

Public Services

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Public Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public services underpin our society. Every aspect of our lives is supported by them. Every day we use electricity, drinking water, roads, and health care. Public services sustain and improve the quality of life for individuals, communities and businesses across Ontario. Since March 1957, the Ontario Federation of Labour has been acutely aware of the importance of quality public services in the lives of Ontarians and their communities.

Public services came about because Ontarians wanted them and were willing to struggle for them. Improvements to these public services happened but it was never easy. As a labour movement we were always aware that there are those in our society who have no commitment to these public services and would privatize them for their own private gain if they were given the opportunity. We have seen the deliberate hurt to Ontarians and their communities caused by this philosophy. It has happened before and could happen again if we are too complacent.

As a labour movement we must be leaders in both defending the public services we have and in improving on them to better address the diverse needs of all Ontarians. We must work with other Ontarians to bring this about. We must understand what is

our vision and principles for public services and how it evolved.

Our Vision and Principles for Public Services

Our vision for public services evolves from a broad base:

- Workers and their unions who understand the importance of public services and are attempting to provide them in spite of such challenges as the lack of available resources and the political agendas that negatively impact the implementation of needed public policy.
- Workers who serve as members/volunteers with agencies providing services in the community.
- Workers who in the past used or continue to use the services available in their communities.
- Workers as citizens and taxpayers who want quality and accessible services in their community.

OFL policies are rooted in the belief that there are certain principles that govern the development, implementation and refinement of public services:

- Universality
- Accessibility
- Comprehensiveness

- Accountability
- Prevention
- Quality public services for the people of Ontario
- Quality jobs in unionized workplaces
- Democratization of services
- Socialization of services

Ontarians have always needed and used an array of public services. They will continue to do so. These services should be seen as both an investment in the future of our province, as well as addressing the immediate needs of Ontarians.

Public services did not come about by accident. They were initiated to meet the needs of people when the private sector and charities could not or would not adequately meet these needs. The workers who provide public services are our brothers and sisters. Public sector workers and their unions must know that they can count on the support of the wider labour movement and the community as they continue to struggle for justice for their members and for quality public services for Ontarians.

Labour's view of public services is not shared by all groups. There have always been those who put private interest ahead of public interest. "True believers" such as Mike Harris and Stephen Harper see their roles as winning power, and, with their friends, building the kind of economy that works for them. The idea of public services has little place in their world view. Other governments of various political persuasions lack a deep commitment to public services.

Public services provide an important counter-balance to the use of private wealth and power.

Public Services for Ontarians

Our members reflect the diversity of Ontario. As such, public services support every aspect of their daily activities and at all stages of their lives. They need an array of public services, provided by fellow union workers at every point of their lives. Examples of these public services (by no means an exhaustive list) include:

- Electricity
- Infrastructure
- Child Care
- Publicly Funded Education
- Social Assistance
- Social Services
- Health Care (including Home Care, Long-Term Care and Mental Health)

In every example, the labour movement, through the OFL, has been active in addressing the needs of Ontarians for this kind of public service. The history of the public service is important as is the present situation in order to better understand both the needs facing Ontarians in the 21st Century and challenges posed by the advocates of privatization.

Public services address immediate needs but they are also an investment in the future of Ontarians and in our province. It is for these reasons that, since March 1957, the Ontario Federation of Labour has always spoken out and acted for public services in our province. We will continue to do so.

Public Services

Introduction

Public services underpin our society. Every aspect of our lives is supported by them. Every day we use electricity, drinking water, roads, education and health care. We take for granted laws and regulations such as minimum wages, health and safety, speed limits and pollution controls. Public services sustain individuals and businesses.

Since the founding convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) in March 1957, the major purpose of the OFL has been to speak out for, and to act on behalf of, all working people of this province. Today, as always, our first constituency is the 700,000 organized workers in Ontario whose organizations are affiliated to the OFL.

As noted in Article II (2) of the OFL Constitution, one of the purposes of the Ontario Federation of Labour is:

To promote the interests of its affiliates and generally to advance the economic and social welfare of the workers of Ontario.

This purpose has been part of the OFL's Constitution since March 1957.

It is this desire to "advance the economic and social welfare of the workers of Ontario" that has made us acutely aware of the importance of quality public services in the lives of Ontarians and their communities. It has also made us aware that there are those who have no commitment to these public services and would privatize them for their own private gain.

Our Vision for Public Services

Our vision for public services evolves from a broad base:

- Workers and their unions who understand the importance of public services and are attempting to provide them in spite of challenges such as the lack of needed resources and the political agendas which negatively impact the implementation of these needed public services;
- Workers who serve as members and volunteers with agencies providing services in the community;
- Workers who in the past used or continue to use the services available in their communities;
- Workers as citizens and taxpayers who want quality and accessible services in their community.

Principles of Public Services

OFL policies are rooted in the belief that there are certain principles which should govern the development, implementation and refinement of public services.

These principles are:

- **Universality**
services should be available to all in need;
- **Accessibility**
services should be available when and where they are needed and in a format that allows for the full participation of all citizens;
- **Comprehensiveness**
services should evolve to meet new or different needs;
- **Accountability**
government should be held accountable to consumers, potential consumers and providers of services for the continuing provision of, and access to, quality services;
- **Prevention**
the need for some services may be lessened in the future by the availability of other services today;
- **Quality public services for the people of Ontario**
history illustrates the point that services delivered by the public sector have served the people of Ontario well;
- **Quality jobs in unionized workplaces**
services provided by workers in a safe working environment where they and their union are treated with respect;

- **Democratization of services**
consumers and workers are given the opportunity to have real input into decision-making regarding the implementation and delivery of services;
- **Socialization of services**
services are seen as providing what the community needs and not as a means of profit-making through privatization and contracting out.

The following aspects of these principles will be addressed:

- the development of public services in response to the needs of Ontarians;
- the role of government in the development of public services and how this role changed over time;
- the need for labour rights for public sector workers in response to how they have been treated by their employers and by government;
- public services are part of the ongoing struggle for democratic safeguards and accountability. Public space and services are created to benefit all citizens. As such, they form one area where all citizens are equal, regardless of their private wealth.

The Numbers and Needs of Ontarians

Members of the Ontario Federation of Labour live across Ontario (from Kenora to Cornwall from Moosonee to Windsor) and work in every sector of the economy. Our membership reflects the diversity of Ontario's population.

As the Ontario Federation of Labour grew, so did the population of Ontario between 1945 and 1960. Ontario's population grew faster than that of any other Canadian province or any other industrialized country in the world.

The 1956 census (the year before the creation of the Ontario Federation of Labour) recorded Ontario's population at 5,404,933. Between 1951 and 1956 the population grew by 807,391 people, 430,386 as a result of births and 377,005 as a result of immigration.

Since the 2001 census, Ontario's population has increased by 750,236. That represents half of Canada's population growth (+1.6 million) during this period. Alberta was the only other province above the national average. More than 600,000 immigrants settled in Ontario, about half of all those who immigrated to Canada between 2001 and 2006.

Ontario's population is expected to increase by 30.7% or 3.9 million over the next 25 years. Immigration is expected to contribute the majority of Ontario's population growth in the years to come, with an estimated 90,000 to 150,000 new immigrants making their home in Ontario each year. Over the same period, the population aged 65 and over is expected to more than double from 1.6 million or 12.8% of the population to 3.6 million or 22% of the population.

More Ontarians are making a contribution to our economy and society now and will continue to do so in the future. They use an array of public services. The availability of these services should be seen both as an investment in the future of our province, as well as addressing the immediate needs of fellow Ontarians.

At the founding convention of the OFL in 1957, one of the resolutions passed called on the Ontario government to bring about a program of public welfare which, in the wording of the resolution, "would provide standards of health and respectability".

Another example, in a 1969 convention statement entitled *General State of Labour*, the OFL called for all workers to have the right to bargain collectively. It also called for improvements in social welfare legislation, the educational system and called on working with others in the community to improve housing, day care centres and homes for the aged programs. From the founding convention to the present, it has been our standing policy to call upon governments to develop, implement and refine public services to address the needs of Ontarians.

Governments and Public Services

Public services didn't come about by accident. They were initiated to meet the needs of people when the private sector and charities could not or would not adequately meet those needs. Some of the first public services in Ontario were regulations controlling sewage and garbage in cities in order to ensure a supply of safe clean drinking water.

Public services were also created to support business and economic growth. The development of reliable transportation systems (canals, railways and highways) encouraged investment in the harvesting of raw materials and manufacturing of finished goods. It created employment and mobility opportunities for Ontarians.

The development of reliable and cheap electricity greatly benefited the business community. It also improved the quality of life of Ontarians and their communities.

The material benefits flowing from these kinds of public services usually overcame the philosophical opposition to this kind of government activity by the business community. Simply put, the government was providing reliable and accessible services that were needed by the business community at a cost that they were unable and/or unwilling to match.

The experiences of the Great Depression and World War II altered the view of the role of government in addressing economic and social needs. Since then government has been expected to play an active and more positive role in developing programs and services to meet the needs of Canadians.

In the 1950s and 1960s the federal government introduced conditional grants and federal-provincial cost-sharing programs for hospitals, health insurance, post-secondary education (PSE) and welfare transfers and services. Conditional transfers and shared-cost programs allowed Ottawa to impose some national standards in the areas of health and welfare (Canada Assistance Plan – CAP) with the provincial governments being required to abide by federal criteria as a condition of receiving federal funding.

There was a change in federal funding of services in the 1970s. Health and PSE cost-sharing programs were replaced by block grants called Established Program Financing (EPF). The amounts were set unilaterally by the federal government after discussions with the provinces, but not linked to spending levels and paid out on an equal per capita basis as of 1982.

