



The following overview of the election platforms of the three parties that hold federal seats in Ontario is intended for OPSEU members who want more information before Election Day, October 19. Please be aware that the party platforms are much more detailed. To find out more, click on the links in each section or read their platforms online:

- The **Conservative Party of Canada's** platform is at <http://www.conservative.ca/media/plan/conservative-platform-en.pdf> with a separate costing document at <http://www.conservative.ca/media/plan/costing-plan.pdf>
- The **New Democratic Party of Canada's** platform is at <http://xfer.ndp.ca/2015/2015-Full-Platform-EN.pdf>, with costing included.
- The **Liberal Party of Canada's** platform is at <https://www.liberal.ca/files/2015/10/New-plan-for-a-strong-middle-class.pdf> with a separate costing document at <http://www.liberal.ca/costing-plan/>

1. Public services

Conservative Party

According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Conservative cuts since 2009-10 are now reducing government program spending by \$12.5 billion a year. The Conservatives have taken an axe to programs right across the board:

- By next year, the Canadian **Food Inspection** Agency will have lost 20 per cent of its workforce and 24 per cent of its budget under the Conservatives.
- By 2016 the Conservatives will have cut frontline staff working at the EI Ministry by 24 per cent, which is 5,700 jobs across the country.
- The Conservatives have made deep cuts to **Environment Canada**; by 2017 they will have cut the Ministry by 36 per cent. The government has laid off all kinds of people involved in environmental protection, including climate scientists.
- By 2017, the government will have cut 1,100 staff working in **border security**.
- The government has closed nine **Veterans Affairs** office across the country, including Thunder Bay and Windsor. The Veterans Affairs workforce has been cut by 24 per cent.
- The government has cut 300 jobs from the **Coast Guard** and closed communications centres across the country, including in Thunder Bay.

Almost all new spending in the Conservative election platform for 2015 is in the form of targeted tax cuts like the Home Renovation Tax Credit, which accounts for more than 40 per cent of all the Conservatives' new "spending" over four years. The Conservatives also plan a one-year "operating freeze" to save \$565 million in 2016-17 and a similar amount each year after, which is enough to pay for the handful of small new expenditures that are not tax credits.

New Democratic Party

Aside from spending on infrastructure and Employment Insurance (see below), the NDP plans to add about \$20.8 billion in new spending on public services over four years. The New Democrats plan to spend more on childcare, universal prescription drug coverage, affordable housing, the Guaranteed Income Supplement, First Nations education, funding to the CBC, support for veterans, and other items.

Liberal Party

Aside from spending on infrastructure and Employment Insurance (see below), the Liberals plan to add about \$19.6 billion in new spending on public services over four years. The Liberals plan to spend more on home care, "clean" technology, the CBC and the Canadian Council for the Arts, First Nations education, support for veterans, and other items.

2. Health care funding

The Canada Health Transfer (CHT) is a federal program that sends money to the provinces to fund health care and maintain national standards. It is a major part of health care funding in Canada, accounting for \$34 billion in 2015-16. Under the Canada Health Accord negotiated with the provinces and territories, the CHT rose by six per cent per year from 2003-04 to 2013-14.

Conservative Party

The Conservatives allowed the 2004-14 Canada Health Accord to expire and have no plans to negotiate a new funding agreement with the provinces. Instead, they announced in 2011 that they would continue the Accord's base funding increases of 6 per cent per year for three years, ending in 2016-17; after that, health transfers will be tied to the rate of growth in the Gross Domestic Product (or three per cent, whichever is higher). The Canadian Health Coalition says the Conservative plan for the 10 years after 2016-17 represents a real cut to health care of at least **\$36 billion** over 10 years compared to the previous six-per-cent a year increases.

New Democratic Party

The New Democrats would increase the CHT by at least six per cent a year for 10 years.

Liberal Party

The Liberals say they "will negotiate a new Health Accord with provinces and territories, including a long-term agreement on funding," but do not set a specific level for an annual increase in transfers.

