

HOUSING AND INCOME CRISIS AT CRITICAL JUNCTURE

THESE MUST BE TOP PRIORITIES FOR THIS ELECTION, WRITES KIM JENKINSON



KIM JENKINSON
Column

The Ontario election is underway, the stock market is crashing, COVID policies have abated — if not COVID itself — and Ontario, Canada and the rest of the world is facing a

housing crisis.

Ukraine is under attack, Yemen continues to be persecuted and Israel and Gaza are still lobbing missiles at each other.

The world is facing a crisis, humanity is under constant pressure and no time in history has it been more important to work together to try to alleviate some of the big issues.

Housing and income are two of those big issues. Everyone needs safe housing as a basic right, and sufficient income to sustain it.

Housing affordability has rocketed out of reach for so many in just the past five years.

Not only is owning a home now impossible for many people, but renting something on your own is also now out of reach for a large number of people, including seniors, young adults and students fresh out of college.

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If you are a low income wage earner, if you are not already living somewhere with a reasonable rent or if you lose your housing in the increasing number of "renovictions," your family can quickly fall into our already very vulnerable social safety net, which itself is in crisis and unable to keep up with the never ending requests for help.

Now bring in an international perspective. Imagine coming from a war-torn country, not speaking English, and receiving 90 days of basic income support.

You need to start working immediately to support yourself and your family. You had a good job at home, but with no English and no understanding of the Canadian job market, you'll be lucky to get what is called a "survival job" by newcomers — likely manual labour and shift work in a factory or warehouse.

Not to mention that to get that job you are going to need someone to watch your kids. You've left family behind, probably your husband and your broth-

ers as they have been conscripted to fight, and you pray for their safety every minute of every day.

You are living with a distant cousin who you have never met before and your two families are on top of each other, suffocating in a house made for one.

This is the current story of the Ukrainians arriving in Canada.

The provincial government is in theory responsible for housing, employment and income, some of which was downloaded to the regions and municipalities.

The federal government has recently flirted with the idea of basic income, but for whatever reason it didn't happen — much to the sorrow of the social services and low income families across Canada.

And despite there being provincial and federal

housing investment strategies in place, the programs to access the money are — in my opinion — so complex and convoluted that getting a project underway takes major assets before you can even start those discussions.

In the coming provincial election, please ask your local candidates: "How are you going to work together with other levels of government to successfully move us forward on income and housing security given these are provincial mandates?"

Big problems can be solved only by working together, and that is the commitment we need from all levels of our politicians.

Kim Jenkinson is the executive director of the Halton Multicultural Council. She can be reached at kjenkinson@hmconnections.com.

ONTARIO DESERVES A REAL ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPION

Last fall, a report by Ontario's auditor general showed the province is nowhere near on track to meeting its climate targets, and the provincial government is expected to achieve only 20 per cent of promised CO2 reductions by 2030.

Since Doug Ford took office, his government has dragged Ontario backwards on its climate and environmental policies.

Ford fought hard against the federal government's carbon price, despite the fact that Nobel Prize-winning economists

have endorsed a price on carbon as a cheap and effective way to reduce emissions.

Ford spent millions on anti-carbon tax stickers at gas pumps across the province and took the government all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada to

repeal it — and lost.

Ford also scrapped the rebate for electric vehicles, making it harder and less affordable for people to buy them. He's also planning on spending billions on two major highways, Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass, which would both

pave over ecologically sensitive wetlands and parts of the Greenbelt including prime farmland in Ontario.

That money would be better spent on public transit instead.

Last month, the Halton Catholic School Board declared a climate emergency. Young people deserve to grow up in a world that is as clean, safe and beautiful as it was when their parents

grew up. They deserve so much better than Doug Ford.

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