

BIG QUESTIONS for OPSEU members

Before you vote Oct. 6, ask your local candidates about their plans for Ontario!

General questions

A. What are your plans for public services?

I am a voter in your riding. In this election, many commentators are saying that whoever forms the next government is likely to propose substantial cuts to the provincial budget. Also, the three main parties are currently proposing tax cuts of various kinds, all of which will reduce the money available to pay for public services. If elected, will your party be proposing cuts to public services, and if so, can you provide details of these cuts? What is your plan for my sector in particular?

B. What is your plan for good jobs for all?

I am a voter in your riding. Like many Ontarians, I am deeply concerned about the job market for people working today and for those who will be working in the future. I am concerned not only about the quantity but also the quality of jobs available. Today, only five out of eight jobs are permanent, full-time jobs. What is your plan to create good, full-time jobs that allow people to live decently, bring their kids up the way they want to, and retire with dignity?

C. Will you make the tax system fairer?

I am a voter in your riding. I believe that a fair taxation system is a progressive one that is based on the principle of ability to pay. Yet recent tax changes have gone the other way, increasing the province's reliance on regressive consumption taxes and reducing the money we collect through progressive individual and corporate income taxes. What is your plan to make sure that government has the revenue it needs to tackle the problems Ontario faces? If elected, will the changes you make create a tax system that is fairer, or less fair, than the existing one?

Specific questions

Will you abolish the Drummond Commission?

1. The Commission on Reform of Ontario's Public Services, chaired by bank economist Don Drummond, appears to be designed to privatize as many public services as possible. This will reduce direct government oversight and move money from the wages of working people to the profits of corporations. If your party forms the next government, will you abolish the Drummond Commission, and if not, why not?

What is your philosophy around privatization?

2. Of the world's developed countries, the one with the most expensive health care – by far – is the one with the private system. What is your party's philosophy with respect to the privatization of health care services, and privatization in general?

Are corporate tax cuts really the best way to spend public dollars?

3. Corporate leaders in Ontario have told government that they want lower taxes on their profits, and on July 1, 2010 the McGuinty government brought in the first in a series of cuts to the corporate income tax rate. Do you support these tax cuts? If so, do you believe they are a better use of public dollars than building more public transit, opening more hospital beds, reducing college and university tuition fees, or other expenditures? Why or why not?

Is the McGuinty wage freeze fair?

4. In the March 2010 budget, the McGuinty government announced a policy of “compensation restraint” that was designed to use inflation to cut the wages of close to one million public sector workers in Ontario. Do you think this is fair at a time when Ontario’s corporations are receiving corporate income tax cuts worth far more per year than compensation restraint could possibly save?

Will you interfere with the independence of arbitrators?

5. Some politicians say they want to change the system that allows workers and employers in parts of the public sector to resolve disputes over wages and working conditions through independent arbitration. The PC platform calls some recent arbitration awards in the public sector “excessive” even though most have been well below the rate of inflation and as a result have actually reduced the real wages of workers covered by them. What is your idea of a “reasonable” settlement? If your party is elected, do you plan to limit the independence of arbitrators to settle contract disputes? If so, how?

What is your plan to close Ontario’s 29 per cent gender pay gap?

6. Ontario has one of the highest gender pay gaps in the world. Looking at full-time jobs, for every \$1.00 men bring home in their paycheques, women earn an average of 71 cents. Yet Ontario law makes it unlawful to discriminate against women in their work or pay. Pay equity is mandatory, not optional. Do you support the Equal Pay Coalition’s call for a FAIR plan for pay equity that is Funded, Accountable, Integrated, and Real? What is your plan to close Ontario’s 29 per cent gender pay gap?

Are you in favour of lowering the wages of women in the public sector?

7. In its election platform, the PC party says it plans to bring public sector pay rates in line with private sector standards where the former are higher than the latter. Yet one of the main reasons for the difference between private and public pay is the more widespread application of pay equity in the public sector. Are you in favour of lowering the wages of women in the public sector? If elected, will you support increased enforcement of pay equity in the private sector?

How will you support the Ontario Public Service?

8. The current Liberal government has begun to implement a plan to cut at least \$1.5 billion in funding and reduce the size of the Ontario Public Service by 5,000 jobs by 2014. The PC party has proposed an estimated \$2.3 billion in cuts to the public service and an undisclosed number of job cuts. Either approach can only have a negative effect on the quality of service Ontarians receive from their government. Can you name three services provided by workers in the Ontario Public Service? What is your plan for funding the Ontario Public Service, and how will you ensure that the vital services it provides are maintained?