3. A national pharmaceutical drug plan

Canada is the only developed country with a national public health care system that does not also have a national program designed to ensure affordable pharmaceutical drugs for its citizens. A well-run "Pharmacare" system could save Canadians and their governments up to \$11 billion a year if done

properly, yet cooperation has been slow. Canadians are still paying too much for their medicines. Only Americans pay more.

Conservative Party

A national Pharmacare plan is a non-starter for the Conservatives. Stephen Harper has no interest in creating new national programs that touch on areas of provincial jurisdiction.

New Democratic Party

The NDP aims to lower prescription drug costs by 30 per cent through a national universal coverage drug plan. The NDP would begin funding the program in 2017-18, increasing total new funding to \$1.55 billion a year by 2019-20.

Liberal Party

Liberal leader Justin Trudeau says he would join with the provinces to save money on medications through bulk purchasing. The Liberal platform contains no new funding for medications.

4. Home care and long-term care

Conservative Party

The Conservative platform makes no specific mention of home care or long-term care.

New Democratic Party

The NDP would invest \$1.8 billion over four years to fund more home care and create 5,000 new nursing home beds.

Liberal Party

The Liberals would invest just under \$3 billion over four years to improve home care.

5. Child benefits and childcare

Federal funding for programs targeted at children is complex. In 2006, the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) replaced federal funding for child care programs. The UCCB is a direct cash payment to all parents/guardians from the government. It is taxable. The Canada Child Tax Benefit is a tax-free income-tested payment designed to help pay the costs of raising children, and may include the National Child Benefit Supplement, a multi-government payment to parents/guardians of children in poverty. Until this year, the Child Tax Credit was a non-refundable tax credit worth \$2,255 for each child. The government also gives families with children tax reductions through the Children's Fitness Tax Credit, the Children's Arts Tax Credit, and the like.

Conservative Party

In the 2014 Budget, the Conservatives announced that, effective January 1, 2015, they would expand the Universal Childcare Benefit from \$100 a month to \$160 a month for children under the age of six and introduce a new \$60-a-month payment for children aged six to 17. The Conservatives eliminated the Child Tax Credit, partially offsetting the increased cheques from the UCCB. But the increased payments still have a net extra cost of more than \$2.6 billion.

New Democratic Party

The cornerstone of the NDP platform is the creation of at least one million childcare spaces that would cost parents and guardians no more than \$15 per day per child. The NDP vows to “work with all provinces and territories” to deliver “affordable, quality, accessible childcare to Canadian families.” The NDP would invest \$600 million in child care in 2016-17, with the amount rising to over \$2.5 billion a year by 2019-20.

Liberal Party

If elected, the Liberal Party proposes to eliminate the UCCB, the Canada Child Tax Benefit, the National Child Benefit Supplement, and the Conservatives' income-splitting plan. To the money saved, the Liberals would add an extra \$2 billion and then use the resulting pile of money to create the Canada Child Benefit, a tax-free monthly payment they say would provide more money to 90 per cent of families compared to what the Conservatives are currently doing. Unlike the UCCB, the Canada Child Benefit would not go to all families. Families in low income would get the maximum amount, but those with over \$150,000 a year in income would get zero. Those in between would receive the Canada Child Benefit on a sliding scale, with smaller payments for those higher up the income scale.

6. Taxation

All federal funding for public services, from food inspection to border security, depends on revenue, and almost all federal revenue comes from taxation.

Conservative Party

Cutting taxes as a way to reduce funding for public services is a core policy of the Harper Conservatives. Since being elected in 2006, the Conservatives have:

- reduced the Corporate Income Tax rate from 21 per cent to 15;
- reduced the Goods and Services Tax by two percentage points; and
- reduced personal income taxes via rate changes and various deductions, exemptions, and credits.

