



**NEWS RELEASE
COMMUNIQUÉ**

Notes for remarks by

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Premier of Ontario
Leader of the PC Party of Ontario

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you, and good afternoon.

It's a great pleasure to return to the Canadian Club ... to sit with such distinguished head table guests ... and speak to so many people who each want the best for the province of Ontario -- and for Canada.

I want to salute two of those people if I might: Durhane Wong-Rieger, who has fought so hard on behalf of Hepatitis C victims in this country. You are an inspiration to us all.

And Fraser Mustard, who recently completed a ground-breaking study for our government and for all Ontario parents on how best we can prepare our kids for life.

I understand I am third of the trio of provincial leaders to speak to you. Howard Hampton and Dalton McGuinty have both been here recently ... I like to think you've been saving the best for last.

Because last week we released our team's plan. The plan for keeping Ontario prosperous and strong. A balanced plan.

That plan is called *Blueprint*. And it's our plan to keep Ontario on the right track.. It continues to build on the gains we've made together over the last four years. And, ladies and gentlemen, there have been many.

Let's look at where we were four years ago.

Things we take for granted today -- things like more jobs, confidence in the future, and a sense that Ontario was moving in the right direction -- were all in very short supply in this province.

Successive governments' inability or unwillingness to deal with years of irresponsible spending and tax hikes -- had created a province that was drowning in a sea of deficits and despair.

Confidence in our economy and our system of government and in our political leaders was at an all-time low. Saying that Ontario had some problems with its economy was like saying the Titanic had a little problem with ice.

So in 1994, our team proposed a clear plan based on common sense.

In 1995, the people of this province voted for that plan -- a plan to put Ontario back on the right track.

That plan is working.

Ontario's economy is the strongest in Canada, with job creation at record levels.

Just today, we learned that real GDP rose by 2.1 percent in the fourth quarter of 1998 — the strongest quarterly gain in three years. And for 1998 as a whole, real GDP grew by 4.2 percent — far higher than the 3.5 percent projected in last year's budget.

The \$11.3 billion deficit that we inherited has been dramatically reduced. We are on course to eliminate the deficit by the year 2000/2001, just as we said we would do.

Almost 400,000 have been freed from the welfare dependency trap. That's 400,000 people who have looked away from the dependency and despair, and towards hope, opportunity, and a job.

And people *are* confident again. People like the woman who stopped me recently to tell me her story. To tell me about how she broke the cycle of welfare dependency, found a job and has her life back on track.

Today, one day before our budget, Finance Minister Ernie Eves and I are going out to buy some new tires ... tires to help us keep our province's economy rolling.

It's been an amazing transformation. It didn't happen by accident. We made tough but necessary choices to achieve our goals. And as heartened as we are by the success of the last four years, we cannot take it for granted that it will continue.

We live in a highly complex and competitive world. A world where the road to more jobs, more growth, more opportunity is all uphill. And if the road we're travelling is uphill, Ontario cannot coast. We either keep moving forward ... or risk sliding back.

Any slide backwards will threaten our ability to support the programs that matter to Ontarians -- Health care we can rely on ... quality education for our kids ... safe communities ... and a clean environment.

Ontario's success in moving forward in the face of challenges from other areas will depend on the two things: a realistic, detailed plan for achieving our goals; and a strong, focused and experienced leadership to make it work.

Our *Blueprint* offers a clear vision of the Ontario that we will build together ... and a clear roadmap of how we'll get there. It will keep our economy competitive and growing. It will give us the resources we need to protect our quality of life and offer every family the chance to prosper right here at home.

The foundation of the plan is a strong and growing economy. With economic growth, more people are working, providing for themselves and their families. As we have proven in the past four years, economic growth — and new jobs — begin with tax cuts.

More than anything else, tax cuts allowed Ontario to turn the corner. The debate is over. Tax cuts create jobs.

We've led the way in Canada, with 69 tax cuts over the past four years – including a 30 per cent cut in personal income tax rates. It's been the biggest tax cut in Ontario history and the first real increase in take-home pay for the average Ontario worker in a decade.

The result? 540,000 jobs created in Ontario in only four years ...more new jobs than the combined populations of London, Kingston and Sudbury.

It makes sense. Common sense. The more money we leave in people's pockets the more they will spend, save or invest. The more people spend, the more goods and services businesses sell. The more business expands, the more people they hire. The more those people spend, the stronger the economy becomes.

But there is still much more to be done.

We need to put even more money back in the pockets of hardworking Ontarians and stimulate even more job creation. That is why – in our next term of office – we will cut the provincial income tax rate by another 20 percent. That's even more money back in your pocket.

Our 20 percent tax cut will leave Ontario with the lowest provincial income tax rate in Canada. It will return four billion dollars to the taxpayers of Ontario. It will fuel the creation of 825,000 more new jobs over five years.

But we're not going to stop there.

We'll also cut the provincial portion of residential property taxes by 20 percent. This will provide tax relief to every homeowner and renter in Ontario by putting another five hundred million dollars back in the hands of individuals and families.

These job-creating tax cuts will complement our already announced half-billion dollar reduction in commercial and industrial property taxes. And we'll continue our reduction of the small business tax – to the lowest in the country.

We have a *Blueprint* for a strong economy and a bright future. And a strong economy means more money to pay for the priority services that matter most -- like health ... and education ... and community safety.

Making sure every person in Ontario can rely on top quality health care is our most urgent concern.

To make sure it happens, we've done what had to be done to modernize our system to meet the needs of our aging population. It wasn't easy. It involved some tough, political decisions. But they were necessary decisions and the result will be a better health care system for your family.

We know the job of creating a modern health care system isn't done.

