

# Health care, education are the priorities, Witmer says

By RICHARD VIVIAN  
The Champion

Multi-year funding would help avoid health care provider shortfalls like the \$2.8 million deficit facing Halton Healthcare Services, says provincial Tory leadership hopeful Elizabeth Witmer.

"I want to institute long-term funding for hospitals and long-term care facilities so they can plan three years out and know exactly what amount of money they're getting, so that they can provide services and know that they've got the health care providers they need," said the environment minister.

"You can't plan if you give people money after the fact. You've got to allow them to plan."

Ms Witmer's comments came at a reception hosted by the Halton Provincial Progressive Conservative Riding Association at The Ivy Arms Thursday.

If elected to run the party and become Ontario's premier, Ms Witmer said she will institute changes in two major areas — health care and education. "Those are the two (issues) I hear about everywhere that I go."

In order to improve the state of health care, the environment minis-



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Elizabeth Witmer speaks to fellow PCs at The Ivy Arms Thursday night.

ter hopes to build the "human infrastructure" by developing a human resource inventory. The inventory would help to ensure appropriate medical personnel are accessible where and when they're needed.

"We all know there are all sorts of areas in the province that don't have enough doctors, enough nurses, enough pharmacists," she explained.

"The first thing we need to do — and there's got to be researchers involved in this because it has to be evidence-based — is develop a human resource strategy so that we don't find ourselves in this situation again."

Supports for Ontario's education

system are also needed to keep the economy growing, Ms Witmer told association members.

"We need to make sure that our children have access to affordable post-secondary education — whether that's college or whether that's university," she said. "We also need to make sure that we have a great apprenticeship program, because we're always going to need the auto mechanics or plumbers."

"We need to focus and make sure we have a strong educational system."

The 'Common Sense Revolution' (CSR) which swept the Tories into power in 1995 is over, she added.

"The CSR was designed to respond to the fiscal situation in the province, which was high debt, deficit, high taxes, low employment and consumer and business confidence had been totally shattered," Ms Witmer said. "Now we're in the year 2002 and we need to take a look at what's on the top of the minds of the people of Ontario."

Also running for party leadership are former Finance Minister Ernie Eves, Health Minister Tony Clement, Education Minister Janet Ecker, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and Labour Minister Chris Stockwell.

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