

Manufacturing industry misrepresented, opposition says

By DANIEL SCHWAB

With just over six months left before the provincial election, the leaders of the three major political parties were not quite ready to face each other in an all-out debate at this weekend's Ontario Community Newspapers Association convention in Niagara Falls.

In the lead-up to the October 10th election, the three leaders spoke during separate, consecutive 20-minute sessions at the annual gathering of reporters, publishers and staff from Ontario's community newspapers.

Defending his government's record of achievements, Premier Dalton McGuinty expounded on the recently announced commitments to education outlined in the 2007 budget, adding that classroom sizes are now smaller and high school graduation rates have remained high.

The creation of the Ministry of Health Promotion has taken junk food out of schools and implemented a program of

daily physical education for all students, he said. In addition, support for health care has resulted in the hiring of 8,000 nurses, allowing thousands of Ontarians access to family doctors.

Still, he admitted a troubled manufacturing industry has "Ontarians struggling in a global economy."

While highlighting that the province's unemployment rate of 6.3 per cent is the lowest it's been in five years, McGuinty said sectors such as the manufacturing industry are "in transition" and will need to be protected in order to become more competitive.

"We are plugged into a global economy," McGuinty said. "As we raise new generations, we need to raise them as not just Canadian citizens but as global citizens."

Despite mounting layoffs in the automotive industry, he added that 327,000 new jobs have been created in Ontario.

But NDP leader Howard Hampton dismissed McGuinty's point of view that workers are economi-

cally stable, saying 140,000 "good paying" automotive and manufacturing jobs have been lost in the past three years. He said many of those laid-off are now working for lower wages.

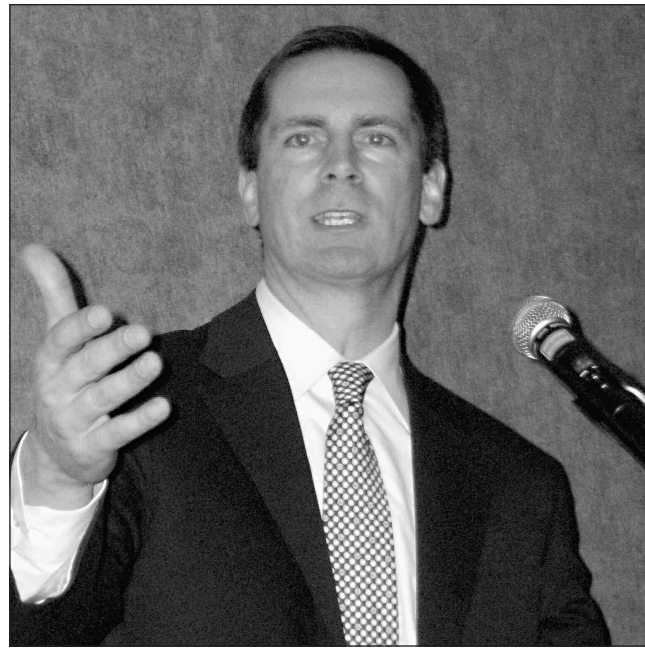
"People are working longer and harder and are making less," Hampton said.

He said the gap between rich and poor is also increasing, adding that executive pay has "skyrocketed" and that banks and oil companies are deepening their pockets by the billions.

Hampton also called for an immediate risk management program for farmers. A portion of their costs, up to 40 per cent, should be covered so farmers aren't carrying the risk of U.S. subsidies, climate change or drought, he said.

Conservative leader John Tory, who met with farmers in Blenheim last week, also criticized the Liberal government saying it took the party three years to deliver on its promise to create a balanced budget.

"There has been a deficiency of trust," Tory said.



Leaders of the province's three major political parties speak to reporters during an Ontario Community Newspapers Association convention in Niagara Falls last weekend.

"Ontarians are struggling in a global economy."

- Premier Dalton McGuinty



"People are working longer and harder and are making less."

- NDP leader Howard Hampton

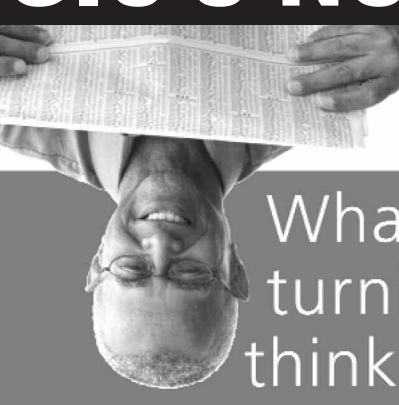


"We were once the economic engine of Canada. Now we're last in economic growth."

- Conservative leader John Tory

Daniel Schwab / Free Press

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Essex, at Client First PlanningTuesday, April 20 - 2 - 4 pm
Essex, at Client First PlanningTuesday, April 20 - 6 - 8 pm
Kingsville, at Pelee Island Winery.....Wednesday, April 21 - 2 - 4 pm