

## The Empire Club Presents



**THE HONOURABLE  
ANDREA HORWATH,  
LEADER OF ONTARIO'S  
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY**

***WITH: WHAT'S NEXT FOR ONTARIO?***

**Welcome Address, by Paul Fogolin, Vice President of the  
Ontario Retirement Communities Association and President  
of the Empire Club of Canada**

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November 22, 2017

Good afternoon. Welcome back, ladies and gentlemen. From the Royal York Hotel in downtown Toronto, welcome, once again, to the Empire Club of Canada. For those of you who are just joining us through either our webcast or our podcast, welcome, to the lunch. It is now my pleasure to introduce our Head Table Guests. I would ask that each of you rise when your name is called.

If you could hold your applause to the end, that would be great, but if you feel compelled to clap, go ahead. We support that as well.

## HEAD TABLE

### Distinguished Guest Speaker:

The Honourable Andrea Horwath, Leader of Ontario's New Democrat Party

### Guests:

Ms. Megan Boyle, Director, Public Affairs, Red Bull Canada; Director, Empire Club of Canada

Mr. Kent Emerson, Associate Vice President, Municipal and Stakeholder Relations, Municipal Property Assessment Corporation; First Vice President, Empire Club of Canada

Ms. Taylor McKenna, Advisor, Government Relations, Bruce Power

Mr. James Scongack, Vice President, Corporate Affairs and Environment, Bruce Power

Mr. Robin Sears, Principal, Earnscliffe Strategy Group; Past President, Empire Club of Canada

Ms. Marit Stiles, President, Federal New Democratic Party; Trustee, Ward 9 Davenport), Toronto District School Board

Mr. Matthew Thornton, Vice President, Public Affairs & Communications, Ontario Real Estate Association

Once again, my name is Paul Fogolin. I am the Vice President of Government & Industry Relations for the Federation of Rental-Housing Providers of Ontario—another mouthful—and a Past President of the Empire Club of Canada. Ladies and gentlemen, your Head Table.

If I have done my math right, there are 197 days until the next provincial election. Do not go on your phones and check. It is abundantly clear, however, to anybody who is paying attention, that election season is upon us. Political ads have hit the airwaves; our social media feeds are inundated with ads a well; town halls are fashionable once again; and all three political party leaders have hit the hustings, eager to

convince Ontarians that their plan is the right plan.

I would like to quote the Dalai Lama, a very wise man who also happens to wear lots of orange—nice coincidence. He once said, “In order to carry a positive action, we must develop a positive vision.”

It is a great privilege to have Andrea Horwath, the Leader of Ontario's New Democrats, here with us today to share her vision of what is next for Ontario. She will start with a speech from this podium, followed by a fireside chat—just picture a fire over here—with our good friend Robin Sears.

Andrea, since early in her career in community development to today, has always believed that government should be about giving people the opportunity to build a good life no matter where they live in Ontario or when they made this province their home.

Born and raised in Hamilton, Andrea was elected to Hamilton City Council in 1997, and then as MPP for Hamilton Centre in 2004.

Ladies and gentlemen, please, give a very, very warm welcome to Andrea Horwath.

## **The Honourable Andrea Horwath**

Good afternoon, everyone. Bonjour tout le monde. Thank you very much for the introduction. I appreciate that.

Nineteen-ninety-seven was my first election. That is 20 years in politics, for me, this year. I am thrilled to be here with you to celebrate that 20 years. I think last week was the official anniversary of my first election.

Before I get into my formal remarks, I do want to acknowledge that we are meeting, today, on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, and I want to take a moment to thank all of you for being here this afternoon.

The Empire Club has an incredible history. For 114 years, this institution has been at the forefront of debate on the most important issues facing our country and facing our province. Today, as Ontario's NDP Leader and as the woman who wants to lead our entire province forward, I am honoured to be able to talk about our future and where Ontario goes from here.

We live in an incredible place. The city we are in today is one of the envies of the world. Would you not all agree? One of the envies of the world, Toronto.

Of course, this city is on the verge of becoming one of the great metropolises of the globe. People around the world actually want to live here. Young people want to move here. Families want to do everything they can to give their children every opportunity to succeed and thrive right here in Ontario.

I have got to tell you, I love this province.