In the 1980s the federal government unilaterally decided to reduce the EPF. Federal spending was restrained with a "cap on CAP" imposing a 5% annual growth ceiling on CAP payments to the three provinces then ineligible for Equalization Payments: Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. The elimination of cost-sharing under CAP modified the incentives for provinces to spend on social assistance programs.

In the mid-1990s CAP was replaced with another block grant, the *Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST)*. This covered the federal government's contribution to three major social policy areas – health, post-secondary education and social assistance, and in the year 2000 it was also used to further policy goals regarding children. This was a smaller overall transfer envelope. The 2002 Federal-Provincial Health Accord divided the CHST into a *Canada Health Transfer (CHT)* and a *Canada Social Transfer (CST)* as of 2004-05.

The *Social Union Framework Agreement* signed in 1999 stated that co-operation and efficiency would take precedence over the constitutional division of powers and that the federal government would refrain from unilaterally introducing new, shared, cost policy initiatives.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the lure of money from the federal government "convinced" Ontario's Conservative government to become part (in 1959) of a hospitalization plan through the Ontario Hospital Services Commission. In 1965 the province established a voluntary medical insurance plan and by 1969 "was forced" into the national Medicare system. In 1962 a tax-sharing agreement between Ottawa and the provinces was a catalyst for the development of Ontario's social programs.

Under Conservative Premier John Robarts (1961-1971) the Ontario government invested in an expansion of primary and secondary schools, new universities, a province-wide system of colleges of applied arts and technology, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and the Ontario Educational Communications Authority (TV Ontario). The Ontario Housing Corporation was established, a legal aid plan was created and provincial investment in homes for the aged was expanded through the Canada Assistance Plan.

In 1975, Conservative Premier Bill Davis (1971-1985) established the *Special Program Review*. It called for sweeping cutbacks in government health, welfare and education programs. It was opposed by the OFL, the wider labour movement and community organizations. It was the first major attack on public services by the Ontario government. It would not be the last.

It was a Conservative government that set up Ontario's public electricity system in 1906, over the opposition of private electricity producers, to supply the provincial economy with reliable and cheap electricity. In 1997 another Conservative government, Harris', began the privatizing of electricity resulting in a decade of disruption for Ontarians and the provincial economy especially in the resource based industries of northern Ontario. This privatization move was opposed by the OFL, the wider labour movement and community organizations.

The British North American Act, 1867 renamed *The Constitution Act* in 1982 assigned control over municipal to provincial government, which, in turn, delegated power to control local matters to local government. Local government was viewed as a "creature" of the provincial government. Over time local

government has taken over such areas as health, social services, education, housing, roads, public transit, water and garbage.

The Conservative government that came to power in 1995 cut some provincial services and downloaded others to municipalities. They also forced amalgamation of municipalities and the restructuring of two-tier counties and regional governments into single-tier governments.

In 1995 there were 850 local governments in Ontario; by 2001 there was half that number. A similar exercise was imposed on boards of education across the province. This exercise and its aftermath were disruptive for local governments, workers providing services (our members) and for Ontarians needing the services provided by this level of government.

Moving away from the prescriptive approach of earlier legislation, *The Municipal Act, 2001*, took a more permissive approach towards local government. They have also announced a *Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review*, which will provide an opportunity for some to argue for more privatization of municipal services - which does not serve the best interests of the community. Our agenda for a positive and progressive local government has to be put forward.

The city of Toronto's decision to buy unionized, Ontario made, subway cars with the support of the local labour council, labour movement and community organizations, shows that local governments have the capacity to act in a positive manner. The city of Ottawa's infatuation with the P3 model in spite of the spirited opposition from the local labour council, the labour movement and community organizations, shows that local

governments also have the capacity to act in a negative manner.

The OFL and our affiliates will continue to advocate for local government that understands the needs of the community and is willing to act in a positive and innovative manner and where the labour movement plays a full and positive role.

Not all public services are offered to the community by governments. Often governments provide funding to the non-profit sector to deliver services. According to the *2007 Ontario Alternative Budget*, Ontario's non-profit community sector is the largest in Canada.

It includes approximately 45,000 organizations with annual revenues of \$29 billion. One in 11 Ontarians work in a non-profit organization and 7.8 million people volunteer for a non-profit organization, contributing a total of 791 million hours of volunteer labour each year. Many of our members are employed in this sector.

The Ontario government contracts with community agencies to deliver specific services, but does not provide core funding to support the general mission of organizations.

Public Sector Workers

Workers providing similar public services may be in different unions in different locations across Ontario. Workers in one location but providing different services may be in a number of unions who are all dealing with the same employer.

At different times since 1957, public sector workers, through their unions, have affiliated with and become active in the OFL:

1957:

Board of education workers, fire fighters, health care workers, municipal workers, transit workers, utility workers.

1958:

Postal workers.

1971:

Federal government workers.

1979:

Provincial government workers, community college workers.

1995:

Primary and secondary school teachers.

2002:

University teachers.

2005:

Registered nurses.

The first resolution discussed by the founding convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour (March 1957) concerned the issue of public sector workers (in this case municipal and county employees) and their right to organize themselves into unions. A later OFL convention (1962) called on the federal and provincial governments to establish legislation providing collective bargaining for all their workers. The 1961 OFL Convention called for the *Ontario Labour Relations Act* to be amended to clearly establish that all workers had the right to organize into a union and to bargain collectively.

Public sector unions fought long and hard to make advances for their members. CUPW has struggled for years against Canada Post. CUPE has struggled against municipal governments, school boards and employer groups such as the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA). OPSEU has struggled against the provincial government, community colleges, the OHA and other employer groups. ETFO, OECTA and OSSTF have struggled with school boards. SEIU and ONA have struggled against the OHA and other employer groups. PSAC has struggled against the Federal government.

As employers, governments have imposed restrictive legislation on their own employees, such as the 1976 federal *Public Service Staff Relations Act* and the 1972 Ontario *Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act*. Affiliates have spent decades struggling against these laws. Governments impose legislation on their employees to get what they can't get through fair collective bargaining.

The following example involving PSAC and the federal government is taken from a 1999 report examining the deterioration of labour-management relations. Here are some of the actions taken by the federal government against its own employees:

1975:

A three-year program of wage and price controls.

1982:

A second round of controls, applied only to wages of federal employees.

1991:

Freeze of public service salaries first-ever nationwide strike by PSAC (September) ended by legislation.

1994:

Two-year freeze on salaries, along with cuts in departmental operating funds.

1995:

Budget cuts of 45,000 public service jobs, to be implemented in 3 years.

1996:

Announcement that salary arbitration would be suspended

1997:

Legislation restricting compensation increases as collective bargaining resumes.

The delay until year 2000 in implementing the pay equity decisions.

As well as bargaining for their own members, public sector unions have worked with and through the OFL to educate the broader labour movement on the importance of public services, building links between the public and private sectors for greater solidarity and coordinated action to convince government and the broader community of the importance of defending and improving public services.

Public sector unions work closely with the communities who use the services they provide to defend those services. This working together has also led to the development of effective province-wide community organizations such as the Ontario Health Coalition, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice.

Public sector workers and their unions must know that they can count on the support of the wider labour movement and the community as they continue the struggle for justice for their members and quality public services for Ontarians. Working together is the recipe for success.

The Conservative government led by Mike Harris – elected in 1995 – had little time or use for public services or public sector workers. As part of their "Common Sense Revolution" this government passed *The Labour Relations and Employment Statute Law Amendment, 1995 (Bill 7)*. This Bill repealed *The Labour Relations Act* including recent amendments aimed at modernizing the legislation, and enacted *The Labour Relations Act, 1995*. In 1997 they passed *The Public Sector Dispute Resolution Act* and *The Public Sector Labour Relations Transition Act, 1997 (Bill 136)*. *The Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997 (Bill 160)* repealed *The School Boards and Teachers Collective Negotiations Act* and replaced it with collective bargaining under *The Labour Relations Act, 1995*.

Harris knew that the labour movement would be in opposition to his overall agenda of cuts to, and privatization of, public services. And he was right! During his entire term of office (1995-2003) the OFL, the wider labour movement, and Ontarians across our province, opposed his agenda every step of the way. Public sector workers were in the forefront of this struggle.

One incident typified the Harris approach to public sector workers and their unions. In 2001 there were changes made to *The Public Service Act* to allow the Ontario Provincial Police Association (OPPA) to organize 2,000 civilian employees of the Ontario Provincial Police, who were then members of OPSEU. The issue for

Harris was that the OPPA had supported him while OPSEU had not.

Another View: Hostility to Public Services and to People

Labour's view of public services is not shared by all groups. There have always been groups and individuals who put private interest ahead of public interest; those who believe that the so-called "free market" can, and should, deal with and solve any issue.

They believe that public activities, as well as public sector workers, are a drain on the wealth of society. They believe they generate this wealth and it is theirs to do with as they see fit. They believe that decisions, whenever possible, should be made behind closed doors and that they should not be bothered by issues of process or public accountability. Simply put, their mantra is: public sector bad, private sector good; regulation bad, market forces good. This philosophy has a strong and entrenched following in Ontario, Canada and across the world. A current label for this philosophy is neo-liberal. Neo-liberals view privatization as an important tool to dismantle the public sector in order to build the kind of economy that will service their needs.

