

Hopefuls lay out their platforms at first all-candidates meeting

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"Ontarians have had enough of the Tory cuts and enough of the McGuinty government 'flip-flopping' responses to their actions," said Jackson.

The NDP candidate said it was wrong for the Tories to remove \$6 billion from public services to benefit the wealthy. He promised to reinvest the money to restore nursing jobs and cut university tuition fees.

Family Coalition Party nominee Giuseppe Gori said Ontario was in a "state of disorder and confusion." Gori felt that a majority government should represent the majority of people and promised to put more of the decision-making for education in the parents' hands, because "they know what's best for their kids."

On health care, Chudleigh said four years ago there were 43 hospitals serving two million people in Toronto and only 17 hospitals serving about the same amount of citizens in the 905 area code region.

"We needed to achieve some sort of balance there and we have," said Chudleigh. "There are 20,000 new beds in Ontario, 1,579 of which will come to Halton and already there are 300 in Oakville with more to come."

Anand responded to the concern of private ownership of these new beds, saying that public ownership is a necessity. "Harris' Common Sense doesn't make sense here," said Anand. "A government provides a service at no profit, but if a corporation runs a service it has to make a profit, so the result is the nurses working there are paid less."

Jackson said the NDP would take the \$1.5 billion Harris has saved the rich and reinvest part of it in the health care system.

"We must stop private nursing home beds by having beds owned by communities," he added.

A university student in the crowd expressed concern over the increase in tuition fees, demanding accountability from the Tory government.

"Tuition fees are currently at 35 per cent of the cost of post-secondary education. We've increased OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program) availability and there is an 8 per cent increase in university students over last year," Chudleigh said.

Jackson, on the topic of tuition, feels it "should be free, but one of the first steps is to announce a 10 per cent reduction right away."

Anand expressed concern that many students leave university about \$30,000 in debt. He promised to cut tuition by 10 per cent and allow students to earn \$1,800 during the school year without student aid being reduced.

Chudleigh defended the Tory stance on public education, stating that his government has adjusted the funding formula to allow 100 per cent funding for a school even if it's only 80 per cent full. Also, he said, 5,500 new textbooks have been placed in the high schools.

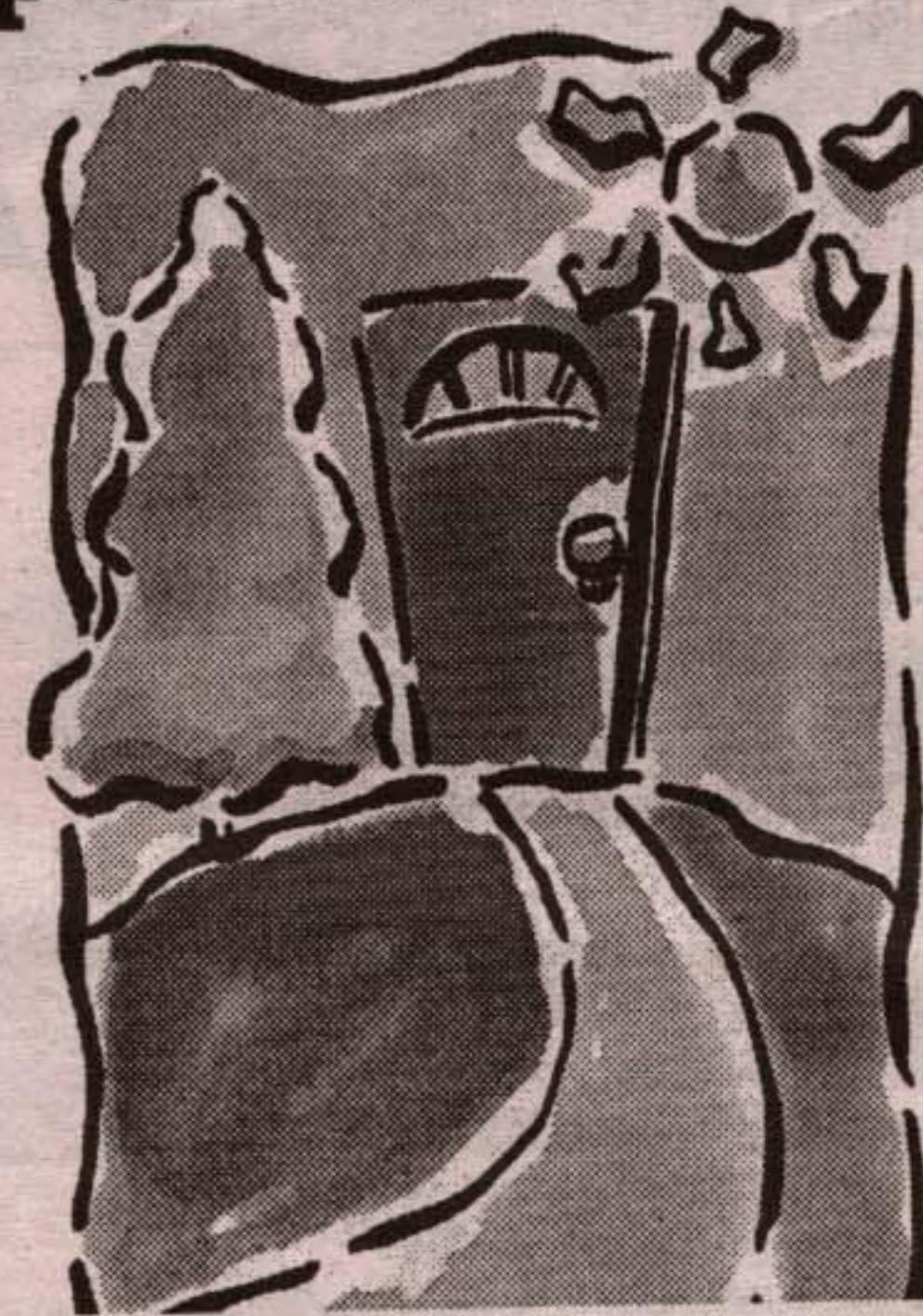
Anand promised that the Liberals would repeal Bill 160, while Jackson promised to invest \$360 million immediately to keep schools open and aid early childhood education. He also said the NDP would repeal Bill 160.

"Bill 160 allows the government to set the education portion of property tax behind closed doors," he said. "The NDP would stop that."

This was the first of four scheduled all-candidates meetings for the Halton candidates. They are to meet twice next week in Milton and May 31 in Georgetown at the John Elliott Theatre beginning at 7:30 p.m.

—By Scott MacArthur, special

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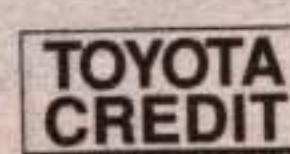


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