

Education

What They Promised

“Classroom spending for education will also be exempt” from spending cuts.
– *The Common Sense Revolution*, page 3

What They Delivered

Primary/secondary

A “created” crisis to pave the way for massive restructuring:

- The government cut \$525 million in operating grants in the first two years of its mandate.
- It planned to cut a further \$883 million under Bill 160, but an uproar over school closings reduced the cut to \$672 million.
- In total, \$570 per child has been cut from the public school system.

Quality education suffers as enrolments are up by 4% while the number of teachers is down by 2.7%.

Post-secondary

- The Harris government cut \$400 million, or 17%, from operating budgets.
- Access to education is threatened as the maximum level of tuition for undergraduate arts and science programs has increased from \$2,228 in the 1994–95 academic year to \$3,915 in the 1999-2000 year—an astounding 76% increase. Professional program tuition has soared even higher.


What We Propose

Primary/secondary

- Increase grants to guarantee every board its 1995–96 funding levels.
- Restore the right to tax locally, capped at 10% of a school board’s provincial allocation.
- Begin phase-in of an Early Years Program and child care reform.
- Implement an open revision process for education funding, to ensure that the funding formula actually reflects the costs of delivering a high-quality education to every student in Ontario.

Post-secondary

- Increase the funding base by \$416 million to restore the Harris cuts and allow for inflation.
- Freeze tuition fees at the 1997 level.

.....
 For a budget summary, 
 turn this page over.

What does the Ontario Alternative Budget do?

Our budget does three things:

- One: It discredits the Harris government's claim that its tax cuts and fiscal policies have produced substantial gains for middle-income earners;
- Two: It documents the devastating impact of the Harris government policies on Ontarians; and
- Three: It proposes an alternative budget that would restore public services to their real per-capita 1995-96 level while eliminating the deficit by 2001-2002.

Problems

Contrary to government claims,

- the reductions in income taxes of \$738 for the average family **will have no positive impact**, because provincial cuts in funding have led to increased user fees and property taxes, and other costs of at least \$766. These new costs **entirely wipe out the tax cut** for three-quarters of Ontario's families.
- if there had never been a Harris government (no public spending cuts; no tax cuts), **the budget would have been balanced in the 1998-99 fiscal year** anyway, through increased revenues. We would be discussing instead how to spend the surplus, not what to do about damaged public services.
- **nearly \$2 billion has been cut from health care** since Harris was elected, when inflation and population growth are taken into account.
- **Harris government policies actually have held back job growth in Ontario.** Ontario's job performance is entirely attributable to the lower Canadian dollar and growth in the U.S. economy.
- on a comparable per-capita basis, **\$570 per child has been removed from the public school system**, totalling \$1.2 billion.

Solutions

The Ontario Alternative Budget proposes to

- **increase revenues in order to restore public services and balance the budget by 2000-2001.** We can do this by restoring the tax cut that was given to the highest-income 20% of taxpayers, returning tobacco taxes to pre-1994 levels, and eliminating pointless tax breaks for business.

The Choice

The Ontario Alternative Budget shows that

- **Ontario's deficit and public service crisis is not inevitable** but the result of political choices made by a government that is not interested in the greater public good.
- **it is possible to reverse the damage caused by the Harris government and repair our public services** within a responsible taxation and fiscal framework.

Need more information? Contact us:

Ross McClellan, Legislative and Political Education Director

The Ontario Federation of Labour

15 Gervais Drive, Suite 202, Toronto, Ontario M3C 1Y8 (416) 441-2731

Web sites: www.efto.on.ca www.recoverontario.org