Privatization is the movement of activity and resources from the public sector to the private sector. According to Feigenbaum et al., "*Shrinking the State: the Political underpinnings of Privatization*" (1998), this can be done in a variety of ways including:

- **Management Reforms:**
Changing policies and processes to have the public sector structures, especially governments, operate in a more "business-like" manner;
- **Service Shedding:**
Governments withdrawing from providing services with the expectation that voluntary organizations, charities or self-help groups will provide the services if they are really needed;
- **Asset Sales:**
Disposing of existing assets often at less than the asset is worth;
- **Contracting Out:**
Management in public sector becomes contract administrators, identifying what needs to be done and who can do it at what cost;
- **User Fees**
People paying for services that used to be provided for out of general taxation revenues;
- **Voucher System:**
Providing vouchers for the purchase of specific goods or services from the private sector as an alternative to the government providing the goods or services;
- **Public-Private-Partnerships:**
The government working with the private sector to provide mutually agreeable goods or services. Beneficial to the private partner at the expense of the users/taxpayers who end up paying more over a longer period, often for little or no improvement in services.

The electoral successes of both Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister of Great Britain (1979-1990) and Ronald Reagan as President of the United States (1981-1989) gave life to privatization as a tool of this ideology.

Their political successors carried on the policy of privatization.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, other political leaders in jurisdictions across the world, including Canada, advocated this philosophy and were elected and re-elected.

Canadian governments that support this world view have been elected. At the federal level Conservative and Liberal governments both embraced and adapted to this philosophy.

The Brian Mulroney Conservative government (1984-1993), by signing the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), sought to impose/strengthen the grip of this philosophy on Canadians. This was done over the spirited opposition of the labour movement and many Canadian organizations and individuals. Large scale privatizations such as Air Canada and Petro Canada were undertaken. They attacked their own employees which resulted in the 1991 PSAC strike which the Conservatives ended through legislation. They cut billions from federal-provincial transfers – especially in health care – a move which resulted in the restructuring of health care across Canada resulting in the growth of for-profit health care.

In 1993, the Liberals, under Jean Chrétien, ran against the Conservative record, got elected and proceeded to implement the same agenda.

In the 1995 federal budget, as part of the "war on the deficit", they announced the firing of 45,000 federal government employees as part of a massive cutback of programs and services. The government rejected all viable alternatives put forward by the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

The Liberals continued privatization. The Chrétien government made severe cuts to transfer payments and in 1995 introduced the *Canada Health and Social Transfer Act (CHST)* to replace the Established Programs Financing and the Canada Assistance Plan. Under CAP, the funding of social programs also included national standards. The CHST allowed for block funding to the provincial governments rather than funding tied to particular programs. In February 2003, a health accord was signed between the federal, provincial and territorial governments. After two days of closed-door negotiations, more money was dedicated to Medicare but without a collective and clear stand against the role of private for-profit corporations in providing health care services.

Jean Chrétien was succeeded by Paul Martin as Prime Minister in November 2003. Martin had been Finance Minister during the Liberal "war on the deficit". A second health accord was signed in September 2004.

The process began as an open meeting which was adjourned the second day and the meeting carried on behind closed doors. Money was a major item and the agreement centered on a \$41 billion transfer from the federal government over the next twenty years. Discussion on such issues – as the role of private for-profit providers – was sidestepped.

Martin was replaced as Prime Minister by Conservative leader Stephen Harper in the federal election on January 23, 2006.

Harper was a "true believer" when it came to this right-wing philosophy. In the past he had said that Canadians were content to live in a "second-tier, socialistic country". He had called on Alberta to build a "firewall" to preserve its values from the federal government.

He had been the head of the National Citizens' Coalition, a group which had been originally organized to fight Medicare. He was an eager cheerleader for the actions of the U.S. government especially after September 11, 2001. His views are a matter of public record.

After the June 28, 2004 federal election which the Conservatives thought they would win, Harper was "repackaged" as more flexible and less ideological. He won a minority government on January 23, 2006. The Harper government continues the "repackaging" in the hopes that Canadians will see him and his government as competent and caring and reward them with a majority government in the next federal election. Their attitudes and actions on issues have been challenged by many Canadians.

Two incidents illustrate the attitude of Harper and his government. In the fall of 2006 his government announced their decision to cut \$1 billion in social programs – on the same day that they announced a \$13 billion budget surplus. In November 2006 Federal Finance Minister, Jim Flaherty, announced that the federal government intends to require every province and territory to consider public-private or "so-called" P3 partnerships as a condition of receiving federal funding.

Ontario had its own version of a "true believer" in the person of Mike Harris, the Conservative leader who was elected Premier in June 1995. The Conservative platform released in 1994 was called *The Common Sense Revolution*. It was a blueprint on how they wanted to change Ontario. It called for a 30% reduction in the provincial income tax rate and a balanced budget. It vowed to shrink the public sector and the role of government. It called for cutbacks to needed social programs and legislative rights won by workers

and their unions. It wanted to "open" Ontario for business.

Harris acted quickly. An economic statement in July 1995 called for \$2 billion in cutbacks including \$500 million in service and staff cuts to ministries. In November another \$3.5 billion in cuts were announced. This included significant cuts to services, financial grants and a 21.5% cut in social assistance rates. The cuts went beyond the Ontario public service and into the broader public sector. For example, financial support for municipal government was virtually cut in half. Monies were cut to transit, education and social assistance. The government gave itself the power to eliminate, merge or amalgamate local municipal structures and hospital boards. In 1997 the release of the report *Who does What?* called for a realignment of provincial and municipal roles and responsibilities.

In April 1996 "business plans" by ministries and agencies were released. The obvious reason for these plans was to identify public assets which could be privatized. They established a Red Tape Commission to "weed out" unnecessary regulations and agencies. The hostility of the Harris government towards public services never abated until he left office in 2002 and was replaced by his Finance Minister Ernie Eves.

The disruption and hurt caused to Ontarians and their communities by the Harris government is a matter of historical record. So, too, is the broadly-based extensive, creative and spirited opposition to this government. This opposition encompassed the Ontario Federation of Labour, its affiliates, other labour organizations, the Ontario New Democratic Party and a wide variety of social partners and individuals.

After winning the provincial election in October 2003 the Liberals did not break with the Harris/Eves agenda to the extent that Ontarians had expected they would. An expectation based on their words while in opposition.

The "true believers" like Harris and Harper see their role as winning power, and, with their friends, building the kind of economy that works for them. The idea of public services has little place in their world view. There is little need to talk to anyone about what needs to be done because they know what needs to be done. Opposition to their agenda must first be ignored, and if it persists, then the power of the state should be brought to bear to silence it.

Other governments of various political persuasions lack a deep commitment to public services and are willing to accommodate themselves to other views in the hopes of winning and keeping political power.

The availability of public services provided by public sector workers goes beyond any philosophical preference. Public services provide an important counter-balance to the use of private wealth and power. Ontarians should have a real say in how they are governed and how programs are developed, implemented and refined as needs change. The process should be both accountable and transparent.

Ontarians should also benefit collectively from the public ownership of assets which are working in their best interests. Public services are an investment in the present and future of our province. The presence of quality public services should be a key component of any economic and/or social strategy for our province.

Public Services for Ontarians

As already mentioned members of the Ontario Federation of Labour have always lived across Ontario (from Kenora to Cornwall from Moosonee to Windsor) and worked in every sector of the economy. Our membership reflects the diversity of Ontario's population. As such, public services support every aspect of their daily activities and at all stages of their lives.

For example, a new parent may want access to quality child care, and later, quality publicly funded education. A worker who has lost their job may need access to social assistance. An injured worker may need access to quality home care. Workers at some point may want access for themselves or family members to quality care for seniors. Most Ontarians will need access to quality health care at some point in their lives.

These public services are only examples – not an exclusive list – of the kinds of support that Ontarians may need at different points in their lives. It is because of this range of needs, as reflected in our membership, that the OFL has always called upon governments to develop, implement and refine public services to address the needs of Ontarians.

These services should be provided by unionized workers who are members of our affiliated unions.

Electricity

Given the climate and geography of Ontario, access to reliable and affordable electricity is a necessity. The

OFL's position on this issue is best represented by the title of a 1980 convention document: *Statement on Energy: Under Public Ownership and Control to Serve the Canadian Economy*.

It was a Conservative government that set up Ontario's public electricity system in 1906, over the opposition of private electricity providers. The Hydro Electric Power Commission, or as it became commonly known – Ontario Hydro – supplied Ontario's economy, communities and people with reliable and affordable electricity. It also provided employment across Ontario for our members. This was good for the provincial economy, communities and for the people of Ontario.

In 1997 another Conservative government (Harris) began privatizing electricity resulting in a decade of disruption for Ontarians and the provincial economy, especially in the resource-based industries of northern Ontario. This privatization move (as already noted in this paper) was opposed by the OFL, the wider labour movement and community organizations.

Ontario governments (either Conservative or Liberal) do not seem to see it as an important public service – a public asset which should not be handed to the private sector.

Since 2003 the Liberals have squeezed public power generation while encouraging private power. The high cost of which is hidden because most of our electricity still comes from public low-cost power generation. They have kept open the electricity market but hide it from consumers because their rates are still regulated. They (Liberals) effectively bar Ontario Power Generation – the public power structure – from participating in the new, green, environmentally-friendly power generation.

The Liberals are forcing local municipal utilities to act like corporations rather than providers of public service. The results of this are that prices keep going up. A price we pay as direct users of electricity and indirectly through the impact of job losses and cuts in services from schools, hospitals and other public institutions faced with increased electricity costs. Existing "free trade agreements" will increasingly lock Ontario into the volatile U.S. electricity market. We will lose control over our electricity rates and our ability to control emissions from electricity generation.

We need to return to publicly-owned electricity sold at cost. Public power generation will help our communities. Our control of new, green, power generation will ensure that conservation plays an important role. It will also ensure that jobs are created and retained in communities across Ontario.

