

Latest provincial budget successfully walked a tightrope

There was a time when budget day in Ontario could be counted on to produce lines at the gas pumps, a run at beer stores and a nagging little itch in the wallets of all hard-working Ontarians.

Year after year taxes went up, debt increased and there was precious little to show for it. Ontario's drunken sailor years, starting with the Liberals and ending in the gutter with the NDP, were witness to huge tax increases and virtually total disregard for the future, a future we are now living in.

Perhaps we should thank these two governments for showing us so graphically why the Ontario's path was unsustainable. I suggest the ballot box in 1995 and again in 1999 showed that most Ontarians understand the problem, however, it is evident that many still do not.

Most Liberals and NDPs likely concede that Ontario cannot go back to where it was under Bob Rae, however, these people seem to still believe in the same fuzzy thinking that got Ontario into trouble in the first place.

The recent Ontario budget, the third consecutive balanced budget in this province, walked a tightrope, balancing necessary funding increases to public education, infrastructure and health care, while making a significant repayment of debt, continued cut taxes and a commitment to increased accountability in the public sector. It was the first time in almost 100 years that Ontario has had three consecutive balanced budgets.

Taxes in Ontario went up little by little for decades and slowly became a significant drain on the economy. It is my belief that taxes need to come down in a similar manner. Each small tax decrease provides a boost to the economy, which in turn provides the economic strength to allow for the next decrease.

The current budget includes \$3 bil-

QUEEN'S PARK REPORT



Ted Chudleigh

lion in debt reduction, the largest repayment in Ontario's history. While that may not seem like a lot on a debt of more than \$100 billion, repaying it has freed up millions that used to be spent on interest payments. Like any big debt, repayment seems slow at first,

but accelerates as interest payments decrease. The key is starting to make the repayments.

Perhaps most significantly, the Ontario budget implements a five-year phase-in of a tax credit for parents of students in independent schools. I have received hundreds of letters from people pointing out that Catholic education is fully funded by the province but other types of independent education are not, a situation that is obviously unfair.

According to my research, about 85 per cent of those students in indepen-

dent schools do not attend high tuition private institutions. Suggesting that the proposed tax credit benefits the rich, is as unfair a statement as saying that public education allows parents of publicly funded students to purchase a nicer car or a bigger house because society takes care of their education costs.

Parents of students in independent schools will still be supporting public education through their taxes. Five other provinces support some form of funding for independent schools and their experience suggests that there will not be a mass exodus from the public system. However, providing choice to parents should improve the performance of public schools.

I believe parents are tired of finger-pointing, labour unrest, flavour of the month teaching fads and test scores that produce nothing but excuses. If providing choice in education improves the entire education system then the tax credit is worth far more than the millions it will put back in the hands of working families.

Ted Chudleigh is the MPP for Halton

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