That is what drives me each and every day, because I believe we can build an even better future for everyone who calls

this province home. I think we can do more to support our families, our communities and our young people. We can grow our prosperity and ensure that everyone shares in the benefits of that prosperity. To do that, we need to recognize that our economy is changing fast. This economic shift presents both opportunities, but also challenges for Ontario and for our next government.

Today, too many businesses face barriers to investing here, barriers to investing and barriers to creating jobs. For millions of employees, work is just not what it used to be. A security that used to come with full-time work simply is not there anymore for far too many people in Ontario. In the face of these challenges, the question that millions of people in this province are asking, today, is What comes next for Ontario? What comes next for our great province? What kind of leadership do we need to move this entire province forward and make sure that Ontarians see tangible benefits as our economy shifts instead of being left behind?

I believe that the next government, one that I am running to lead, must be guided by three priorities when it comes to our future and our economy. These are priorities that I want to share with you today, because true leadership, in my humble opinion, true leadership is all about telling people what you are going to do and then actually doing it.

The first priority, for me, is this. We must ensure continued economic growth here in Ontario.

I would think most people in this room would agree with that. We must continue to see economic growth for our

province. Instead of cutting services, cutting investment and cutting jobs, as some would suggest, we must invest to grow our economy and build on what is already working. We must make critical infrastructure improvements and investments from broadband to transit. We have to build infrastructure that our growing province needs, like delivering express rail, for example, from Toronto to Kitchener-Waterloo.

The lack of fast transit options, the lack of a speedy way to get back and forth between our Innovation Corridor in the Kitchener-Waterloo area is standing in the way of investment and growth. I hear it every time I am in Kitchener-Waterloo. The concern continues to grow that we have not gotten to that point yet where we can connect that corridor with this great city. Let us do something about it. Let us actually do something about it. Let us get that job done.

As we invest in infrastructure, we must also provide investment in sustainable development, in sustainable infrastructure investments that support regional industries and that support the innovation clusters that we have sprinkled around our province. We need not only to welcome investment—we need to certainly do that—but we do not only need to welcome investment, we need to invite it. We need to pursue it. We need to aggressively make the case for Ontario, which I believe is one of the best places in the world to invest. From auto, manufacturing, film and television sector, to research and development, to agriculture and agribusiness.

*[Remarks in French] Notre croire en soi économiques est très important.*

To secure our future growth, we must also take a hard look at what is not working in Ontario, and we have to be up front about that. What is not working in our province? As we identify what is not working in our province, then we have to commit to doing something about it. That brings me to my second point. I believe that the success of middle-class families is the most important measure of our prosperity. More than ever, people need to have a premier who is actually working for them.

I think of the mothers that I have met in this city, in particular, who have taken the time to take me aside and open up to me about what they are going through, tell me their stories, their challenges, what everyday life looks like for them. Many of those moms are working two and three jobs just to get by. They are working two and three jobs just to put food on the table for their kids. There are so many people in this province who are in exactly that same situation, working long hours, but finding it harder and harder just to make ends meet. Just take a minute and think about folks who are in that situation.

When politicians like me and others talk about the rate of GDP growth for our province, it means nothing at all to people who are struggling to get by. It means nothing to folks who feel they are doing everything they possibly can. They think that they are doing everything right, and yet, they still cannot get ahead. People start thinking that government and the economy just cannot work for them.

They feel let down. People start to feel like things just cannot get any better, and they lose hope.

When I hear that sense of disappointment in people's voices, I look them in the eye, and I assure them that it does not have to be this way. It does not have to be this way in our great province. It absolutely does not. We can have leadership that gives people hope again.

We can give people the tools to build a better life for themselves with better jobs, better wages and more benefits. I am passionate about this. I passionately believe that this is the case, that we can do so much better in this great province. As we grow our economy, government must deliver results that have measurable, positive impacts on people. As we grow our economy, government needs to ensure that our economic progress helps fuel reinvestment in Ontario's people and families.

That is why I have laid out my plans to partner with cities, cities like this one that we are in, cities like Toronto, to provide crucial provincial leadership that has been lacking for far too long. We have to support moms and dads by investing in affordable childcare. We have to help families find housing that they can afford by investing in things like social housing and by doing more to help people realize their dream of home ownership. We must deliver a world-class transit system by restoring provincial operating funding to the TTC and public transit systems across Ontario—funding that, you may know, was cut by the Conservative government many years ago and was never reinstated by the Liberal government. That extra funding for transit systems will do a heck of a lot to improve our transit systems in this great city, as I said, and around the

province, and it will also help municipalities to provide better services for the people who use transit.

