacturing and processing jobs. We will reverse that trend with the job creation policies detailed above.

Health Care

7. Our publicly administered, universal health care system is cherished throughout Ontario. More of our health services, however, are being de-funded and privatized. What policies will your party implement to ensure that health care in the province remains under public control and is accessible to everyone?

New Democrats are proud to support a universal health care system that is based on need rather than the ability to pay. We have opposed the de-listing and increasing privatization of our health care system at its every occurrence. The Ontario NDP is committed to enforcing the Canada Health Act and addressing the encroachment of privatization in our health care system. That is why we have opposed P3s (public-private partnerships) since their inception, and why we oppose competitive bidding in home care. New Democrats will continue to work with progressive partners to prevent and reverse the privatization in our health care system.

8. There are more than 10,000 people in the province on waiting lists for home care, and 400,000 are actively seeking but cannot find a family doctor. What will your party do to fund more doctors, nursing positions and hospital beds throughout the province?

New Democrats have a plan to improve access and quality of health care in Ontario. For too long, our province has ignored the long-standing problems in the system. Under the McGuinty government, waiting lists for long-term care have tripled, high-quality and consistent home care has become increasingly difficult to access, and hundreds of thousands of Ontarians have no access to family doctor.

The Ontario NDP has a plan to eliminate the waiting list for home care by adding an extra million hours of care into our system. We will also conduct a comprehensive review of the home care competitive bidding policy so that our precious health care dollars are spent providing services – not generating profit.

We will eliminate the waiting list for long-term care beds for those Ontarians with the highest medical needs. This will bring an additional 2,650 beds into our nursing homes. We also have a plan to improve access to homemaking and support services so that Ontarians can stay in their homes for longer. Our plan for home supports will bring 7.5 million hours of homemaking services to communities across the province.

Finally, New Democrats have a plan to ensure that every Ontarian has access to a family doctor or nurse practitioner. We will open 50 family care clinics in communities across the province and forgive the student debt of 200 new physicians. Taken together, these commitments will serve more than 600,000 Ontarians who currently do not have a family doctor.

In all of these commitments, we will ensure that our health care facilities and programs are adequately staffed and resourced.

9. During the past fifteen years, more health services have been delisted from OHIP. Will your party make a commitment to end user fees and provide greater funding for eye care, home care and the Trillium Drug Program?

New Democrats have opposed the McGuinty government's steady de-listing of health care services and we have fought for universal health care services for all Ontarians. We have a plan to start tackling user fees in health care. In Ontario today, most residents are forced to pay \$45 dollars when transported to hospital in an ambulance for a medical emergency. We will eliminate this outrageous fee in order to fight the ever-growing list of medical fees that Ontarians are forced to pay and ensure that Ontarians have access to the care they need.

Education

10. Only 20% of young children today have access to regulated child care spaces in Ontario. What will you do in government to create more child care spaces? Will you commit to investing more in Early Childhood Education in the province?

We will invest \$250 million over two years to help licensed child care centres freeze parent fees and keep their doors open. We will develop a child care plan to ensure access to affordable child care for all Ontarians. We will proceed with investments to support the roll-out of early learning to all Ontario schools by 2015.

11. What specific policies will your party implement to hire more teachers and reduce class sizes in primary and secondary schools in Ontario?

We will review the outdated funding formula to ensure that schools receive adequate funds to cover building, staff and program costs.

12. Ontario university students with loans currently graduate with an average of \$37,000 of debt after a four-year degree, and our province has the lowest rate of public funding for colleges and universities - less than half the per student funding of Alberta. What will your party do to lower tuition fees and reduce student debt?

We will freeze tuition fees for undergraduates and graduates at Ontario colleges and universities for the duration of our mandate. We will also eliminate the interest on all current and future student debt.

The Environment

13. What policies will your party implement to reduce climate change and protect the environment, and how will you pay for them?

We will pause plans for the refurbishment of the Darlington nuclear reactor and direct the \$900 million in savings to rebates, loans and grants for home energy retrofits.

We will launch a cap and trade market through the Western Climate Initiative and develop a plan to meet climate targets of 20% below 1990 levels by 2020. Initial commitment to achieve this target

include: immediately place coal-fired plants on emergency standby and shut them down by 2014; pursue all cost effective conservation and expand grants, rebates and loans for energy efficiency home retrofits; ramp up support for transit by funding 50% of municipal operating costs; get tough on urban sprawl by ending backroom deals that exempt developers from growth limits and ban develop lawsuits against citizen groups.

14. Nuclear power in the province of Ontario has been a decades-long testament to inefficiency, debt and environmental endangerment. The province of Ontario has never in its history completed a nuclear power plant on time or on budget. What will your party do to reduce our dependence on nuclear power and invest in environmentally friendly forms of energy?

Nuclear energy creates environmental problems that last thousands of years. It 's a part of our electricity supply we can't simply ignore but we can say we will not build new nuclear reactors and we will carefully assess the need for further refurbishments. We will pause plans for the refurbishment of the Darlington nuclear reactor and direct the \$900 million in savings to rebates, loans and grant for home energy retrofits. We will direct the Ministry of Energy to prepare a new plan looking at more cost effective options, including increased conservation, increased renewable energy, expanded combined heat and power and hydro imports from Quebec.

15. One of the best ways to reduce our carbon footprint on the environment is public transportation. What will you do to make public transportation throughout the province more affordable and accessible to Ontarians?

We will share the cost of operating transit equally with municipalities. In exchange for this new commitment, we will tell municipalities to freeze transit fees at current levels for four years. We will also invest in new transit projects and upgrades for public transit systems.