These changes have reduced government revenues by \$25 billion a year, \$13 billion a year, and \$17 billion a year, respectively. This \$55 billion a year is a significant number, equal to 19 per cent of the current federal budget. It is lost revenue that is **not** being spent on federal public services, transfers to the provinces, or debt repayment.

In the 2015 federal budget, the Conservatives introduced an “income-splitting” plan (“the Family Tax Cut”) designed to cut taxes for two-earner families where one earner’s income is much higher than the other’s, reducing tax paid by households by up to \$2,000. This change will cost the government \$2.2 billion a year but will reduce taxes for only about 15 per cent of Canadian households, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Also in the 2015 budget, the Conservatives doubled the amount of money that can be sheltered from tax in Tax Free Savings Accounts (TFSA). The Conservatives' 2015 election platform promises another \$2 billion in personal tax cuts, most of which is for the Home Renovation Tax Credit. They will also lower the small business tax rate from 11 per cent to 9 per cent.

The Conservatives' obsession with tax cuts explains why federal government revenues, as a share of the economy, are at their lowest level since 1940. It also explains why the government continues to cut public services and is scaling back financial transfers to the provinces.

New Democratic Party

The NDP's tax plan promises to:

- eliminate tax “loopholes” that allow corporate CEOs to pay lower taxes on stock options to bring in \$500 million a year to government coffers;
- crack down on tax cheats and the use of “tax havens” that allow companies to avoid paying taxes in Canada;
- increase the Corporate Income Tax rate from 15 per cent to 17 per cent to bring in an estimated \$3 billion a year in revenues;
- reduce the small business tax rate from 11 per cent to 9 per cent;
- cancel the Conservatives' income-splitting plan – but keep income-splitting for pension incomes; and
- cancel the Conservatives' doubling of TFSA contribution limits.

Liberal Party

The Liberals say they will:

- cancel the Conservatives' income-splitting plan – but keep income-splitting for pension income;
- end “other tax breaks and benefits for the wealthy”;
- reduce income taxes on those earning between \$44,700 and \$89,401 and pay for the change through higher taxes on those earning over \$200,000; and
- reduce the small business tax rate from 11 per cent to 9 per cent.

7. Deficits, debt, and the federal budget

Conservative Party

Like governments around the world, the Conservative government ran several years of budget deficits in the wake of the 2008-09 recession. By drawing funds from the Employment Insurance fund, the Conservatives were able to register a budget surplus in 2014-15 and say they will continue to have surpluses over the next four years.

New Democratic Party

The NDP says Conservative deficits are the result of “reckless tax handouts to the wealthiest Canadians.” The NDP says it will maintain balanced budgets by “cancelling Stephen Harper's tax breaks for the wealthiest Canadians and by asking profitable corporations to pay their fair share.” The NDP vows to balance the books without cutting public services: “We will run balanced budgets and, unlike successive Conservative and Liberal governments, this will not be achieved through cuts to the front-line programs and services that matter to Canadians.”

Liberal Party

The Liberals intend to run “modest” budget deficits (less than \$10 billion a year) for three years to pay for infrastructure and other spending priorities, returning to a balanced budget in 2019. The Liberals say they would also embark on a government-wide “spending review” to find opportunities for cost savings. Among the possible savings listed in the Liberal platform are:

- clamping down on tax evasion;
- bringing the use of outside consultants by government down to 2005/06 levels;
- reducing government advertising; and
- capping tax breaks on stock options for millionaires.

8. Jobs and the economy

Conservative Party

The current prime minister has the worst economic record of any prime minister since the Second World War when it comes to job creation and economic growth. Canada has lost a net 400,000 manufacturing jobs since Stephen Harper took office, and 275,000 of them were lost in Ontario. More and more jobs these days are part-time, temporary, insecure jobs with low wages and few benefits.

Nonetheless, Harper still believes the role of government is to get out of the way and let the “free market” work everything out. This explains his obsession with tax cuts, public spending cuts, privatization, and so-called “free trade” deals.