You will also remember that the Conservatives also decided way back then in the '90s that they were going to cover in a hole that was being built, a tunnel that was being built for the Eglinton subway. We know where Conservatives are when it comes to transit investments. They are not very supportive. We certainly cannot go back to that next time around because those kinds of cuts are extremely irresponsible. They take the wind out of our sails as a city and as a province. They hurt the very people who live in this city who need to see that the premier of this province is working for them.

This is why my plan is focused on solving real problems and making things better for people and for businesses that are the backbone of our economy. It is why New Democrats have a plan to lower hydro bills by 30% for families and businesses. It is why I believe that the province's business support programs should do a much better job of supporting small businesses to create good jobs. It is why we have to fix our procurement processes and policies, so that Ontario's homegrown businesses can actually qualify to bid for, and actually win, some of the contracts that come from the Government of Ontario.

I want Ontario's homegrown success stories to thrive. That means taking down the barriers that prevent a level playing field. Ontario's families and businesses must see and feel the benefits of our economic growth. I do not think that is too much to ask for. That is my focus.

As we continue to grow our economy, and as we ensure that the people see the benefits of growth in their own lives, we must do more to prepare Ontario for the future of work.

This is the third crucial priority that guides my thinking on the economy. I think you would all agree that the pace of change that we are seeing is only accelerating. People no longer spend their entire careers with one company. Many workers are very, very mobile, much more mobile, much more flexible, but they are also working without the security and stability that people need to build a good life for themselves and for their families. Traditional industries are being disrupted faster than ever as new industries emerge and exert huge influence on the future of our economy.

Our next premier cannot let these opportunities or challenges go unanswered. As new jobs demand new skills, we have to get our labour market policies right, starting with more support for work integrated learning. I want to see a future where every young person is able to graduate from college or university with experience under their belt, experience under their belt in their chosen field. I hear from too many young people who finished their studies, and they are out into the workforce only to be turned back by potential employers who say, “You have a great academic history, but you have no experience; come back when you have some experience.” Very disheartening for young people. I want to see a future where those young people actually get their foot in the door of an employer upon graduation, and I want to see a future where every single employer can find new grads with the experience

they need to contribute to their teams from day one.

A government that I lead will do more to support opportunities that people need to fully participate in our changing workforce. That work can only be done in partnership with you, the businesses, the labour organizations, educational institutions and professional associations of Ontario every step of the way. As we prepare the new workforce, we must also meet the new needs of that workforce. With more and more people working without health benefits, as they hopscotch back and forth to different employment opportunities, and employers, on the other hand, continuing to see the costs of drug benefits increasing, the evidence, I think, is very clear. It is time for government to step up and deliver universal prescription drug coverage, not just for young people, but for all Ontarians. It is necessary now.

I have to say, I am really proud of my party for being the only party that has a plan to do exactly that. Pharmacare for everyone means lower costs. It means lower costs for businesses. It means lower costs for direct payers. It means less worry for people, and it means better health for our population and our workforce. With our plan for universal prescription drug coverage, not only will every Ontarian have access to the medications that they need, but we will also help Ontario’s businesses save at least \$800 million per year in employee drug costs.

Pharmacare for everyone is a win-win for families and for our economy. It will help the bottom line for businesses, and it will help the people of this province. It is absolutely a ne-

cessity for our changing economy. That is exactly the kind of positive change that we need to see here in Ontario. That is why it is at the heart of my plan to grow our economy and to make sure that Ontarians see the benefits of that economic growth.

What comes next for Ontario? As I said, this is the crucial question that millions and millions of Ontarians are going to be asking themselves. I believe the choice is becoming increasingly clear. A better future is possible in this province if we have the right leadership with the right priorities. That is why we must continue to grow our province and build on the successes that we have been able to achieve thus far. We must also ensure that middle class families see more of the benefits in their own lives, and we must make smart steps to prepare for the changing workforce, so that Ontarians can thrive instead of being left behind.

This is the vision of hope and opportunity that I will be offering to the people of Ontario over the coming months. These are the economic priorities that guide my decisions and the decisions of my team. This afternoon, I have to say that I am thrilled to share all of that with you. I know that the formal part of the remarks are done, but we do have a great opportunity to have a little bit more of a dialogue, which I look forward to, so I am going to get right into that discussion by inviting Robin Sears up to the stage with me.