Will you keep ServiceOntario in the public service?

9. ServiceOntario is the one-stop service organization that lets you renew your driver's license, apply for a health card, order a birth certificate, get a hunting or fishing license, register a business, or search a land title. In a March 2011 provincial survey, a whopping 89 per cent said they were very satisfied with the service they got from ServiceOntario. Yet the Liberal government is considering privatizing ServiceOntario and turning it over to a for-profit company to run. Will you keep ServiceOntario in the public service, or will you privatize it?

Will you count the votes of college part-timers?

10. In 2009, the Ontario Labour Relations Board ordered union certification votes for part-time faculty and part-time support staff at Ontario's community colleges. More than 5,000 workers voted, but two years later their votes have not been counted because the colleges have used public dollars to pay expensive lawyers to block the ballot boxes from being opened. If your party forms the next government, will you direct the colleges to drop their objections and allow the votes to be counted so part-timers' voices can be heard?

Should our colleges be model employers?

11. Our community colleges are charged with training the workforce of the future and most students enrol with the goal of getting an education that will lead to a good, permanent full-time job. Yet the colleges now employ more lower-paid part-time workers than well-paid full-timers – despite the obvious availability of full-time work. If your party is elected, will you allow the current situation to persist, or will you call on the colleges to set a good example for other employers and create the good full-time jobs Ontarians need?

Will you support “Equal Pay for Equal Work”?

12. One reason there is so much precarious work today is that employers are allowed to pay part-timers less per hour than they pay full-timers. In the European Union, it is against the law to discriminate against workers in this way. Would your party support “Equal Pay for Equal Work” legislation that would stop employers from discriminating against people on the basis of their work status as part-time or temp workers?

What will you do to make post-secondary tuition affordable?

13. Other than food, clothing, shelter, and transportation, probably the largest expense faced by Ontario families is tuition for college and university. Given that an educated population benefits all Ontario, what is your plan to make post-secondary education more affordable? How does it compare the plans of other parties, in your view?

How will you fund health care?

14. The Liberal and Tory platforms both propose a dramatic slowing of the rate of growth in health care spending. The auditor has suggested that these funding targets are “optimistic and aggressive” and will likely result in cuts to services, particularly at our hospitals. What is your plan to fund top-quality health care for an aging population in an era of rapidly-changing technologies and treatments?

Is there “waste” in health care? Where is it?

15. In March of this year, the McGuinty government created the Commission on Reform of Ontario’s Public Services, chaired by bank economist Don Drummond. Mr. Drummond reportedly told the Toronto Star that up to 25 per cent of health spending in Ontario is wasteful. Do you agree with this assessment? If so, what parts of our health care system do you believe are wasteful?

What’s your position on public-private partnerships (P3s)?

16. The Ontario Auditor General noted that the private-public partnership for the William Osler Hospital cost almost \$500 million more than it would have if it had been built using traditional public procurement. In 2003, Dalton McGuinty campaigned against public-private partnerships (also called P3s), but now he is authorizing dozens of them. What is your view of this form of privatization, and what will be your policy if your party forms the next government?

How will you fund long-term care and home care?

17. As part of its plan to reduce funding increases to hospitals, the government plans to transfer patients out of hospitals and into long-term care and home care. However, Ontario’s auditor general notes that the government may be optimistic in its forecast to reduce these costs given that it is practising even greater restraint in the home care and long term-care sectors. If elected, will your party continue the policy of transferring patients out of hospitals? If so, will your party provide the funding for long-term care and home care that would make this possible? Please provide as much detail as possible.

Will you scrap competitive bidding in home care?

18. Competitive bidding in home care has been a failure. Administrative costs are conservatively estimated to take up 30 per cent of the money Ontarians pay for the service. The lack of job

security under competitive bidding has created an exodus of professionals from home care, and in many regions only the most acute patients are receiving care. What would you do to fix home care?

How will you fix the problems with patient transport?

19. Earlier this year the Ontario ombudsman identified serious problems with private patient transport including a lack of infection control, unsafe vehicles and poorly trained staff. In your view, has the privatization of these services been a factor in the problems the auditor identified? What would you do to fix these problems?

Will you chop ambulance fees?

20. The NDP has pledged to do away with the \$45 ambulance fee they say deters patients from calling 911 in an emergency. What is your position on ambulance fees?