The Conservatives’ view that low taxes make business invest has proved to be wrong: business investment in Canada has actually fallen in the era of tax cuts.

Stephen Harper’s latest move – signing the 12-country “Trans-Pacific Partnership” during an election campaign – ignores the lessons of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The TPP puts at least 25,000 auto-sector jobs at risk in Ontario and will allow foreign companies to sue Canadian governments if those governments stand in the way of the companies’ profits.

New Democratic Party

The NDP approach to building the economy places a high value on building public infrastructure (see below). Good roads, railways, bridges, and transit systems move goods and people efficiently; they create jobs when they are being built and afterwards as well. Similarly, good hospitals and schools are essential to the well-being of citizens and make for a more productive workforce.

The NDP focus on childcare is meant to help more parents, particularly women, re-join the workforce; likewise, the NDP plan to fast-track recognition of the credentials of foreign professionals is meant to make more people as productive as they can be.

The NDP will work with industry and government leaders to develop a National Automotive Strategy to preserve and expand high-value-added manufacturing jobs in that sector and will create an Aerospace Advanced Manufacturing Fund to help small- and medium-sized Canadian aerospace companies grow. The NDP will spend money to directly create jobs for young people.

On the Trans-Pacific Partnership, NDP leader Thomas Mulcair has sworn to protect the auto and dairy industries and says the NDP “will not be bound by this secret agreement that Mr. Harper has been negotiating.” Mulcair’s opposition to the TPP is in line with statements by U.S. presidential hopefuls Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, who have both expressed concerns about the deal. Sanders said the

TPP will “hurt consumers and cost American jobs” and has vowed to do all he can do defeat it. Mulcair says that, if elected, he will renegotiate the TPP to better protect the interests of Canadians.

Liberal Party

The Trudeau Liberals' current approach to building the economy also places a high value on building public infrastructure (see below). The Liberals' tax plan, which would move a certain amount of money from the hands of wealthy individuals to “middle class” households, could also contribute to growth, however modestly; low- and middle-income earners are more likely to spend what they have, and spend it locally, than those in the upper echelons of the economy. The Liberals also plan to use direct spending to create jobs, most notably through investing \$300 million more in the federal Youth Employment Strategy with the goal of creating 40,000 new jobs a year for young people over the next three years.

Like former Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, who signed NAFTA, current leader Justin Trudeau “strongly supports free trade” and is broadly supportive of the goals of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. If elected on October 19, the Liberals promise to “hold a full and open public debate in Parliament to ensure Canadians are consulted on this historic trade agreement.” If history is any indication, the Liberals will then vote in favour of the TPP, demanding few, if any, changes to the text of the agreement.

9. Public infrastructure and public-private partnerships

Conservative Party

The Conservatives' contributions to public infrastructure projects since 2006 have been modest to say the least, if not stingy. The Conservative platform makes no mention of new funding for any significant infrastructure projects, unless “tug boat capacity on the west coast” – \$8 million in new spending in 2017-18 – can be considered infrastructure.

Much of what the Conservative government has spent on infrastructure in recent years has been directed through P3 Canada, a government agency which funds only privatized “public-private partnerships” that subsidize the profits of private companies and cost Canadians more.

New Democratic Party

The NDP has committed \$1.5 billion a year for new roads, water, sewer systems across the country and \$1.1 billion a year to build better public transit infrastructure for Canadian communities.

With respect to public-private partnerships for infrastructure projects, NDP leader Thomas Mulcair says he is “pragmatic” on the subject. “There is room for the federal government to make better use of public-private partnerships, but we should not be ideological in either our support or opposition to them,” he told the Canadian Construction Association in June 2015. “They should be measured based on clear criteria, in full transparency, to ensure that the public is getting the best value for money. We need an approach that addresses Canada's massive infrastructure deficit with a variety of tools and policy options.”