Thank you for your kind attention during my prepared remarks. *Merci beaucoup*. Thank you very much.

## **The Honourable Andrea Horwath with Mr. Robin Sears**

RS: Andrea, you mentioned at the beginning that this is your 20th anniversary in politics, but to my mind, an even more impressive anniversary is that, I think in March, you will be celebrating a 9th anniversary as party leader.

AH: True.

RS: There are probably people in this room that do not know what an unpleasant job being an opposition party leader is.

AH: Being the third party, never mind.

RS: I used to say when I was in harness, “I get to stay in every crummy motel from one end of the province to the other.” How do you do it? What drives you? What keeps you going?

AH: What really drives me is the energy that I get from people. I have had the honour and the privilege of doing this for nine years, as you said—almost. But to every part of Ontario that I go, Robin, I meet people that are amazing. Whether that is a young immigrant family trying to make it in Ontario, whether that is Syrian refugees who are trying to stabilize their families and begin to build a life here, whether that is someone here on Bay St.—a mogul in terms of the business community—or whether that is a steelworker in Hamilton, people in this province are wonderful. They are amazing people.

I really do draw my energy from them, from their hopes, from their dreams, from their concerns, from

their ideas. After all of these years, I am still not tired. Believe it or not, I am still not tired of meeting all the great people of this province and trying to find, with them, the solutions that will make life better for them.

RS: I think another thing a lot of people may not know about you is that behind that winning smile and charming personality is a stainless-steel spine. Andrea got to every level of her career over the resistance of older white guys, mostly, I say with some blush. She won every rung up the ladder on her own initiative. If you believe that leadership is about character, I think you have demonstrated character.

AH: My dad used to say I have the constitution of a horse. I do not know if that was a compliment. He used to say that to me.

RS: How do you deal with the tensions of the job and the tensions in a caucus and the attacks from all the usual suspects? What keeps you going through that?

AH: There are a couple of things. I try to get to the gym in the morning just to reduce the stress. That is important because it is both mental and physical. I have a son who is in my basement, still. It is a whole other story. I am not going there.

RS: That is probably part of the training.

AH: Yes, that is my key on the training part. We have a great little dog. Dogs are always good. Nobody does this kind of job alone. Nobody does this kind of work alone. I was talking about the strangers that I meet over the

years and that I have been able to connect with. I also have a great team of staff and of MPPs that are very supportive. Yes, there are sometimes tussles in our caucus, and sometimes our MPPs are not as disciplined as you might want them to be, but they work really hard. We have a vision for the future of this province that we all very much believe in and that, although sometimes is very wearing to try to do the work necessary to realize that vision, having that vision and knowing that there are teams of people that are on your side and working towards the same vision, including the great people at the NDP in terms of the party folks as well and the membership that we have across the province, helps with the stamina. It helps you with your stamina, for sure.

RS: Let us talk about a couple of policy things just briefly. I do not think I have ever seen a Government of Ontario leave office bragging about its success with Ontario Hydro or power. To put it politely, that is not usually one of the bragging rights that governments go out of power with, which says two things, I guess. It is very hard to get right, because everybody has had challenges, and also that it is really hard to make change successfully. How would you fix the problems that you have inherited to reduce the cost of power?

AH: First and foremost, I think it is of a concern to us that the current government went ahead against the wishes of 80% of Ontarians and sold off Hydro One. Folks did not want to see that happen. At the same time as the pri-



vativation has occurred, we have, again, continued to see rates increasing. We just had the government put together a \$40 billion plan to give temporary relief to people on their bills, which was not very wise, financially.

Then, of course, we see a long-term energy plan that just was recently made public that shows that, in fact, bills are going to go up pretty soon. In a very worrisome piece of that plan, it shows that industry, industrial rates, particularly, are going to go up between 40% and 50% within the next ten years. I do not think people can afford that. I do not think business can afford that. I do not think industry can afford that. People's bills are going to be going up about 43% within a short period of time as well. That is not a responsible way to manage the system.