Infrastructure

The 1960 OFL convention called on governments to invest in "projects of sound social value" such as public enterprise, the construction of "badly-needed" schools, hospitals and highways and the development of natural resources. The convention correctly saw that any discussion of economic activity had to include a discussion of public infrastructure. This approach has been the consistent policy of the OFL.

Governments which provide publicly-owned infrastructure are providing a public service. The presence of such services as roads, public transit, water and garbage, ensures a quality of life for members of the community and

underpins the economic and social activity of the community.

The provision of these services provides employment opportunities for dedicated and qualified members of the community (our members). Because they are publicly-owned, community members have a democratic say and control regarding the development and operation of these services in their community.

Studies such as the 2003 Statistics Canada *Public Infrastructure and the Performance of the Canadian Economy, 1961-2000* confirm the point that publicly-owned infrastructure has a positive impact on the productivity and economic performance of the business sector.

This is not a view that is accepted by everyone. As already noted, the 1980s saw the ascendancy of a political ideology that sought to replace the "public" with the "private". To them, the role of government should be diminished and services and programs if needed should be provided by the private sector not by the public sector. Programs and services were viewed as potential sources of "profit" rather than satisfying the needs of the society.

In this period there was a preoccupation with debt and deficits. Government spending was viewed with suspicion even by some governments. Caught in this suspicion were the needed investments to replace aging infrastructure and the need to expand infrastructure in response to increased demand. A "crisis in infrastructure" was evident. For example, in 2004 the Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimated Canada's infrastructure deficit to be as high as \$60 billion and growing by approximately \$2 billion a year.

In response to these developments the Ontario government, then conservative, borrowed from Britain the idea of the Private-Public-Partnerships (P3s). The attraction of the idea to them was that it provided the opportunity to expand capital spending to address the accepted consensus that there was a "crisis in infrastructure" without appearing to be spending more. It was touted as a way to bring private sector expertise and money to the construction and operation of public facilities. The idea was first imposed in health care to deal with the construction of needed new facilities in Brampton and Ottawa. The Liberals, although critical of P3s before the October 2003 provincial election, signed the deals for the Brampton and Ottawa hospitals soon after they were elected. They (the Liberals) kept the policy but re-named it "Alternative Financing and Procurement" (AFP).

The 2005 OFL convention statement *Public-Private-Partnerships (P3s) and the Transformation of Government* analyses this political shell game by illustrating a number of points:

- Governments have the lowest cost of borrowing. Using the P3 model the government pays a private corporation to go out and borrow on the government's behalf, at a cost which is higher than if the government borrowed the money itself.
- The P3 model shifts administrative and public policy control to a third party. It drives a wedge between public services and their delivery, creating a category of services that are still public services, but which are privately delivered. The idea of democratic control and input from the wider community is abandoned.

The Ontario government has tried to move the P3 model beyond health with limited success. Even the creation of a new crown corporation – Infrastructure Ontario – to deliver infrastructure funding programs in other sectors has not resulted in much uptake. Perhaps, the widespread problems involving the operation of Highway 407 and the sustained public opposition it has generated has resulted in a reluctance to repeat the experience in other sectors.

In their last budget the Federal Conservative government (with a number of the key players from the Harris government in Ontario) repackaged their infrastructure funding for provinces and municipalities as the "Building Canada" fund which will require that P3s be "fully considered" as a condition of receiving funding. This is an obvious threat from the Federal government to accept this model or suffer the consequences.

The sustained opposition from labour and the community to the imposition of P3s in health has had an impact on the Liberal government. They have responded by limiting the coverage of some P3s.

The 2005 OFL convention statement suggests three elements to a strategy to combat the spread of P3s in Ontario:

- A concerted effort, in the media and in the courts if necessary, to force disclosure of the details of P3 agreements.
- A consistent, sophisticated and cogent analysis of the cost and other implications of every P3 deal.
- Targeted campaigns to build public awareness of those implications.

Part of this public awareness must be a greater understanding by all Ontarians of the importance of publicly-owned infrastructure as the underpinning of our society and economy. Part of this must be to engage Ontarians on how to best create, maintain, expand and control this infrastructure to better serve the needs of our people.

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| <p>Child Care</p> |
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As early as 1972 the OFL was talking about the importance of this issue. In 1980, Ontario Federation of Labour convention delegates adopted a child care policy and launched a campaign for universal early learning and child care. In the spring of 1981, the Federation held public hearings across the province and the Ontario Coalition for Better Daycare was formed.

In the almost three decades since then, the OFL and the now Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, have organized and mobilized for the creation of a system of child care that is universally accessible, high quality, not-for-profit, regulated, and publicly funded, that would meet the needs of families and provide decent wages and working conditions for workers in the sector.

The benefits of a well-funded, high-quality, affordable and universally accessible system of early learning and child care will be felt across sectors and in all communities by:

- contributing to the equality of women, who are often the primary caregivers for their children and who also make up 97 per cent of the child care work force;
- supporting parents in their child care responsibilities while allowing

them to stay in the labour force and access skills training;

- enhancing early learning for children as an essential first stage in a system of lifelong learning that promotes and equalizes opportunities for all children regardless of family income and social background/circumstances.

There is no coherent child care system in Ontario. Decades of ad-hoc, piecemeal government policies, a market-driven approach based on parents' ability to pay, declining provincial child care budgets and downloading onto cash-strapped municipalities have caused a serious child care crisis for families with young children. A situation which leads to:

- long-established child care centres, including community college lab schools, have been forced to close. Existing child care centres report difficulties attracting and retaining qualified staff since wages are low and benefits and working conditions are poor;
- parents are having a tough time affording quality child care - if they can find spaces. Thousands of Ontario's parents are forced to resort to make-shift child care arrangements because high-quality licensed programs are simply not available;
- currently, less than 11 per cent of children under 12 in Ontario have access to high-quality, regulated child care.

The need for a child care strategy and funding to build and sustain it has never been greater. Provincial investments in early learning and child care services were slashed under the Harris government.

During the 2003 election, Dalton McGuinty promised to invest \$300 million in provincial dollars for early learning and child care as part of his party's Best Start plan. Today, despite an escalating crisis in the child care system and repeated calls for that promise to be kept, the provincial government has failed to meet its commitments.

In its implementation, the plan does not produce a seamless service; commit to a universal system of early learning and care; address early learning and care needs of children 0-3 and 6-12; protect against expansion in the commercial child care sector; address the role of the informal sector in child care in Ontario; address the most essential ingredient of quality: the staff; commit new provincial funding to child care; plan for adequate and meaningful consultation with all members of Ontario's child care community; contain adequate timetable and targets.

In the most recent provincial budget, the government announced the first provincial money allocated to child care since the Harris cuts over a decade ago. In Budget 2007, the government announced \$25 million this year and \$50 million next year – falling \$275 million short of the funding promised in 2003. Funding announced in the federal budget the same week was not included in the provincial funding announcement – totaling just under \$100 million.

While new provincial and federal dollars are welcome, in their current amounts they do very little to rebuild the damage of the past 12 years including the \$152 million cut during the Harris/Eves years and the dismantling of a federal child care program. There is a lack of political will and absence of vision with regard to early learning and child care.

Why is this happening? The current provincial government has continually blamed its own lack of action and political will on the cancellation of the federal/provincial 2005 child care funding agreements, despite its own 2003 commitment to fund child care independent of any federal support. Ontario's families and children are paying for that inaction.

Quebec is building such a system. The system developed by Quebec is a model in this regard, with parents paying a maximum of \$7 a day and government paying the balance. This model, applied in Ontario, would ensure that care is affordable for and accessible to all families.

By ensuring affordability, it would mean that families are not paying up to 20 per cent of their income for child care. In particular, it would ease the financial burden of child care for young families with low and modest incomes, especially single-parent families and women. There is no economic reason that Ontario cannot do the same as Quebec is doing.

Federal

A national child care program has been advocated by the Canadian Labour Congress, women and child care advocates for 30 years. The struggle for a high quality, universally accessible, not-for-profit, regulated, publicly funded system has continued at both the provincial and federal levels.

During the 2004 federal election, the labour movement, women's groups and child care advocates pressed all political parties to support a national child care system. The Liberals and NDP did include a child care commitment in their election platforms. This was not the first time political parties promised a national child care system during an election. Canadian

families have been promised a national child care program for two decades now – first, by the Conservatives under Brian Mulroney in the 1980s, and then, several times by the Liberal government in the 1990s. They still are in need of a system of high quality, affordable, universal child care. We know that the building blocks of such a system are:

- funding child care services directly and not through vouchers or subsidies;
- expansion in the not-for-profit sector only;
- measures that hold provinces and territories accountable for how they spend federal child care dollars;
- legislation that enshrines the principles and structure (national child care standards) of a high quality system for future generations.

In 2005, we were close to achieving that vision. The Martin government, faced with a minority government and realizing strong public support for child care, was forced to deliver on their election promise. In its 2005 budget, the federal government committed to spend \$5 billion over the next five years to kick-start a national early learning and child care system.

The budget was a significant step forward for child care. It was the first time in Canadian history that a federal election commitment to child care was backed up with a funding commitment in the budget. However, the budget did not tie any strings to the first year of these new dollars – \$700 million. There was concern that not all provinces and territories would invest this funding towards growing regulated, high quality child care, as we saw in Ontario when the Mike Harris Tory

government spent little of the federal child care dollars on child care delivery.

Across Canada we organized to demand strong federal/provincial agreements that would deliver a high quality national child care system for all Canadians. In the dying days of the Martin government, a number of provinces signed child care agreements, including Ontario. If those agreements were still in place, this province would have received almost \$450 million in dedicated child care funding from the federal government.

This basic foundation was destroyed after the next federal election, in January 2006, which saw the election of the Harper Conservative government.