Liberal Party

The Liberals say they would double federal investment in infrastructure, increasing overall spending from the currently-planned \$65 billion over 10 years to \$125 billion over 10 years.

The Trudeau Liberals, like their Ontario cousins in the Kathleen Wynne government, are enthusiastic about privatized infrastructure projects as well. In a speech last winter, Trudeau invited corporations to get into public infrastructure in a big way. “Justin Trudeau has made it abundantly clear that he is a big proponent of the public-private partnership model,” the *Canadian Business Journal* observed.

10. Labour rights

Conservative Party

The Harper Conservatives have promoted several pieces of legislation designed to undermine unions' ability to represent their members.

- Bill C-377, which became law in June 2015, is designed to tie unions up in bureaucratic red tape so they have fewer resources and less time to represent their members.
- Bill C-59, ostensibly a budget bill, stripped unionized workers in the federal public service of their right to bargain sick leave and gave their employer the right to override their collective agreements.
- Bill C-525, which became law last December, is designed to make it harder for federally-regulated workers, like people who work at airports, to join a union. It would also allow a minority of workers to decertify the union.

New Democratic Party

In its platform, the NDP has committed to repealing Bill C-377, Bill C-525, and "other Conservative anti-union legislation." The NDP would also:

- reintroduce the *Fair Wages and Hours of Labour Act*, a law abolished by the Conservatives that ensured fair wages for tradespeople working on federal contracts;
- reform the Temporary Foreign Worker program to end abuses and give temporary foreign workers a path to citizenship; and
- ban the use of replacement workers during strikes or lockouts in workplaces under federal jurisdiction.

Liberal Party

The Liberals say their party will:

- repeal Bill C-377 and C-525;
- "restore fair and balanced labour laws;"
- "reinstate a modernized and inclusive fair wages policy for federal procurement"; and
- "bargain in good faith with Canada's public sector unions."

11. Employment Insurance

Conservative Party

In the 2014 Budget, the Conservatives announced that they would reduce Employment Insurance premiums from \$1.88 to \$1.49 per \$100 of insured income, effective in 2017. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, this would drive the EI fund below its break-even level. This can only create pressure for further reductions in access to EI and/or EI benefits.

New Democratic Party

The NDP would freeze EI Premiums at current levels. By doing this, the NDP would have more than \$5 billion per year to increase access to EI and improve benefits to those who receive it. The NDP proposes eight separate improvements, with the two largest being improvement of the EI Sickness Benefit and the establishment of a 360-hour qualifying period.

Liberal Party

The Liberals would reduce EI premiums from \$1.88 to \$1.65 per \$100 of insured income. Reducing premiums less than planned by the Conservatives keeps the EI fund above the break-even mark and gives the Liberals more than \$2 billion a year to increase access to EI and improve benefits to those who receive it. The Liberals propose six separate improvements, with the largest being the reduction of the waiting period to one week.

12. The minimum wage

The minimum wage in Canada is set by provincial and territorial governments, but there are workers in federally-regulated jobs who would see their wages rise if the federal government were to set its own minimum wage.

Conservative Party

The Conservatives do not plan to raise the minimum wage for federally-regulated workers.

New Democratic Party

The NDP would raise the minimum wage for workers under federal jurisdiction to \$15 an hour. This would increase wages for over 100,000 workers and set an example for the provinces and territories, the NDP says.

Liberal Party

The Liberals do not plan to raise the minimum wage for federally-regulated workers.

13. Retirement

The federal government oversees three main programs that contribute to income stability for retired Canadians: the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), paid for by workers' contributions; Old Age Security (OAS), paid for out of general government revenues; and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), an income-tested benefit designed to help low-income seniors.

Conservative Party

In the 2012 federal budget, the Conservatives announced that the age of eligibility for the OAS and the GIS would gradually increase from 65 to 67, beginning in April 2023. And despite demands from ordinary Canadians, the labour movement, and some provinces, Stephen Harper has shown no interest in expanding the Canada Pension Plan. Harper views pension contributions as payroll taxes, not retirement savings. Harper has refused to cooperate with the Ontario government of Kathleen Wynne in its effort to set up its own provincial pension plan.