Will you reduce ambulance wait times in ERs?

21. Overloaded hospital ERs have meant delays in turnaround time for ambulances. What would you do to fix the problem?

Will you bring in a staffing standard in long-term care?

22. All the major parties in this election are committed to more long term care beds, but the quality of care delivered to existing and future beds is equally important. If elected, will your party adopt a staffing standard to guarantee nursing home residents get the care they deserve? If so, what will that standard be?

Will you fund mental health care to World Health Organization standards?

23. Last August, the three major parties signed on to a plan to advance mental health in Ontario. Sadly, the official government plan released this spring is very different, and all but abandons adults with mental illness for the next three years. The other parties have been virtually silent on mental health in this election campaign. Ontario spends a much lower percentage of health care funding on mental health than that recommended by the World Health Organization. What would you do to address this inequity and help people with mental health issues get the help they need and deserve?

What will you do about Local Health Integration Networks?

24. There is much frustration across Ontario with the operation of the Local Health Integration Networks. How would you improve or replace them? If you propose cutting them, does this mean health care planning and funding decisions for the whole province would be made in Toronto?

Do you support Tim Hudak’s “compete for your own jobs” plan?

25. Tim Hudak says that, if elected, he will make public sector workers compete for their own jobs, a move likely to result in increased insecurity and lower wages for large segments of the workforce. Do you support this approach? Or do you believe government should be a model employer to encourage employers to provide good wages and working conditions across the economy?

Do you support successor rights for health care workers?

26. In the event that health care workers face the transfer of their work to the private sector or to another public sector agency, will you maintain the right of workers to transfer with that work, taking with them their existing wage rates, seniority, vacation, benefits and union representation?

Will you commit to a Workload Study Review in Children’s Aid?

27. Ontario’s children’s aid workers work every day to keep our children safe from abuse and neglect when families fail to. For many years, the biggest issue in children’s aid has been the workload of frontline staff. Stringent standards and reporting requirements are fine, but frontline child protection workers now spend more time doing administrative work than they spend working directly with the children and families who need their help and support. If elected, will your party commit to a comprehensive Workload Study Review so policy-makers can get the facts they need to keep our kids as safe as humanly possible?

Will you continue the new funding budgeted for children’s mental health?

28. In the 2011 provincial budget, the government announced \$257 million in new funding over three years for children’s mental health. This came after the all-party committee on addictions and mental health agreed that children’s mental health had been neglected for too long. So far, \$78 million of the new money has been committed. If elected, will your party commit to continuing the \$179 million budgeted for the next two years?

What will you do to help clients and workers in developmental services?

29. The people who work as caregivers for people with intellectual disabilities work under very difficult conditions. Over two-thirds of workers in the sector are part-time, and hourly wages are the lowest in the public sector. Staff turnover is high. Years of chronic underfunding mean hard times for developmental service workers and long waiting lists for clients, many of whom only receive the support they need when they become urgent care cases. If elected, what will your party do to help the vulnerable clients and underpaid workers in developmental services in our communities?

Will you help people get the ODSP payments they deserve?

30. Many Ontarians with disabilities, including disabilities related to intellectual and mental health challenges, are eligible for income support from the Ontario Disability Support

Program but are unable to apply for it themselves. What will you do to make sure people with disabilities receive the support they are eligible for?

Will you raise social assistance rates?

31. Successive Ontario governments have been cutting real social assistance rates, almost without interruption, for 16 years. Today, the income received by a single person living on social assistance is just 55 per cent of what it was in 1995. What is your plan to improve the lives of people on social assistance, and what will you do to lift them out of poverty?

Will you fight hunger?

32. About 400,000 Ontarians, a large percentage of them children, are forced to use food banks every month because they cannot get enough to eat. What is your plan to ensure that no one goes hungry in this rich province?

Will you help people who are waiting for housing?

33. Tens of thousands of Ontarians are homeless and more than 150,000 are on waiting lists for assisted housing. What is your plan to ensure that everyone has a safe place to live?

Do you support beer and wine in corner stores?

34. Some Ontario convenience store operators would like to boost their incomes by selling beer and wine in corner stores, a move which would negatively affect both public health and safety and provincial revenues. Do you support or oppose this, and why?

Is climate change real? If so, what are you going to do about it?

35. Do you believe the Earth's climate is getting warmer? Do you believe climate change is caused by human activity? If so, what is your party's plan to reduce or adapt to the effects of climate change on Ontario?