Stephen Harper followed through on the Conservative "child care" promises: ***He tore up the child care funding agreements with the provinces.***

The immediate impact of cancelling the agreements is the stalling of Ontario's Best Start and the loss of 11,000 planned child care spaces across the province. The spaces that were created under Best Start with the federal funding are becoming unsustainable, and municipalities are forced to pay more than their share of downloaded child care costs. Rural and remote municipalities, where early learning and child care has always been difficult to come by, will not see an expansion of services and spaces. In addition, we stand to lose significant new investments in special needs resourcing across the province.

Mr. Harper offered employers \$10,000 in tax credits to create (but not sustain) child care spaces.

Past experience in Ontario shows that this type of tax incentive scheme does not build a child care system, or even build any spaces. Mike Harris' government used the same scheme – a tax incentive to employers for workplace child care – and no new spaces were created. And in the first year of the federal Conservatives' scheme, not a single new child care space was created.

Mr. Harper gave a taxable benefit of \$1,200 a year to parents for each child under the age of six.

The child care allowance is taxed back from all families except those with one parent at home, so \$1,200 per year represents a maximum. This cash does not help parents find high quality child care – you cannot buy what does not exist. Even existing child care costs 10 to 20 times the \$3 or \$4 a day the allowance provides.

These policies are a throwback to the past. They do not deliver the kind of high quality child care our children deserve, and do not support the needs of today's parents.

And, in the meantime, international research reports – such as the Organization for Economic Development and Co-operation's Starting Strong II – now rank Canada last among developed countries in spending on early childhood education.

Solving Canada's child care crisis will take a lot more than sound bites, simplistic ideas and discredited theories. Canada needs a plan and a program that recognizes the social and economic benefits that high quality early learning and child care produces for children, families and all of society. Most successful industrialized nations recognize the benefits of public investment in high quality child care and already have universal programs.

Canada, its children and their families deserve one too.

The Quality Universally Accessible Developmental (QUAD) principles build the foundations of an early learning and child care system based on:

- **Quality**
evidence-based, high quality practices relating to programs for children, training and supports for early childhood educators and child care providers, and provincial regulation and monitoring;
- **Universally inclusive**
open to all children, without discrimination;
- **Accessible**
available and affordable for those who choose to use it;
- **Developmental**
focused on enhancing early learning opportunities and the developmental component of ELCC programs and services.

Child care must be seen as an essential, quality service offered to children and parents. Our vision for child care in Ontario is a comprehensive support system that is built on the following principles:

- Publicly funded,
- Not-for-profit,
- Has a universal entitlement,
- Inclusive services for children with disabilities,
- Programs reflective of the diversity of our communities,
- High quality,

- Stable working environment for workers in the sector with good wages and benefits.

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| <p>Publicly Funded Education – Junior Kindergarten, Grades 1 to 12 and Post-Secondary</p> |
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After World War II, Canada's economic expansion was reflected in the growth of educational institutions. The relative prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s gave rise to a new vision of education – that it was not just for getting a job. Although getting a job was important, it was also about developing citizenry, building democratic institutions, and helping all members of society in reaching their potential.

The Ontario Community College system – Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology – was established in the 1960s as a means of accommodating the growing number of children entering and completing education. These colleges were intended to serve the specific needs of the local and rural communities and offer a unique education.

New universities were built and increasing numbers of working families took advantage of the opportunities offered through the public education system.

However, the economic recession of the early 1980s ushered in a new era of cutbacks and restraint. In many ways, the history of public education over the past three decades is a history of struggle to ensure that high quality education remains accessible for all Ontario families, regardless of their socio-economic status.

When the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris was elected in 1995, education was one of their first targets in his "Common Sense

Revolution." Education Minister Snobelen vowed to create a crisis in education; within two years he made good on that promise setting the stage for some of the largest-ever mobilizations of teachers' unions and other public sector workers.

Along with a number of other bills aimed at cutting funding to the public sector, Bill 160 - *The Education Quality Improvement Act* – created turmoil and chaos within the public education system. Ten years later, the system has not yet recovered.

Prior to the legislation adopted by the Mike Harris regime, Ontario's public education system was jointly managed by democratically elected local school board trustees who operated within the parameters established by the provincial government. Within 24 months of getting elected, the Conservatives virtually eliminated the role of local school board trustees. The school curriculum was developed and imposed by the provincial government, and the number of school boards was reduced as a cost-saving measure. Today, local school boards are expected to administer the budget decisions made by Queen's Park. Furthermore, issues such as teacher workloads and class sizes were removed from the realm of collective bargaining and put under the authority of Queen's Park policy-makers. Crucially, about \$1 billion was cut from education spending.

During the Harris decade, key elements of the public system were dismantled. Grade 13 was removed from the secondary school system – where it was available for free to Ontario families – and transferred to the post-secondary sector that is based on a user-fee model (tuition fees).

Shop classes were quietly removed from the elementary and secondary school curriculum as frivolous "extras" and reinvented as user-fee based programs in community colleges.

Fundraising and private donations helped schools in affluent neighborhoods deliver more diverse curricula and offer more after-school programs while schools in less affluent neighborhoods struggled under the weight of the cuts. From their own pockets, teachers themselves subsidized the inadequate resources of their schools.

Benchmarking, efficiencies and standardized tests came to symbolize Ontario's approach to education, leading to school closings, high drop out rates, and streaming.

In the meantime, the federal Liberal government (under then-Prime Minister Jean Chrétien) was implementing the largest social programs cuts since WWII. Post-secondary education funding was cut by half a billion dollars, extending the crisis in education to colleges and universities just as the system was preparing for an enrollment surge – the obvious result of the elimination of Grade 13.

But rather than increase the capacity of Ontario's colleges and universities, instead, tuition fees increased by the maximum until the Harris government fully de-regulated tuition fees for certain college, professional, graduate and post-diploma programs. As a result, tuition fees for college programs like Computer Animation or Dental Hygiene increased from \$1,400 in 1998 to \$11,000 by 2001. Today, tuition fees for medicine, dentistry and law hover around \$20,000 per year.

Tuition fee hikes spurred an outcry among working families that higher education was fast becoming unaffordable. Moreover, as new generations of indebted students graduated into the workforce, the issue of crushing student loan debt became a matter of national debate and concern.

While proponents of massive tuition fee increases claim that tuition fee hikes improve the quality of education, Ontario's experience demonstrates the opposite. Tuition fee increases tend to occur most rapidly in a climate of underfunding. In fact, user-fees are a means of privatizing the cost of education and transferring the burden to the individual.

In the elementary and secondary school systems, this kind of privatization has taken the form of reliance on private donations and fundraising. Schools in affluent areas can afford to fundraise hundreds of thousands of dollars, while others cannot.

In the post-secondary system, high user fees (tuition fees and ancillary fees) have translated into crushing debt loads for students who must rely on student debt programs to finance their studies. Tuition fees are the soft shoulder for government. As long as tuition fees continue to rise, the government does not have to provide the funding the system requires. Furthermore, the very existence of user fees lays the foundation for private, for-profit institutions aiming to sell education and make a profit.

Within the public school system, staffing shortages persist. Whether it is guidance counselors, librarians, shop teachers, support staff, maintenance staff and others, this reality bodes poorly for Ontario's children.

Within the community college system, chronic underfunding has meant that fewer full-time staff have been hired to keep up with a growing demand for higher education. Part-time staff now comprises the bulk of Ontario's Colleges and Applied Arts and Technology, including both support staff and teaching staff.

Ontario's universities warn of an impending faculty shortage, set to escalate over the next 10 years. Support staff continues to face contracting-out and overwork. Basic maintenance – deferred for over a decade – needs addressing.

When Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberal Party were elected in 2003, many hoped that the new government would restore funding for public education in Ontario and take steps to make genuine improvements in Ontario's overall investment in education.

The McGuinty government did make new money available for education both at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. However, the amount of funding restored has simply not been enough to repair the damage that accumulated for nearly a decade.

For the elementary and secondary school system, the funding formula has still not been fixed. New funding tends to be pre-allocated and tied to initiatives determined at Queen's Park – not by local school boards.

Without a full restoration of the funding, including allowances for enrollment increases and inflation, the climate of underfunding cannot be eliminated. Consequently, there will be continued pressure on school boards to cut services as a means of addressing budget shortfalls. The urgent and pressing issue is the need to fix the funding formula in a manner that is

sensitive to local needs and addresses the priorities identified by teachers, staff and parents.

At the same time, some of the most pernicious elements of the Harris regime have been maintained. For example, many teachers report that standardized tests, far from revealing a student's potential, tend to discriminate against students attending schools in low socio-economic municipalities.

When students from all socio-economic areas are averaged throughout the province, it follows that those students will be at a disadvantage compared to students from more affluent localities. Rather than just the poorest in the class being lumped together, province-wide standardized tests means that the poorest in the province can be lumped together. These are the ones that have the least access to quality learning at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. These tests are contributing to a new form of streaming within the public school system – now known as “pathways.”

Without shop classes, arts programming, physical education, and other curricula that appeals to a wide array of learning preferences, students have lost a host of options they might have otherwise pursued. At the same time, the introduction of standardized tests will help to exclude whole swaths of students who might have excelled in a college or university environment. By allowing tuition fees to increase, even more students will face barriers in reaching their potential. These factors conspire to mitigate enrollment in our public colleges and universities, while at the same time create a market for private institutions operating alongside public institutions.

Teachers, staff and parents have been successfully mobilizing to prevent the worst of the cuts to mitigate the damage. Students, staff, faculty and parents have been mobilizing to stop the acceleration of tuition fee increases at the post-secondary level - even winning a two-year freeze on tuition fee increases - (Premier McGuinty had campaigned on freezing tuition fees for at least two years) while at the same time calling for adequate, accountable public funding for all levels of education.

