



# Ontario votes: the stakes are high for health care workers



In the current Ontario election, Unifor's goal is to keep Progressive Conservative Leader Tim Hudak from becoming premier, Unifor National President Jerry Dias says. Tim Hudak's election platform and his party's agenda set out in their health care White Paper, is a threat to literally destroy our health system.

The Hudak "Paths to Prosperity" policy paper on health is in reality a "Plunge into Deep Austerity." It contains a host of policies that would fund further tax cuts and commit to another excessive restructuring exercise that will waste billions of needed health dollars. Ontario's already giving up a cumulative of \$19 billion of foregone revenue due to a tax cut agenda that started with the then Harris PC government in the 1990s. Additional tax cuts "from" Hudak's agenda could only further erode Ontario's fiscal coffers and the quality of public services.

The Hudak belief in another destructive cycle of radical restructuring in health care is our greatest threat as health care workers. The vision of de/restructuring vastly exceeds even the dreaded Health Services Restructuring Commission (HSRC) set up by Mike Harris in the last full frontal assault on the Ontario health care system. That tale of destruction closed 45 hospital sites and amalgamated another 44 hospitals. In 1990 there were 225 hospital sites - and only 150 hospitals survived the assault of the Harris-Eves regime.

The Commission ravaged the hospital sector; closing and amalgamating hospitals, resulting in tens of thousands of lay-offs and real job losses. Hospital employment in Ontario peaked in 1992 and did not return to that level until defeat of the Harris Tories in 2004. At the same time, Harris eliminated the minimum staffing standard in long-term care, resulting in a plunge in staffing levels.

What the HSRC failed to provide was any of the promised reinvestments in other parts of the health system. The Harris-Eves regime expanded the investor-owned nursing home sector with an added 20,000 beds - funded by public monies, and after being defeated, joined the boards of those same corporations when they left politics.

Let's not forget the lessons of the past. When Hudak promises to cut 100,000 public sector jobs, it is likely that many of those jobs will be in the health sector (since the health sector broadly defined represents 18% of public sector employment in Ontario). Their platform also would open the door further to private for-profit providers. They are proposing that funding goes to patients directly to create "competition

## Excerpts from "Paths to Prosperity"

"To determine how to re-engineer Ontario's health care system, it's necessary to look at the parts and determine what is working and what is not."

"The Ontario PC Caucus believes it's time for a fundamental restructuring of health care in Ontario, to create a system that puts patients first and stops wasting health dollars."

"Ontario can't afford to keep throwing money at health care."

It is not our goal to deliver more health care in hospital. That's costly and not medically necessary."

between hospitals and independent health facilities” (read ‘private clinics’).

Hudak has promised in the White Paper to leave only 30 to 40 hospitals standing in Ontario (from some 150 currently). Those that are lucky to survive will become responsible for all health services (including long-term care; home and community care which hospitals know very little about currently). That is a recipe for potential disasters. That will not create a system where patients come first anymore than Hudak can magically create 1,000,000 million jobs.

Hudak promises a return to the Harris and Rae era attack on health care workers’ compensation and right to negotiate fair and equitable terms and conditions of employment. Hudak promises in this election to impose a two-year wage freeze for all broader public sector workers. If Hudak is elected, there will be no public sector wage increases until the provincial budget is balanced. If Hudak is elected, public sector workers will move to defined contribution pension plans, instead of the defined benefit plans like HOOPP or OMERS.

Will Hudak be an effective champion for Ontario in Ottawa? Will he challenge Stephen Harper’s unilateral decision to abandon the 2004 Health Accord and the funding formula for the Canada Health Transfer (CHT). Hudak’s federal cousins are removing \$8.2 billion from health care in Ontario by 2023-24. What has he said about that?

If Hudak is elected, public services will be privatized and contracted out and unionized public sector worker wages and benefits driven downward in a relentless race to the bottom, while investors are lavished with tax cuts and bloated profits. A Hudak election will witness a radical attack on health care sector workers.

We cannot let Hudak get elected – not only for our own sake, but the sake of our children, families and communities that rely on health services. In any riding where the Tory candidate has a reasonable chance of being elected, we must work to ensure they are defeated. We must alert our co-workers, our families and our neighbours and friends of the dangers to ourselves and our province of a Hudak win.

### **Globe & Mail Editorial, May 12, 2014**

“Can Tim Hudak win election by 100,000 job cuts?”

“Mr Hudak would be looking to cut almost one in six jobs, or more than 15 per cent of this [public sector] workforce. And he says he’ll do it in just two years.”

“In other words, unless Mr. Hudak has a plan up his sleeve to dramatically reduce or privatize other, smaller parts of the public sector, the bulk of the 100,000 jobs cut will have to fall in education, health and social services.”

“Mr. Hudak is talking about cutting more than twice as many jobs as Mr. Harris... But a promise to eliminate 100,000 public sector jobs in two years? It’s radical and rash.”

**Voting is one of the most important tools we have to build a prosperous Ontario.  
On June 12, get out and vote for good jobs and strong communities!**



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