We have been very bold. Folks in this room might know that we have been pretty bold in our plans when it comes to Hydro One. We believe that Hydro One should be operating in the best interest of Ontarians, not the best interest of shareholders. Our pet plan to bring hydro rates down by 30% includes bringing Hydro One back into public ownership, which we would do over a period of time, utilizing the dividends, the ones that are still accruing to the province as opposed to the shareholders. That will take us some time, for sure, but we will bring it back into public ownership.

We have also looked at the system to try to figure out the other ways that we can provide some relief.

Some of those include eliminating the time of use, mandatory time of use pricing, ensuring that the delivery charges, the delivery rates are equitable across the province. We know that rural and remote communities and smaller communities really take the hit on delivery charges, so we are going to equalize those.

We also know there is a lot of excess power in our system, and we know that the government is not getting top dollar for that excess power. There are two pieces there. There is one piece around making sure that as contracts come due for renegotiation and renewal—and we know that there are many that are coming for renewal within the first couple of years after the election that is coming next year—we will look carefully at whether we need that power. Do we need to re-sign some of these contracts?

The other piece is finding a more efficient way, a more effective way, really, of getting our power to market. Other jurisdictions have put in place different tools to market the energy to their customers over longer term contracts giving them a better price. We are going to look at some of those things as well. In fact, our plan is online. It is available for people to look at. We spent almost a year trying to put it together and figure out with experts what opportunities we had. Those are the big pieces. I am sure there are others as well. We are still going to try to get the federal government to come to the table on the federal portion of the HST.

RS: Let us talk about another area where federal-provincial cooperation is traditionally essential. How can you do a pharmacare plan in one province, if Ottawa does not step up to assist with a national formulary, national pricing structure? How do you make it feasible for even a province as big as Ontario to go it alone?

AH: Again, we have had the advice from the top national expert in the pharmacare realm. He has helped us with our plan. In fact, we believe that we can. It is the same way that Tommy Douglas brought Medicare to Canada, which was through an initial province. He did that work, and then it was spread across the country. When we look at Ontario, there are almost 14 million people. That is a huge population to bring online for Medicare. What our plan would do is provide, initially, just initially, the most commonly prescribed drugs for the most common ailments as the first initial process. That will do a number of things. It will create a lot of space in terms of companies, particularly, businesses and even government that are already covering those drugs through drug benefit plans, and so that will either create savings and/or more room in those plans to provide other kinds of benefits—\$800 million. The plan, itself, \$475 million, which is a one-third of 1% of Ontario's budget, one-third of 1%, \$475 million. Financially, it is doable.

RS: It is feasible.

AH: Absolutely feasible. Hopefully, what we will end up

with is the pressure coming from other provinces, then, to the federal government to expand the plan. There is no way that here, in this day and age, particularly, as I said in my remarks, when you see how rapidly our economy is changing, when you hear terms that have been coined, now it is the gig economy. There are lots of people who do not have full-time jobs, who are cobbling together all kinds of different contracts. Some of those are in our college system. That is a whole other story we are not going to talk about. The reality is that it is time to actually look at how we create an environment where that kind of work is sustainable for families. This pharmacare plan is part of that. The savings are going to be amazing, but it is also going to take a lot of stress off of families and a lot of pressure off of families. It is going to take stress and pressure off of our healthcare system as well and off of our hospital system. There is no way, in this day and age, that people should be going to the doctor with an illness, be written a prescription and then walk out of that doctor's office knowing full well that they are not going to be able to fill that prescription. It should not be happening.

The last piece is that when you think about 14 million people, that is a huge number. That number, alone, is going to help us when it comes to negotiating drug prices as well. That is another savings that we will get.

As I said in the remarks, it is a win-win situation all the way around. That is W-I-N by the way. We are

looking forward to the opportunity to be able to bring that to Ontarians. As time goes on, the number of drugs covered will change. It will grow.

RS: Finally, let me frame the 197 days ahead of you.

AH: Thanks for that reminder.

RS: You are the veteran. You are the most seasoned performer on the circuit going out this time. You are the one who has seen more of the challenges of being a leader in an election campaign than either of your competitors. What do you want voters to see, or, as spin doctors would say, what is the ballot question, for you?

AH: I do not even know that we have a ballot question, yet. I think that ballot question comes a little bit—

RS: What would you like it to be? What do you want people to judge?