The Ontario Federation of Labour's vision for education is that it is a collective right, that it is the foundation of democracy, and that it allows all of us to realize our potential, not just as workers, but as creative individuals in a broader, equitable society.

The Ontario Federation of Labour believes the right to education should exist - not just for young people, but for all people, regardless of their age. Workers should be funded and granted leave to participate in educational programs. Such programs should not be dependent on who can afford to pay, or on which community is richest.

Lifelong learning should be an entitlement of all those who have worked in and contributed to building the society we know.

Education can, indeed, be the great equalizer - but only if we fight for equal access, for adequate public funding, and for the rights of all those who work within the system, from support staff to teachers to faculty to students to parents to workers.

Social Assistance

The OFL always sought to improve the social assistance system. For example, the 1964 convention called on the Ontario government to adjust the income limit in line with the cost of living for recipients of Mothers' and Dependent Children's Allowances. In 1967 there was a call for the Ontario government to introduce and fund needed youth programs. In 1975 there was a call for the Ontario government to amend existing legislation to better provide for the needs of recipients.

In 1969 - to ensure that labour's voice would be heard - there was a call for a labour representative to be part of the review board for welfare cases.

Ontarians in need are not second class citizens. As early as 1957 the OFL was opposing the use of means tests on mothers applying for allowances under the *Mothers' Allowance Act* and on blind adults applying for blind persons' allowances. By 1966 we were opposing the use of all forms of the means test by the Ontario government. The 1961 convention opposed the decision of the Ontario Municipal Association to call for municipal welfare recipients to do civic employment in return for their benefits.

In 1995 the OFL opposed the Conservative government's 21.6% cut to social assistance. The rate for Ontarians with disabilities was frozen at the 1993 level. In 1997 the OFL opposed *The Social Assistance Reform Act, 1997* (Bill 142), with its provision for mandatory workfare which was an important tenet of the Harris Conservative agenda.

In 1998 *The Prevention of Unionization (Ontario Works) Act* (Bill 22) was passed to ensure that workfare participants would be treated as second class citizens by denying them their rights as residents of Ontario. This particular legislation was condemned by many in Ontario, across Canada and internationally, as a violation of accepted standards for human rights.

In 1999 the OFL made the case internationally against these unjust laws by lobbying at the hearings of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (which Canada has signed) at the United Nations in New York City.

The *Social Assistance Reform Act, 1997*, created two separate statutes: The *Ontario Works Act* (OWA) 1997, and The *Ontario Disability Support Program Act* (ODSP), 1997. It replaced The *General Welfare Assistance Act* first established in 1958 and *The Family Benefits Act* first established in 1967.

The OWA was proclaimed May 1, 1998. The purpose of this *Act* is to provide financial and employment assistance to single people, couples with and without children and sole- support parents. The government's belief is that mandatory participation in Ontario Works (OW) activities will assist people in moving as quickly as possible to a job. Sole-support parents under the *Family Benefits Act* were transferred to Ontario Works.

The ODSP was proclaimed June 1, 1998. The purpose of this *Act* is to provide income support for people with disabilities and employment supports for people with disabilities who are seeking to work. People with disabilities and permanently unemployable people under the former *Family Benefits Act* were transferred to the ODSP on June 1, 1998.

Since the 1995 cut/freeze by the Harris Conservatives, social assistance rates have been eroded by roughly 46%. When inflation is taken into account, social assistance rates today are lower than when the Liberals took power in 2003. Since coming to power in 2003, the Liberals have raised rates by 3 per cent in 2005 and 2 per cent in November 2006. The March 2007 Ontario Budget included a number of measures (such as a 2 per cent increase in rates) which are only steps towards what is needed.

A single person on OW receives \$548 per month. A single mother with one child on OW receives \$1,008 per month. A single disabled person receives \$979 per month. A single disabled person with one child receives \$1,498 per month.

It is necessary and possible to create a model for income security that reflects the needs of Ontarians and their communities. A starting point would be to accept the fact that all Ontarians, particularly those who use and provide needed services, must be involved in the process of developing and implementing the model.

In the November 2006 publication *Ontario Poverty – Yours to Discover* with the subtitle *a report card of government inaction and broken promises on poverty* calls for at a minimum:

- Setting OW and ODSP rates according to the Market Basket Measure (MBM).
- Using MBM, a single mother with one child on OW would receive \$1,604. A single person on ODSP would receive \$1,145.
- Annually adjusting OW and ODSP rates to the cost of living.

A number of provincial governments, such as Newfoundland and Quebec, are already doing this at present.

Ontario Poverty was prepared by the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice with contributions from a variety of other community and anti-poverty organizations.

In July 1998 the federal government introduced *The National Child Benefit Supplement* (NCBS) which is paid to low income families with children. It is a supplement since it is an addition to the existing Canada Child Tax Benefit – available to approximately 80% of Canadian families with children. The supplement is paid whether the family participates in the workforce or receives social assistance. The provincial government may then reduce the amount they provide in special assistance to these families up to the amount of the federal increase, leaving them in an unchanged financial situation. The provincial government may spend the funds in provincial programs aimed at child benefits and earned income supplements, child daycare initiatives, services for early childhood and children-at-risk, supplementary health benefits and other services.

During the 2003 provincial election McGuinty acknowledged that clawing back the NCBS was wrong and he promised to end it by the end of his first term. In 2004 the Liberals announced that they would allow families on social assistance to keep any increases to the NCBS. As of November 2006, the Liberal government was clawing back approximately \$120 from every child on social assistance. There were 170,729 children affected.

The publication *Ontario Poverty – Yours to Discover* calls for:

- an end to the claw back of the National Child Benefit Supplement immediately so that families on social assistance can keep the full amount;
- using general revenues to continue funding programs for low-income families that are currently being funded with claw back dollars.

In the March 22, 2007 Ontario Budget an *Ontario Child Benefit* (OCB) was announced. It will be phased in and not fully implemented until 2011. Eligible families will receive a one-time payment of up to \$250 for each child under 18 if their family income in 2005 was under \$20,000. This payment will not be treated as income or clawed back from families on social assistance. In July 2008 a monthly OCB benefit of up to \$50 per month for every child under 18 will start to flow to eligible families.

Social assistance rates for families with children will begin to be restructured. From July 2009 to July 2011 the maximum OCB will gradually increase from \$50 per month per child to \$92. During this period social assistance rates for families with children will continue to be restructured so that, by July 2011, the overall increase in monthly income for a single parent with one child will increase to around \$50 per month.

Social Services

At the founding convention of the OFL in 1957, one of the resolutions passed called on the Ontario government to bring about a program of public welfare that would provide standards of health and respectability.

In a 1969 convention statement entitled *General State of Labour*, the OFL called for all workers to have the right to bargain collectively. The statement called for improvements in social welfare legislation, the educational system, and called on working with others in the community to improve housing, day care centres and homes for the aged. The 1993 convention statement *Social Services* correctly saw any discussion of social services as part of the wider question of what kind of society and economy we wanted in Ontario.

From the founding convention there has always been the realization that Ontarians need an array of quality services which should be available in their community. These services should be provided by other Ontarians (our members) in the same community. It has also been our standing policy to call upon governments to develop, implement and refine services to address the needs of Ontarians. Our long standing support for the United Way is based on the premise that services and agencies receiving United Way funds, provide a supplement, not a replacement to government-financed and publicly-delivered programs. In many of these agencies the programs are delivered by our members.

Governments have often sought to abandon their responsibility to provide needed services by directing funds to the non-profit community sector to deliver these services. This sector in Ontario is the largest in Canada. One in 11 Ontarians work in a non-profit organization and 7.8 million people volunteer for a non-profit organization.

Using funding as both a carrot and a stick, governments are often able to "influence" the activities of agencies. Cynically, they (government) know that the staff of these agencies (a majority of whom are women) are both qualified

and dedicated. They also know that dedicated staff will often put the needs of their clients ahead of their own. Agencies and staff will cope as best as they can.

Inadequate resources and working conditions become the norm as agencies are often reluctant to publicize the situation out of fear of losing their funding from government. Staff are exposed to unacceptable working conditions and often, although dedicated and qualified, leave the sector. Collective bargaining becomes a frustrating experience for workers and their unions because it is the agency not the government who sits as the employer. The time and resources are not available to assist the clients who are Ontarians in need.

The government should talk and listen to the workers, their unions, agencies and Ontarians, who need and use the services provided by the non-profit sector. There are a number of key elements that the government should begin to implement:

- Return to core, stable and fair funding and shift away from project funding and short-term contracts which will allow agencies to plan better and for the longer term.
- Fair wages and benefits to attract and retain qualified staff which is vital for programs and services.
- Integrate cost-of-living increases in funding programs.
- Invest in community service infrastructure.

These are obvious points which have recently been articulated again by the "coming-together" of labour and community agencies in Toronto.

In 1985, the Liberal/NDP Accord resulted in the creation of the Community and Neighbourhood Support Services Program (CNSSP), which provided stable, core funding to non-profit agencies to cover overhead and administrative costs; and to build organizational capacity and deliver programs and services to the community. In 1995 the Conservative government of Mike Harris eliminated this program which has not been replaced.

Health Care

Ontarians need access to quality health care throughout their lives. The goal for a health care system should be to encourage the prevention of illness. Important determinants of good health are a safe and secure job, a decent income, good housing, quality education, and a healthy environment. Since our founding convention in 1957, the Ontario Federation of Labour has consistently advocated for our vision of a universally-accessible more comprehensive health care system for all Ontarians.