New Democratic Party

The NDP says it will restore the age of eligibility for the OAS and the GIS to age 65. The NDP also plans to gradually increase funding for the GIS by \$400 million a year within four years, a move the party says will “help lift 200,000 seniors out of poverty.” The NDP will work with the provinces to expand the Canada Pension Plan and the Quebec Pension Plan.

Liberal Party

In the 2015 election campaign, Liberals say they will set the age of eligibility for the OAS and the GIS back to 65. They say they will “work with the provinces and territories, workers, employers, and retiree organizations to enhance the Canada Pension Plan.”

14. National security and civil liberties

The Conservative government passed Bill C-51 earlier this year. The Bill creates the *Security of Canada Information Sharing Act* and the *Secure Air Travel Act* and amends three other laws. The Conservatives say Bill C-51 was necessary to protect Canadians from security threats; opponents of the Bill say it goes too far in limiting civil liberties for individuals.

Conservative Party

The Conservatives fully support Bill C-51.

New Democratic Party

The NDP would repeal Bill C-51.

Liberal Party

The Liberals voted in favour of Bill C-51 but say that, if elected, they would amend it to better protect individual rights and freedoms.

15. Electoral reform for a more democratic Canada

Canada’s “First Past the Post” voting system has been criticized as unfair for one simple reason: a party can receive far fewer than the majority of votes in a general election yet win far more than the majority of seats in Parliament. In this election, at least three parties (the NDP, the Liberals, and the Greens) say it’s time to take action to make voting fairer.

Conservative Party

Like all majority governments before them, the Conservatives are happy with the system the way it works right now.

New Democratic Party

The NDP says it will ensure “everyone’s vote matters” by bringing in a system of mixed-member proportional representation, i.e., a system where the percentage of seats a party gets in Parliament reflects the percentage of the popular vote it receives in elections, and where regional representation is preserved.

Liberal Party

"We will make every vote count," the Liberal Party platform says. "We are committed to ensuring that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system." The Liberals say they will convene an all-party committee to discuss options such as "ranked ballots, proportional representation, mandatory voting, and online voting." They promise to introduce "legislation to enact electoral reform" within 18 months of forming government.

16. Urban mail delivery

In December 2013, Canada Post announced that it would phase out door-to-door mail delivery in urban centres over five years.

Conservative Party

Canada Post's decision has the full support of the Conservative government.

New Democratic Party

The NDP says it will "stop the Conservative plan that unfairly impacts seniors and persons living with disabilities, and restore home delivery for the one million Canadian households where it has already been cut. The NDP will direct Canada Post to develop a new plan to restore home delivery and to generate long-term sustainable revenues to maintain services, while protecting Canadian taxpayers."

Liberal Party

The Liberals say they will "stop Stephen Harper's plan to end door-to-door mail delivery in Canada and undertake a new review of Canada Post to make sure that it provides high-quality service at a reasonable price to Canadians, no matter where they live."

Find out more

The election platforms of the three parties that hold federal seats in Ontario are far more detailed than the information in the summary. For full details, read their platforms online:

- The **Conservative Party of Canada's** platform is at <http://www.conservative.ca/media/plan/conservative-platform-en.pdf> with a separate costing document at <http://www.conservative.ca/media/plan/costing-plan.pdf>
- The **New Democratic Party of Canada's** platform is at <http://xfer.ndp.ca/2015/2015-Full-Platform-EN.pdf>, with costing included.
- The **Liberal Party of Canada's** platform is at <https://www.liberal.ca/files/2015/10/New-plan-for-a-strong-middle-class.pdf> with a separate costing document at <http://www.liberal.ca/costing-plan/>

*Authorized for distribution by Warren (Smokey) Thomas
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