AH: I am hoping that what people are looking at this time around is what is next for Ontario, that they are taking a real hard look at what is next for Ontario. We are hearing a lot of disappointment. Everywhere I go now, I hear a lot of disappointment in the current government. It has been 14 years. People are pretty disappointed on a number of different levels for a number of different reasons. In some places, that disappointment can more accurately be described as anger, frustration, but it is pretty much everywhere now. It used to be—and James and I were just talking about this a little earlier—that when I traveled to Northern Ontario or Southwestern Ontario, you would get that sense of we are done with

the Liberals. We are hearing that now pretty much consistently everywhere. It is not just about that. It is not just about getting rid of the current government. It is about what is next? What comes next for this province, and how do we continue to move the province forward? How do we make sure that some of the good things that have happened are continuing on so that we continue to get the benefits of some of the positive changes we have seen, while we then use that as a platform to move the province forward? That is why we are bringing forward ideas around pharmacare, around hospitals, around work-integrated learning and flexible workplaces. These are things that we think are important for the future of the province.

RS: I think you have outlaid a great vision. Now, I think it is the audiences turn to ask some questions.

## Questions & Answers

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**Q: Always a pleasure, Andrea, to hear your vision for the province. I am Harvey Cooper with the Co-op Housing Federation of Canada. You mentioned in your chat with Robin that your son is, like many others, living in their parents' basement. I believe one of your remarks was helping partnering with cities to try to give people more opportunity to find a place they can afford. Maybe you can give an opportunity to spell out a little further what your party will**

**do to address those affordable housing challenges that are affecting a wide spectrum of Ontarians, not only low- and modest-income earners, but middle- and even upper-income earners. Thank you.**

RS: Thanks, Harvey. Thanks for the question. You have raised a great point. It is very worrisome. We see so many young people who do not even think that they will be able to buy a house. I have talked to people in their early twenties—my son not included—and mid-twenties, who are saying that they are not even thinking of looking for a permanent relationship, settling down, starting their own family. They are putting those decisions off. They have made conscious decisions to put those decisions off until they are 30 or older. We see so many young people, and people generally who had a hope to kind of maybe move back to the neighbourhood that they were raised in, and that hope has been dashed over the last couple of years.

We have, on a number of levels, real concerns around the housing situation. It goes everything from the private market system and homeownership where we are still concerned about the cost of owning a home, the cost of buying into the market, as it stands. We are still concerned about the impacts of property flipping and people buying up properties as investments as opposed to people who are buying to live in those homes. We are concerned with what that does to neighbourhoods, what that does to the stability of neighbourhoods.

We have seen what happened in Vancouver in terms

of what that did to their local economy where all those condos were sitting empty. That is not a good place to be. We are certainly aware of needing to address some of those things, but then we also have a social housing stock that has not kept up with the needs of people at the lower income level. We have made a commitment already to be there with municipalities on the repair backlog that exists for social housing. There is no way that this city should be in a situation where it is contemplating shuttering hundreds of units while there continues to be 100,000 people on the waiting list for social housing. It does not make any sense. We know that the downloading occurred under the Conservative government when it comes to social housing. I was on city council at that time, in Hamilton. We were sounding the alarm bells even back then that that housing did not come with appropriate maintenance and replacement reserves.

Now, here we are, fast forward 20 years later, and the cities are in a pickle. We have made the commitment to be at the table with one-third of the funding for the repair backlogs, not only for Toronto, but for the entire province.

There is also the middle. There is that middle ground where there is still a lack of opportunity for people. I am not talking about the higher-income folks or necessarily the lowest-income folks, but just getting in your door, getting in the door to get to your first condo or your first unit is still problematic.

There are a couple of things. Some of that is on the supply side, but some of that is also on the stability of work side as well. I think these things all go together. When young people are facing uncertainty in terms of their jobs, uncertainty in terms of their economic stability over time, they are less likely to jump into the housing market. There is a lot of, I think, solutions. There is not just one silver bullet. I think that is naïve to think that there would be, but certainly we are keeping an eye on all of these things and looking for the solutions, some of which we have already announced. Thanks, Harvey.

**Q: Hi, Andrea. It is Karen from ETFO. A strong and prosperous Ontario includes a vibrant education system, one which works for all Ontarians. Can you just share a little bit for us what you envision as a strong publicly funded education system?**

AH: Sure, Karen. Thanks for the question. We have been concerned by the education system here in the province and what is happening to it. We see schools closing, and, sometimes in neighbourhoods, which is quite interesting: We see schools closing in neighbourhoods in this city, for example, where you will never be able to build a school again in that neighbourhood because the price of property has gone up so high that losing a school in some of these Toronto neighbourhoods is not just about today and how many students are here today, but how are we going to have that asset, that public asset for the future?