In 1962 the OFL Convention passed a comprehensive statement on Medicare advocating that:

- the health needs of the people can best be looked after by a public health care program;
- such a program shall be comprehensive in scope and provide health care in full;

- services should include prevention, diagnosis, treatment of illness, rehabilitation of those disabled by illness or accident and the provision of drugs and appliances;
- the program should be universally available without regard to means;
- provide health care of the highest quality;
- provide equitable financing and free from any co-insurance deductible or other financial deterrents against full use;
- provide optimum distribution and coordination of various health services, agencies and personnel.

By 1971 the OFL was calling for extending coverage to include drugs, appliances, dental care, nursing, physiotherapy, eye glasses and hearing aids.

The 1965 OFL convention endorsed the recommendations of Justice Emmet Hall's 1964 *Royal Commission on Health Services* and called on the provincial government to abandon their proposed plan in favour of the National Plan.

In 2002 the OFL was in support of Roy Romanow's *Report on the Future of Health Care in Canada*.

More recently, in 2005, the OFL working with affiliates and their health care members, embarked on a campaign to address the systematic and serious issues flowing from the persistence of understaffing in all health care sectors. A total of 17 meetings were held across Ontario bringing together health care workers from all sectors and from all affiliated unions. The report entitled *Understaffed and Under Pressure – A*

reality check by Ontario health care workers continues to be used to pressure the provincial government to address the issue of understaffing. The report called for:

- an immediate moratorium of layoffs in hospitals;
- in nursing homes and homes for the aged a required minimum standard of 3.5 hours per day of nursing and personal care for residents; (In 1996 the Conservative government had repealed an earlier standard of 2.25 hours);
- a required minimum standard for staffing with appropriate complement of full-time workers in all health care sectors.

As already noted, the 1962 OFL statement spoke of "optimum distribution and coordination of various health services, agencies and personnel." The OFL has always believed that Ontarians need an array of services available in their community. Needed and quality services can be provided in the community by our members in a not-for-profit manner.

The Liberal government has had little apparent difficulty in supporting and accepting some key Conservative policies implemented during their period in office (1995-2003) – policies which the Liberals had spoken against while in opposition.

The most obvious of these are the public-private-partnerships (P3s) form of privatization which the Conservative government had begun to implement for hospitals in Brampton and Ottawa. To quote Dalton McGuinty on September 26, 2003: *"I'm calling on Mr. Eves to halt any contract signings when it comes to P3s. I stand against the Americanization of our hospitals."* A

month after the October 2003 election, the Liberal government signed P3 hospital deals in Brampton and Ottawa. Years later, after a long struggle, the Ontario Health Coalition and OFL affiliates in health care obtained and released figures (May 2007) that the William Osler Health Centre (Brampton) project could possibly cost \$300 million more under the P3 scheme than if it were funded through the public system. The new hospital will also open with 350 instead of the announced 608 beds.

In June 2007 OPSEU, Local 479, released their report *Risky Business* exposing the bizarre operating procedures at the Royal Ottawa Hospital which was the first P3 hospital to come on line in Ontario. The report should be a must read for every Ontarian.

The P3 model – while mostly developed in health care – can be imposed on any sector of Ontario society. Rather than abandon the P3 model, the Liberals embraced the idea and gave it a new name. Their Minister of Public Infrastructure, David Caplan, calls it "Alternative Financing and Procurement (AFP)."

In May 2005 Mr. Caplan released *ReNew Ontario 2005-2010* – the Liberal five-year privatization plan with the extensive use of the P3 model. The plan called for 66 projects of which 30-35 per cent (approximately 23) were "large and complex." After his announcement, it is not surprising that the Conservatives congratulated the Liberal government for continuing their (Conservative) agenda of privatization of the public sector by continuing the P3 program.

The McGuinty Liberals faced spirited opposition in community after community as they tried to impose the P3 model – rather than the publicly-financed and publicly-operated model for hospitals – to serve the needs of Ontario communities. The labour movement, especially OFL affiliates from the health care sector, played a key role in building this community opposition to P3s.

The widespread community opposition across Ontario to P3 projects, and the body of work documenting the failure of this model in a variety of jurisdictions, should have convinced the Liberals of the folly of their ways. By the end of 2006 the McGuinty government did order the hospitals not to privatize housekeeping and patient dietary services in P3 projects, reducing the number of services to be privatized. While this is not an abandonment of the P3 model, it is at least a positive response to the level of community opposition to this particular model.

The P3 approach (via the Conservatives) was not the only initiative the Liberals copied from the Tony Blair government (1997-2007) in Britain. Another was the "*accountability agreements*" found in the 2004 *The Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act* (Bill 8).

The hospitals are expected to provide certain services but they are also expected to balance their budgets. Services cut or not offered in public hospitals may still be available in the community to Ontarians who need these services. Some clinical services may go to not-for-profit agencies while non-clinical services are contracted to for-profit providers. There does not seem to be an understanding of the fact that diagnostic staff are an integral part of the health care system.

Much of the diagnoses by physicians in hospitals are dependent on lab tests. Staff shortages must be addressed by the government ensuring that there are enough training facilities/openings to train sufficient numbers to replace retiring workers.

The government must address the recruiting and retaining issue that the stressful working conditions do not make this important work appealing for those doing the work now and those thinking about doing it as a career. These new ideas from Britain are attempts to repackage old, flawed Ontario government policies (under both Conservative and Liberal regimes) to privatize needed services such as those provided by public laboratories. Policies based on ideology rather than on addressing the needs of Ontarians. These policies disguise their true intent with the talk of "accountability" or "efficiencies".

In the summer of 2004, the Liberal Cabinet approved a plan to implement fourteen "Local Health Integration Networks" (LHINs). The whole LHINs initiative was marked by a lack of meaningful public input into their mandate, mission and structure. The process of choosing the local LHINs Chairs and Board of Directors was both flawed and anti-democratic and does not reflect the diversity of Ontarians. The LHINs are not local, nor based on existing communities or even communities of shared interest.

The purpose of the LHINs model, according to the government, is to plan, coordinate and fund the delivery of health services in a particular region. The LHINs structure will insulate the provincial government from the political fallout from Ontarians as they realize the changes to their local health care system. Local support, clinical services and the local jobs providing these services will be threatened by the

centralization and integration implemented by the local LHINs.

The LHINs structure is a split between the purchaser and the provider of services. This model has been tried and failed in home care. *The Local Health Systems Integration Act, 2006* gives powers to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and to the LHINs to find integration opportunities. Where previously agencies and hospitals would determine the services they would provide, now the LHINs can determine what and the nature of services that can be provided.

Labour and community activists must be vigilant to ensure that any such initiatives are based on providing more and better services to the community (in the spirit of the previously-mentioned 1962 OFL Medicare statement) and not as a kind of code word for the privatization of services.

In the spring of 2003, 375 people in Ontario were infected with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The greatest numbers of victims were health care workers. 72% of the victims were infected in a health care facility. SARS killed 44 people including two nurses and a doctor.

In June 2003, the Ontario government appointed a Commission headed by Justice Archie Campbell to examine the experience with SARS. *Spring of Fear*, the final report by the SARS Commission, was released in January 2007 shortly before the death of Justice Campbell. The interim reports and the final report provide a detailed picture of what happened and what needs to be done to improve the situation. Campbell describes hospitals as "dangerous places, as dangerous as mines and factories but without the protection that have come to be expected in the mines and factories." He goes on to say:

The only thing that saved us from a worse disaster was the courage and sacrifice and personal initiative of those who stepped up – the nurses, the doctors, the paramedics and all the others – sometimes at great personal risk, to get us through a crisis that never should have happened.

Perhaps the most important lesson of SARS is the importance of the precautionary principle. SARS demonstrated over and over the importance of the principle that we cannot wait for scientific certainty before we take reasonable steps to reduce risk. This principle should be adopted as a guiding principle throughout Ontario's health, public health and worker safety systems.

The McGuinty Liberals have been slow to act on the recommendations of Justice Campbell. They have incorporated the "precautionary principle" as an amendment in the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* (Bill 171) and included some health and safety considerations into the new Public Health Agency. In August 2007 the McGuinty government announced that they would begin to stockpile an estimated 55 million N95 masks to meet the demand in a four-week period during a pandemic. Funding for this initiative will continue through 2010.

Workers in health care need a regulation that would protect them from violence and harassment in their workplace. This is an important issue for workers, their unions and for the OFL.

Another issue that they have been very slow to act on is the need for Needlestick and Sharps Regulation to protect Ontario health care workers. Such regulations are already in place in numerous Canadian and American

jurisdictions and they are effective. The OFL has joined with affiliates from the health care sector on a number of occasions to lobby the government.

New Democratic Party MPP, Shelley Martel, has put in two Private Member's Bills on this issue. The last time she introduced her Bill, in the fall of 2006, it received "all party" agreement to go on to hearings. Her bill died on the Order paper when the house was adjourned. In August 2007 the McGuinty government announced a regulation concerning safety engineered needles and needle-less systems in hospitals by September 2008. After consultations, the government will expand this to cover long-term care homes, psychiatric facilities, laboratories and specimen collection centres and by 2010 for other health care workplaces.

Understaffing, SARS, protection of workers from violence and harassment at work and a Needlestick Regulation are all important issues in Ontario's health care system. They all have solutions which are known to the government. Positive action is needed on them. Positive action which would improve health services for Ontarians.

Our public health system must have the following components:

- fair treatment for all health care workers;
- no privatization in our health care system;
- improvements to the capacity and resources of our public system in order to deal with such issues as low staff levels, workloads and wait times;
- to recognize and positively address the broad determinants of health;

- to improve our capacity to evolve the public system to incorporate programs and services such as home care, pharmacies, chiropractic, physiotherapy, dental and vision care programs;
- building a health care system firmly rooted in democratic principles where the decision-making process is open and transparent and fully involves and addresses the needs of communities, patients/residents and health care workers;
- a healthy and safe work environment for all of the workers who provide the array of needed services for other Ontarians.