That's why we will further increase funding by a guaranteed 20 percent over the next five years. That's on top of the \$1.5 billion more we've already invested, sending health care spending to its highest level in Ontario history.

We'll also introduce a Patient's Bill of Rights. The Bill will include the rights to guaranteed access to health services, including emergency room assessment within fifteen minutes of arrival.

Commitments like these take resources. With a strong and growing economy, we'll have the means to meet tomorrow's health care needs. Just as we'll have the means to make families better off and create opportunities for our young people.

These values are important. They mean a lot to Ontarians. And because we have a strong economy we are able to support these values even more.

For instance, we've all been in situations when a sudden family crisis – whether a sick child or an ill parent -- makes it impossible to go to work. That's why we're introducing a new family crisis leave.

Employees of companies with 50 or more workers will be able to take up to ten unpaid days a year for family and medical reasons. We think families deserve our support in helping each other through these emergencies.

We also know that every year there are hard working students who earn top marks – and who *also* deserve special recognition and support.

That's why we're introducing "Aiming for the Top" tuition scholarships. When fully on-stream, these scholarships will help out the top 10,000 students in Ontario who need financial assistance.

We will challenge the private sector to participate in these scholarships, bringing that number to 20,000.

Every student should have the opportunity to succeed in the real world. And to do that, we must build a strong, fully-funded public education system.

We have made it clear that we believe the classroom should be the focus of our precious education dollars. That is why an important part of *Blueprint* is a guarantee that classroom funding will continue to increase to match rising enrolment.

But more money will mean little without commitments to excellence, respect, and responsibility within the system. That's why we have introduced a comprehensive and far-reaching Charter of Education Rights and Responsibilities.

It clearly spells out what students, teachers and parents need to do in order to produce excellence in education.

Our children don't have an easy time of it today. The pressures, the challenges, the environment in which they are growing up is unlike any other in history. We owe it to our young people to give them an education second to none.

We owe them a setting where they are not expected to deal with the distractions that come when respect and responsibility are neither asked for nor expected.

From teaching respect and responsibility... To giving teachers the right to maintain order in their classrooms... To recognizing every parent's right to know how their children and schools are performing in relation to others ...

We have spelled out, in writing, exactly how we will better link our schools to the real world -- the jobs, ideas, and challenges that we face every single day.

Now, you may recall there was some resistance to our education reforms. There was some resistance to a new professional body for teachers, resistance to our standardized curriculum, to mandatory testing of our students and our schools.

But today parents are telling us, they like these new higher standards. They like the new report cards. They like knowing where their children stand and how well their school is doing.

I believe in quality education for our children. In the best for our schools ... our curriculum ... for our kids and for our teachers.

To support the best in schools – and in our health care system – we need to start to build again.

Our *Blueprint* has a plan to support and enhance the infrastructure required to move goods, services and ideas safely and efficiently across the city or around the world.

For most of our history, we had leaders prepared to build for the future – Drew and Frost, Robarts and Davis. They built highways, transit, health care facilities and colleges and universities.

But between 1985 and 1995, two successive governments failed to invest in our infrastructure. I don't have to tell you what this means. You see it every day.

Much of our highway system is overcrowded ... many of our schools, colleges and universities are aging and outdated ... and we're falling behind our competitors in building the infrastructure we need to attract and create jobs.

Ontario needs a long range view ... a balanced approach between meeting today's needs and building for tomorrow... That's why we'll co-ordinate of all capital spending under one program -- with a strong focus to keep our economy at the top with a solid infrastructure.

The SuperBuild Growth Fund will be the biggest, most effective building program in Ontario history.

It will build and renew our roads, transit systems, colleges, schools, health care facilities, and technology links. It will bring our infrastructure to the standards that the next century will demand.

We will provide a minimum of \$20 billion for development over the next five years.

Once again, it's a strong economy that gives us the means to make this kind of investment.

Taken together, these are the key elements that will give Ontario the strength it needs to compete and succeed in a tremendously competitive world economy.

Twenty percent income tax cuts. Twenty percent property tax cut. Twenty percent increase in healthcare spending and a \$20 billion investment in our infrastructure.

Our *Blueprint* is a bold but fully costed and realistic plan for reaching our potential ... and our team offers the proven, experienced leadership to make it work. I invite you to read it, consider the options within it, discuss it with your friends and family, and compare it with those of the other parties.

Just as the *Common Sense Revolution* that we released five years ago was — five years ago tomorrow, in fact — our *Blueprint* is a complete and comprehensive plan.

It provides a full explanation of what we'll do and how our numbers add up. It lets people see the full picture of what we're promising and fully costs those commitments.

Quite frankly, the citizens of this province are entitled to that kind of disclosure from all three leaders. I have done that; Howard Hampton has done that; and on behalf of all taxpayers, the Liberal leader should do so as well.

It was two weeks ago today, he released an assortment of wishes and promises without indicating how he will pay for them. I call on him to make it public now. People deserve no less than a complete explanation of what a leader's promises will cost. And how they be paid for.

You know, it's been almost four years that I've had the privilege of sitting in the Premier's chair. And if I've learned anything, it's that if you if you don't know where you're going, you'll never get there.

If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything.

Because if you don't believe in what you're doing, there's no reason that anyone else should either.

These lessons really just reinforced what I learned from my mother and father, growing up and working in North Bay.

I have been intensely proud to be Premier of this province. I want us to continue to work together. To continue to build an Ontario that is full of opportunity and hope and confidence.

Together we have put Ontario on the right track. We are once again leading this great country of Canada.

Our *Blueprint* will keep up the momentum, continue to boost confidence, and get us closer to a brighter future for every Ontario family.

Thank you.