

MPPs should vote freely on non-platform issues: Liberal leader

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government. "I don't believe in a pre-

mier's divine right to decide when an election is called," he said. "We should have them every four years."

Nor would he allow tax dollars to be used for partisan political advertisements. He also said members of the leg-

islature should be given the opportunity to vote freely on all legislation except platform issues, the throne speech or the budget.

"It's time to start treating MPPs with respect," he said. "We have to make the legislature more relevant."

Mr. McGuinty said such reforms, including a move to on-line voting, would increase voter turnout in provincial elections.

He sidestepped the question of why electors should believe his party would be any more fiscally responsible than the federal Liberals or the provincial Conservatives given the annual government spending horror stories such as those contained in last week's auditors' reports.

"Whatever commitments we put out, we'll put out our costing," he said. "We'll tell where the money's going to come from and be accountable."

He said the Liberals would not add "a single cent more" to the provincial debt.

"We won't run deficits," he said. "We have to tackle the debt, but first we must restore confidence and vitality to the public service."

On other issues, however, he was short on specifics.

• On education: "After seven years of tinkering by the present government, one half of our students are failing the basic standards of reading, writing and mathematics. I will increase student achievement levels."

• On transit: "We will allocate two cents of the provincial gas tax to our municipal partners to invest in public transit. To those (businesses) who give their employees transit passes, we want to make that a non-taxable benefit."

• On urban sprawl: "We must manage growth in a way that does not compromise our existing quality of life. We're going to continue to invest in infrastructure, but we're going to give priority to certain areas."

• On conservation: "We'll talk about a very ambitious and essential Golden Horseshoe green belt that incorporates an agricultural preserve, the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges Moraine to preserve green space"

• On agriculture: "The ideal solution for farmers is to make farming a viable, attractive and profitable pursuit."

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