Under the umbrella of health care are sub-sections such as home care, long term care and mental health. In each of these sections there are challenges to the provision of needed public services to Ontarians.

Home Care

As early as 1973 the OFL was talking about the need for home treatment that would be covered by a comprehensive health care plan.

The Conservatives first imposed competitive bidding in home care in 1996. The system forced providers to bid low in order to win the contract from the Community Care Access Centre (CCAC). The instability in the workforce and the continuum of care for patients is a direct consequence of the competitive bidding process. When contracts are lost, some workers are rehired by the new employer at lower wages, fewer benefits, loss of seniority and without their collective agreements or union representation.

The provision of home care has always been provided in the community by a variety of agencies. The competitive bidding process has altered the mix of these agencies. For example, the for-profit share has increased from 18 per cent in 1995 to over 50 per cent today as long-established not-for-profit agencies lose contracts to for-profit agencies.

The Conservative funding freeze in May 2001 resulted in the reduction of 115,000 clients served between April 1, 2001-April 1, 2003 and a service cut of six million hours (a 30 per cent drop).

Before the 2003 Provincial Election the OFL asked the political leaders a number of questions including: "*Will your party stop the move to for-profit home care?*" Dalton McGuinty answered, as follows:

*Our commitment to home care centres on ensuring that our frail and elderly have access to the services they need to keep them independent and healthy. **The current system is not working and we need to change it.** We will work to create a system that is patient-centered and flexible. (Emphasis added.)*

A year later, as Premier, he appointed Elinor Caplan with a mandate to conduct a *Review of Home Care Competitive Bidding Process*. When she reported back in June 2005, the OFL and its affiliated unions saw her report as simply tinkering with a flawed system because she did not or could not call for the elimination of competitive bidding.

The Provincial government should begin to implement immediately:

- a stop to the competitive bidding process in home care. A process which has created massive and regular disruption of job security and working conditions for workers and in the continuity of services for Ontarians in need;
- to move to establishing a public system of home care drawing on the successful working models found in Manitoba and Saskatchewan; (In such a public system a continuum of care is provided on a universal and equitable basis, without the presumption of unpaid care giving by family and based on enforceable standards) and;
- a system that ensures that services reflecting the diversity of our province are accessible to Ontarians where and when they are needed.

Long-Term Care

The needs of senior Ontarians have been addressed over the years by the OFL. In 1973 a convention statement dealt with assistance for seniors in such areas as income, health insurance, housing and community services.

In their February 2007 report *Dignity Denied Long-Term Care and Canada's Elderly* the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) made the following observations:

- People aged 80 and over are the fastest growing age group in the country;

- In 2002, there were 157,500 beds in Long-Term Care (LTC) facilities across Canada. Estimates are that between 560,000 and 740,000 seniors will need a LTC facility by the year 2031;
- Income from Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) totals \$1,079 per month;
- Charges for basic accommodation in publicly supported LTC institutions range from \$540 to \$3,960 a month. For private accommodation it is much higher;
- In 2003, 17.7 per cent of unattached seniors and 18.9 per cent of unattached female seniors had incomes barely above the cut-off for these seniors; existing LTC facilities present a costly and often inaccessible option.

In 1969 the OFL called on the provincial government to assume the responsibility for adequate standards of all homes for the aged. The next year (1970) the call was for nursing home care to become part of general welfare and that the cost should be borne from the consolidated revenue and also to establish a standard of regulations to ensure adequate care and supervision of residents in homes for the aged. Also in 1970, the provincial government was called on to establish standard regulations with a minimum employment age of 18 to work in homes for the aged to ensure adequate care and supervision of residents, and also that no employees be permitted to work alone in senile and special care wards. Concerns were also raised about the working conditions for our members in these facilities.

Over the years these issues continued to be addressed by the OFL and its affiliates with membership in this sector. The sector is a growing industry, predominately owned and operated by for-profit multinationals. This is a dramatic shift in Ontario to for-profit long-term-care beds. Ontario has more for-profit beds – more than half – than any other province. For example, British Columbia has about 30 per cent.

There are studies that show for-profits provide less staffing and subsequently poor health outcomes. This shift reflects a deliberate government policy.

In 1998, the then Conservative government announced 20,000 new long-term beds over the next eight years. Two-thirds of these beds were awarded to for-profit corporations.

In 1996 the Conservative government repealed a staffing standard of 2.25 hours per day of nursing and personal care for residents.

Before the 2003 provincial election the OFL asked all political parties the question: "*Will your party stop awarding long-term care beds to private for-profit companies?*" Dalton McGuinty answered:

We have a comprehensive plan to improve the quality of life for residents of long-term care facilities. Our plan includes restoring standards and providing the necessary funding to increase the level of nursing care that long-term care residents receive...

In May 2004, the Liberal government released *Commitment to Care: A Plan for Long-Term Care in Ontario* prepared by Monique Smith, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. A shortcoming of the report was that it overlooked the need for minimum staffing standards.

The Liberal government did introduce their long awaited *Long-Term Care Act (Bill 140)* in the fall of 2006. There were many concerns raised about this proposed legislation especially regarding the lack of staffing standards for care.

The lack of a staffing standard has been a major concern of the OFL and affiliates from the health care sector. Before it was repealed by the Conservatives, the staffing standard for long-term care was the only standard in health care. One of the demands of the OFL understaffing campaign was to bring back a staffing standard to long-term care and establish a staffing standard in all sectors of health care. In a pre-election move, the McGuinty government announced the appointment of Shirlee Sharkey for another round of consultations that was seen as a ploy to postpone actions on staffing standards.

Another aspect of care that surfaced during the understaffing campaign was the issue of incontinence care "diaper use" for residents of long-term care facilities. The employer practice of "75 percent full before changing" was revealed, and the OFL worked with affiliates and a Toronto legal firm to further publicize and change this practice.

In another pre-election move in July 2007, the McGuinty government announced that the raw food allowance for residents in long-term care facilities would be increased to \$7.00 per day on September 1. Another government announcement was a 10-year plan to upgrade 35,000 older long-term care beds.

The 2005 OFL convention policy paper *Rebuilding Health Care* outlined a number of needed components for senior care:

- A required minimum standard of 3.5 hours per day of nursing and personal care for residents;
- Staffing levels that reflect not only the numbers of staff but also the appropriate classifications and qualifications of staff to ensure that residents receive the care that is appropriate to their needs;
- Soliciting ongoing input into long-term care policies by workers through their union, residents and families;
- Increasing the capacity of workers to have a say in what happens in their facilities by instituting regular, unannounced inspections and mandate inspectors to speak with residents, families and workers about conditions; implement whistleblower protection for workers who complain about conditions and for the protection of residents;
- Mandatory reporting and monitoring of staff levels instead of the Liberal's "voluntary" compliance. This will ensure that there is the proper use of government monies.

Another aspect of senior care in Ontario is the retirement home sector which is a run-for-profit industry that is controlled by a small number of large corporations. The original intent of retirement homes was to provide a minimum level of support for Ontarians who could and wished to continue to live independently but who needed some light housekeeping, meals and low levels of personal care. Many retirement homes have mutated from their original intent and have become more and more like nursing homes.

What is needed:

- A Retirement Homes Act, which would establish the appropriate legislative and regulatory framework for the operation of retirement homes in Ontario. This would be similar to the situation found in other kinds of residential care facilities;
- Regular inspections of retirement homes;
- Developing a clearly understood and simple process for residents and/or their families to complain about the operations of retirement homes.

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| <p>Mental Health</p> |
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The first focus of concern on mental health issues was the needs of children who could not be accommodated in public schools. The 1957 OFL convention called for the building and maintaining of a residence school. In 1962 there was a call on the Department of Health to greatly expand the accommodation for children.

The 1971 convention demanded the establishment of a competent, independent commission comprised of representatives of interested groups, including organized labour, to examine the adequacy of existing mental health facilities, the ratio of staff to patients and the applications of remedies for treatments of mental illness. The same convention called for long-term planning as needed to develop a wide range of mental health services on a community basis integrated as far as possible with an improved health care system.

Over time there was little improvement and the 1984 convention condemned the provincial government for its lack of concern for the mentally ill as evidenced in below poverty level incomes, inadequate housing, understaffed psychiatric hospitals, lack of community-based outreach programs, and reduction of psychiatric hospital beds.

Between 1983 and 2003 there were at least a dozen reports on mental health in Ontario. These reports and the election of the McGuinty Liberals in 2003 did little to improve the situation. They continued the policy direction of their predecessor of divesting by having mental health services from psychiatric hospitals become part of the services offered at existing hospitals in select communities.

What is needed:

- Putting a stop to further divestment and bed closures until full assessment of provincial needs is completed;

- Undertaking a full assessment of needs in order to develop policies and to allocate resources to offer a continuum of needed services to Ontarians. This must be done with those affiliates in mental health services and users of these services in the broader community;
- Providing needed services in the not-for-profit public sector across Ontario.

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| <p>Conclusion</p> |
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The membership of the Ontario Federation of Labour reflects the diversity of Ontario's population. As such, public services support every aspect of their daily activities and at all stages of their lives. The needs of Ontarians may change over time, but there is no reason why we, as a society, cannot work together to address these needs. Public services address immediate needs but they are also an investment in the future of Ontarians and in our province. It is for these reasons that, since March 1957, the Ontario Federation of Labour has always spoken out and acted for public services in our province.

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