

Voters face tough choices

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I know. I know. Who to vote for? Whether to vote at all? It's discouraging when you're left to search for the lesser of evils. All of the options are flawed.

This time the thirst for change is palpable. So far the polls say that urge is benefiting Andrea Horwath of the NDP and Doug Ford and his Progressive Conservative Party. At the time of writing the NDP and PCs were jockeying for the lead.

The Liberals are trailing and seem destined for near oblivion. This despite the fact the economy is booming. We're experiencing record low unemployment, sharply rising wages and high foreign investment. Premier Wynne's activism has been groundbreaking: pension reform, child care, early learning, cooling overheated housing, reducing hydro rates, social justice reforms, action against sexual harassment and free pharmacare for young people.

However, much of the support for Horwath and Ford is prompted by a deep dislike of Liberal leader Kathleen Wynne for reasons that are hard to fathom. Studies show Donald Trump received nearly one quarter of his support from people who were voting against Hillary Clinton, rather than for him.

The NDP are offering a left-leaning platform that provides more funding for education, healthcare and a host of other social safety net programs. They have costed their promises and expect to run deficits for several years. It's a tax and spend platform that could put Ontario into an even more unsustainable financial position.

For those considering a vote for the Conservatives, the Ontario you can expect under a Doug Ford government may be even more untenable.

The sex education curriculum had not been revised for 15 years. During that time access to cyber porn and adult content in mainstream media exploded making it doubly important to teach kids



THE CANADIAN PRESS

Ontario Liberal Leader Kathleen Wynne, left to right, Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader Doug Ford and Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath listen to a question from an audience member as they participate during the third and final televised debate of the provincial election campaign in Toronto Sunday.

about puberty before it happens.

There was extensive consultation with parents, educators, experts and children. Resistance came from some parents who felt the curriculum was too explicit and others who thought sex education should be left to them.

Ford says he will scrap the revised version, go back to the 1998 version and consult further with parents. So back to the past for sex education.

The deficit has been climbing under the Liberals. Ford promises to run a deficit in his first year and then provide a timetable to a balanced budget. Sound goods, but the devil is in the details.

Ford said before the campaign he'd pay for this by cutting \$6 billion (4.5 per cent) from the provincial budget without laying off any public servants. He's yet to detail any of the major "efficien-

cies" he has in mind. Tax cuts for the middle class are apparently part of this calculation. Non-partisan economists estimate government job losses of up to 75,000 for these promises alone.

Since then he's also made more expensive promises including: tax cuts for large corporations (\$1.3 billion), tax cuts for workers instead of a \$15 minimum wage (\$500 million), and eliminating the carbon tax revenue (\$4.4 billion). Efficiencies to fund these promise will have to come from cuts to education, healthcare and social services which make up 75 per cent of the budget.

Our hydro bills have already been lowered by 25 per cent since last year. Ford would lower them another seven per cent without saying how he'll pay for this further move.

He says he'll end "hallway med-

icine" but fails to tell us how. He's committed to more long-term care beds, but stretched out over 10 years. There is also a pledge to spend \$1.9 billion on mental health, but again over 10 years.

Addiction experts all say neighbourhood safe injection sites are effective. Ford doesn't like them in his neighbourhood or any other. So don't expect this addiction epidemic tool to be used if Ford wins.

Up until this election all four parties have supported the abortion rights that women enjoy in this province. However, Ford will allow his caucus members to bring forward legislation that could restrict these rights. It's a retrograde way of appealing to the social conservatives in his party.

Last year, Ontario's cap-and-trade carbon pricing scheme brought in over \$2.4 billion from

high GHG emitters buying permits at auctions. This money is being invested in new technologies and eco-jobs that reduce GHG emissions and help the economy.

Ford will drop the program and fight the federal government's legislation requiring all provinces to have some form of carbon pricing. If the PC's win expect a small drop in fossil fuel product prices, a prolonged fight with Ottawa and little progress on taming climate change.

On education Ford has mused about "scrapping discovery math and replacing it with proven methods..." He wants the Higher Education Quality Council to be able to investigate violations of free speech. But there's no comprehensive education platform.

Ford has previously said he'd consider privatizing the sale and distribution of marijuana. It's hard to know what to expect from him on sensitive issues like this. He has never refuted the Globe and Mail's claim that he dealt hash to low level dealers in his youth. So this may be a rare area where Ford has some relevant policy expertise.

On immigration Ford said, "The province should be taking care of our own first" before encouraging new immigrants to settle in Northern Ontario. He later back tracked saying

"The Ford Nation is the most diverse group in Canada." Immigration is yet another Ford policy black hole.

Ford says "relief is coming" for the abused taxpayer. He proposes cuts in taxes, hydro and gas prices. But he's run his whole campaign without telling the taxpayer how he's going to fund these promises. This doesn't auger well for a Ford government.

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