



**LINDSAY MASON:** Province shouldn't alienate core supporters.



**BILL BELL:** Tories are pretend Liberals in wolf's clothing.



**JANET ECKER:** Ontario can't afford round of tax cuts this year.



**BILL CROTHERS:** No funding for contract negotiations.



**JOAN MOASE:** Black market will re-emerge due to cigarette price hike.

# Will real Tories please step forward?

BY LISA QUEEN  
Staff Writer

The Common Sense Revolution was launched from Lindsay Mason's Newmarket livingroom.

In fact, the return of the Common Sense Revolution was launched from Lindsay Mason's Newmarket livingroom four years later.

It was no accident former premier Mike Harris chose Ms Mason's

home in York Region when he called provincial elections in 1995 and 1999.

Small-c conservative voters in the region have formed the backbone of Tory support, representing the middle and upper-middle classes raging for tax cuts.

Although critics warned about the injurious effects on programs and services, York voters overwhelmingly reasoned if the government would get its hand out of their

wallets, they could spend more money and help stimulate the economy.

Mr. Harris was pleased to comply.

He returned time and time again to York Region homes and businesses before retiring last fall, often bringing a jar of money he liked to say represented the cash he had put back into families' pockets courtesy of his tax cuts.

He tipped his hat during those

visits to his right-hand man, Ernie Eves, who, as treasurer for most of Mr. Harris' tenure, brought in tax cuts and balanced budgets amid some controversial political decisions.

But Mr. Harris' right-hand man is being accused of veering to the left after delivering his first budget as premier Monday.

Some have even gone as far as declaring the Revolution dead, accusing Mr. Eves of becoming little more than a Liberal in well-heeled wolf's clothing.

The former tax-cutter raised levies on cigarettes, the first major tax increase since the Tories took office seven years ago this month.

The price jumped \$9 a carton thanks to a combined assault of increased provincial and federal taxes.

Meanwhile, promised individual and corporate tax cuts have been deferred.

Ms Mason is willing to give Mr. Eves the benefit of the doubt for the moment, hoping the budget isn't a signal the premier is abandoning the very people who have kept the Tories in office for the past seven years.

"I'm still cautiously optimistic, but I'm disappointed in this budget," she said yesterday from her Newmarket office.

"All the groups they tried to appease are still not happy," said the long-time supporter of the federal Alliance party.

"My feeling (is) at the end of the day, not only have they ticked off their loyal supporters, but it hasn't helped on the other side. I'm kind of holding my breath. I hope it's just a blip and we get back to the Common Sense Revolution. A lot of work was done, you would hate to see it swept aside."

Still, Ms Mason said the Tories risk alienating their core Conservative voters in York if they veer too far off course into Liberal territory." With Harris, however people looked at him, you knew where he stood. He did what he said

he was going to do," she said.

"If (Mr. Eves) is trying to be all things to all people, it just doesn't work. At the end of the day, he has ticked off everybody. Tory support has come from areas like ours.

"If you start to alienate that core support, it does cause you problems."

But Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees is urging voters, such as Ms Mason to appreciate the realities Mr. Eves and finance minister Janet Ecker had to contend with before jumping to any mistaken conclusion the government is weakening its tax-cut mantra.

He argued the budget represented a short-term financial plan to handle difficulties, such as the drop in provincial revenues following the downturn in the global economy after the terrorist attacks last Sept. 11.

"We will make up any (tax) deferral in short order. I don't see this, in any way, as a disruption of the Common Sense Revolution," Mr. Klees said.

"I have every confidence that Ernie Eves will continue this philosophy of tax cuts and the commitment to ensuring a strong economy to let taxpayers keep more of their hard-earned money."

Despite Ms Mason's concerns, Mr. Klees is confident loyal Tory supporters don't feel abandoned by the budget.

"I don't believe our core supporters are upset. I think our core supporters understand" the short-term pressures facing the government.

At the same time, he sympathizes with health-care experts who complain the additional \$1.7 billion — which brings health-care spending up to \$25.5 billion this year, representing 47 per cent of the provincial budget — is inadequate.

"We're short \$2 billion for health care and that lies squarely on the shoulders of the feds," Mr. Klees said.

"It will never be enough in this province or other provinces in this country until the federal government steps up to the plate."

## Budget leaves no room to negotiate teacher salaries

BY MITCHELL BROWN  
Staff Writer

Teachers, school boards, parents and private school supporters struck a similar chord Tuesday in reaction to the provincial budget.

"We're just disappointed," said Elizabeth Crowe, chairperson of the York Catholic District School Board.

"We had hoped there would be additional funding in the budget ... it won't help us balance our budget in the long run."

For the 2002-03 school year, Ontario's classrooms will receive a record \$14.3 billion, an increase of almost \$400 million over last year.

However, school board officials quickly point out \$347 million of the money was announced more than a month ago.

Bill Crothers, chairperson of the York Region District School Board, was dismayed by the numbers.

"The only stuff that was new was a little bit of one-time funding, which really doesn't help very much," he said.

"The one issue that probably concerns us most is there isn't any funding in there that would allow us

to go into any contract negotiations with any additional funds to offer employees. The increases just barely cover existing inflationary increases and enrolment growth."

Advocates for public education say the new funding isn't nearly enough to repair damage done by past budgets.

### SCANT RELIEF

"In spite of the number of parents and boards who have clearly outlined the need for additional funding for their schools this coming September, there is scant relief for students," said Annie Kidder, spokesperson for People for Education, a Toronto-based group.

While the Elementary Teachers' Association of Ontario said the government has "made a start in repaying the millions of dollars it has taken out of education since 1995," its president, Phyllis Benedict, said her group remains dissatisfied.

"The serious investment needed for smaller classes, for more specialist teachers, for support staff and for capital investment, is all missing from this budget," she said.

### WAITED TOO LONG

*Proponents of private schools are disappointed the province delayed school-tax credits.*

Introduced in last year's budget, the Equity in Education Tax Credit would have given parents of children who attend religious and private schools a maximum of \$700 in tax credits the first year.

The Canadian Jewish Congress, which lobbied hard for the credit, was disappointed by the delay but buoyed by the government's commitment to see it through.

"We have waited a long time to achieve some equity for our children in independent religious schools," said Ed Morgan, chairperson of CJC Ontario Region. "Today's announcement calls for patience, as opposed to a political reassessment. We fully expect that this one-time measure will in no way affect the tax credit in the long term."

However, John Vannesselt, spokesperson for the Ontario Association of Christian Schools, was less impressed by the delay. "It's especially lower-income families that will be hurt by this decision ... In terms of politics, it seems the government has taken away something from the very constituencies most likely to support them."

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