

# **POWER OF MANY** 2019 Budget Speech

Vic Fedeli began his budget speech on Thursday by saying that this is “a plan for the people, by the people and, most importantly, a plan that puts the people first”

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The 2019 budget disguises cuts as increases (and sometimes, it just outright cuts spending) – and the government is doing this – by taking from the vulnerable and giving to the rich.

We’ve always known that the Ford government has the wrong priorities – always putting big businesses and the wealthy over the people of this province.

And this budget solidifies that sentiment for the umpteenth time.

It is an attack on workers, their families, their communities, and the public services they rely on.

This budget cuts or freezes spending in nearly every ministry.

While vulnerable communities bear the brunt of these cuts, businesses will receive \$3.8 billion in corporate tax relief over the next six years.

Across government, total program spending will only go up an average of 0.8 per cent annually over the next three years.

AND, once we factor in inflation and population growth, that means spending will be cut.

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And just as a reminder, Ontario already spends the lowest amount per person on public services in Canada.

We know that cuts to public services mean job cuts and every job cut in the public sector is really a service loss in the community. 1 in 4 workers in this province work in the public sector and their jobs are on the line.

The government is targeting public sector workers – including those working in education, health care, social services, and the civil service – as they move to shrink the size of the public sector and freeze the wages of those that are left standing.

So every time a spending cut is mentioned, we need to remember that means job losses too.

## **Health care**

- Health care spending will grow on average each year by just 1.6 per cent over the next three years. But that's below inflation and population growth (and fails to adequately account for the aging population) – so in actuality, health care spending, including for hospitals, will decrease.
- That's not to mention the fact that this budget needed to inject billions of dollars more to maintain current service levels – and it doesn't.
- Instead, the government restated its intent to create the Ontario Health super-agency – which has extraordinary powers to privatize our health care services – among other things.

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- The government is also planning to make changes to workforce productivity in the health care sector. That includes reducing overtime and premiums paid to workers.
- And they're cutting the number of public health units from 35 to 10 – in addition to an annual funding reduction of \$200 million.
- And let's not forget, \$500 million may be slashed from OHIP services, including tests and procedures ranging from diabetes treatment and pain management, to colonoscopies.
- And finally, I want to mention that according to the Ontario Health Coalition, the government's dental care announcement means that 95% of seniors won't even qualify.

## **Education**

- Education spending will increase by an annual average of just 1.2 per cent over the next three years.

But again, once we factor in enrollment growth and inflation, per-pupil education funding will actually decrease. We'll know, by how much, when the government releases the Grants for Student Needs later this month.

- It is also important to understand that the new child care tax credit, which will cost \$390 million each year, will come out of the education funding envelope.

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The childcare tax credit is bad public policy. Low-income families cannot afford to pay the fees upfront and then wait until tax season for the rebate. Parents will be forced to rely on unregulated and for-profit arrangements that undervalue care work.

And we also know that tax credits don't build quality child care spaces or decent work for all child care workers.

That's why we need affordable, high-quality, publicly delivered child care.

- The government is also going to be creating a task force to look at the efficiency of school boards. And that means they're likely going to cut the number of school boards, which will impact supports for children in the classroom. Northern and rural communities will be particularly hard hit.
- All of this is in addition to the fact that the government will be increasing average class sizes from grades 4 to 12, changing hiring practices for teachers with regulation 274, and overhauling the math curriculum.

As part of that overhaul, they'll be offering supports to parents – such as if they want to hire a third-party tutor, for example. *This* is in the face of removing teachers from classrooms.

## Children and social services

- \$1B will be cut from the Ministry for Children, Community and Social Services over the next three years – largely because of the

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regressive reforms announced in November that limit access to social assistance – particularly for folks with disabilities. This Ministry also handles other services that help vulnerable people including developmental services, autism treatment, and children’s aid.

As an interesting tidbit: Poverty is not mentioned once in this budget. Alcohol, on the other hand, is mentioned 35 times.

## **Post-secondary education**

- Over the next five years, Ontario’s colleges and universities stand to lose 60% of their funding if they fail to meet yet-to-be-determined performance targets. This will negatively impact access to education as “underperforming” courses are eliminated, and faculty are laid off.

Previously, only 1.4% of funding was tied to performance measures.

Also, based on the government’s January announcement, there is a \$670 million cut to student assistance.

## **Justice**

The justice sector will also be hit hard.

- The Ford government has cut next year’s funding for Legal Aid Ontario by \$133-million or about 30 per cent, leaving some of the province’s most vulnerable people without access to justice.

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This government is also specifically targeting immigrants and refugees, stating that Legal Aid Ontario can no longer use provincial funds on these cases.

That's two thirds of their funding for refugee and immigration cases gone.

Plainly, this is racist.

- The Ford government is scrapping the *Compensation for Victims of Crime Act*, which provides financial help to the families of those killed during a crime and to the survivors of violent crime, including sexual or domestic assault.

The money, for example, is given to cover funeral costs, physical therapy, and the loss of income.

- Further, the Ford government is introducing law that makes it harder to sue them by increasing the legal threshold needed to proceed with civil litigation, including class action lawsuits and breach of contracts (like the 78 cancelled renewable energy agreements).

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## Other programs

- The government is also slashing the budget for Indigenous Affairs by half, which will undoubtedly have a negative effect on any movement towards reconciliation.

The Ministry of Environment will see the loss of \$300M. And, The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing will experience a similar cut.

- In-person service delivery of ServiceOntario's top 10 transactions, including renewing driver's licences and health cards, will be digitized. Not only will service quality decrease, but it may also mean job losses for those at Service Ontario
- The Ministry of Labour's budget will decrease by \$11 million.

They will be streamlining and modernizing the enforcement of workplace rights – this means developing “automated digital tools” to help employers educate themselves on employment standards.

This is in addition to the announcement in March, where the Ministry launched a new online self-audit tool for employers to determine whether *they* are in compliance with the *Employment Standards Act*.

We know that the law alone does not protect workers; enforcement is required. But self-regulation does not work. Proactive workplace inspections are needed.

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- The government has no problem, however, enforcing its partisan messaging.

Gas stations will be fined up to \$10K a day for not putting up Ford's oversized stickers about the cost of federal carbon-pricing measures.

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These are just some of the highlights from the budget – which the Ford government has mockingly called 'Protecting What Matters Most'. It's clear from that quick run down – they don't consider that to be the people of this province at all.

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