Then, you have the rural schools in rural communities in smaller town Ontario where kids are being put on—kids who are little, who are like five and six years old—buses for literally an hour or more to get to school, and then an hour or more to get back. That is not great either. Just aiming in terms of the infrastructure, we have some real problems. We have a backlog of maintenance in our schools and as a person that is an educator yourself, you will know that that backlog means that there are kids in the winter that are actually at their desks with coats and mitts on, and, in the sweltering summertime, they are fainting from the heat. There is, again, on the infrastructure side, real issues there.

Then, we also see a school system, at the elementary level, and at the secondary level, where resources have been withdrawn and pulled away. Again, we were talking at our table here a few minutes ago about the challenge of supporting students that need extra help and how those supports have been frittered away, how they have been reduced as school boards have been trying to deal with the lack of funding to meet the needs of students. Yet, we know that the number of young people and children, particularly, who are being identified with learning challenges and exceptionalities, is growing. At the same time that we see children needing more help in the schools, we see less provision of supports by the government. We are really, really concerned about that. We believe that every child should be able to reach their

full potential through the support of the dedicated people that work in our public education system, and we need to make sure that that public education system is able to provide those supports for those kids.

We have issues around the EQAO testing regime, real concerns about that, about whether or not it is actually effective for young people, whether it actually really provides anything other than numbers for the government to work with. We know it provides a great deal of stress, both on educators and, importantly, on students and their families. We are looking hard at where we need to make improvements to our education system.

I know that we engage with educational workers and their unions on a regular basis to make sure that when we form government next year, we are doing things that improve our education system, not only for our children, not only for our families, but for our economy as well, because those young people, then, are the people that are going to be required to be the workers and the thinkers and the aspirational human beings that move our province forward over time. Really, for us, for New Democrats, the education piece is extremely important. I look forward to engaging with ETFO and others as we get our platform finalized and as we form government and begin to bring some serious improvements to public education.

RS: I think we are getting the hook. Thank you very much.

**Note of Appreciation, by James Scongack,  
Vice-President, Corporate Affairs  
and Environment, Bruce Power**

Just to wrap up the luncheon, it is my honour to thank the Leader and Robin for the great conversation. I thought I would take a bit of a different approach to the thank you, today, if that is okay, Paul. Paul is looking nervous thinking, “What the heck is this guy going to say?”

We talk about the election campaign being 190-something days away, and we talk about a lot of these issues. Andrea and I were talking at the table about Bruce Power being a company in rural Ontario and about some of the differences between challenges in urban Ontario and rural Ontario. And I think that a conversation on those issues is really important, but one of the things, that really I want to say in terms of thanking the Leader is we need to remember that behind election campaigns and behind all these conversations, there are real people that are putting their name on a ballot, whether it is in the third party, the official opposition, absolutely.

It is very easy for us to sometimes forget about that. While most of us in this room love to be observers of the process, not many of us in this room have our names on the ballot. If I could just ask everybody to stand up in the room who is an MPP or is putting their name on a ballot in the next election, and let us give them a round of applause for their public service. If anybody else wants to declare, there is a podium up here. You can come over right after. Anyway, that is all I

want to say. Thank you, Andrea, for the conversation. Thank you all those folks who stood up for your public service, and I am really looking forward to an active debate over the next 190-something days. Thank you very much.

### **Concluding Remarks, by Paul Fogolin**

I think I saw a few people start to get up and then sit down a little bit at the back there. We are about to wrap things up. Thanks, again, for Bruce Power, our generous sponsor, as well as the Ontario Real Estate Association, as our VIP sponsor. We are a not-for-profit club, and we simply could not host these lunches without sponsors. A warm round of applause for them, please.

Although our club has been around since 1903, we have moved into the modern world and we are on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn. I think we have a Snapchat account. I do not use it, but I think we have one at the Empire Club. Pretty impressive, so, please, check us out.

Our next lunch is November 27th. Mr. Rob McEwen and Dr. Michael Laflamme will be talking about advances of stem cell research. That will be at One King West.

Thank you, again, for your attendance today. The meeting is now adjourned.

Have a wonderful afternoon