

CAMPAIGN ISSUES

WEEK 1

And they're off

Just days after the writ is dropped, the key issues in Ontario's provincial election are already being defined.

While faith-based schools and the incumbent Liberal Party's record remain near the top of the list, opposition parties have also keyed in on other topics, from autism funding to job losses.

Premier tours Markham

Dalton McGuinty was in Markham Tuesday to help Markham-Unionville MPP Michael Chan open his campaign office, where it quickly became clear the premier doesn't want to talk about his government's record. He breezed into the event, arriving late, and departed minutes later, without answering questions from the media.

Hampton slams Liberals on autism funding

NDP Leader Howard Hampton slammed the Liberals over autism treatment funding during a campaign stop in Richmond Hill Wednesday. "The McGuinty Liberals have disgraced themselves by breaking their promises to Ontario's most vulnerable citizens and families," he said, noting more than 1,000 remain on a waiting list to receive funding for a treatment known as Intensive Behavioural Intervention.

He was joined at the event by York-Simcoe NDP candidate Nancy Morrison whose eight-year-old son, Sean, has autism.

Cheap shots fly in Thornhill

Things are already turning ugly in a couple of York races.

Thornhill Liberal candidate Mario Racco and his Progressive Conservative opponent, Peter Shurman, are accusing one another of initiating the personal attacks they traded last week. Mr. Shurman accused Mr. Racco of staying mum on the faith school funding issue, while Mr. Racco countered by badgering Mr. Shurman for not living in the riding.

Tory pledges to address Ontario's doctor shortage

And speaking of Mr. Tory, among the many pledges and promises this week was his vow to tackle Ontario's doctor shortage.

Many of the elements of his proposal are dead ringers for recommendations made by the Ontario Medical Association when it released a paper on the topic.

Among them are a better physician recruitment strategy and bringing Canadian-trained doctors now practising in the United States back to Ontario.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Premier Dalton McGuinty is greeted by about 70 supporters, including Markham firefighters, at the opening of Markham-Unionville Liberal candidate Michael Chan's campaign office on Crown Steel Drive in the Warden and 14th Avenue area Tuesday night.

McGuinty team uses hurry-up offence

Only 48 hours into a 30-day provincial election campaign and it's clear time is of the essence.

Witness Premier Dalton McGuinty's barn storming pit stop Tuesday night at Markham-Unionville Liberal MPP Michael Chan's campaign office opening.

Scheduled for 7:30 p.m., the premier couldn't be blamed for being fashionably tardy. After all, his day began in Ottawa, where he rolled out his plan to give students more access to tutoring and online homework help.

While party faithful and volunteers waited sardine-like in the foyer, Mr. Chan anticipated Mr. McGuinty's arrival, as would any host anxiously awaiting his a-list guests.

"This is tremendous," Mr. Chan said. "His dropping in to our riding is very special. I'm overwhelmed."

Among the 70 or so attendees, a good portion were media. The premier's advance team wouldn't, or couldn't, confirm if Mr. McGuinty would entertain questions from reporters.

Conspicuous in yellow T-shirts were 14 men lining the entrance. Their spokesperson, firefighter association local 2727 president Walter Brinston, was more than pleased



Chris Traber

to explain the 236-member Markham union is supporting Mr. Chan.

"Michael is willing to listen to and get educated on our issues so he can make informed decisions," Mr. Brinston said.

To pacify the media types during the increasingly warm wait, handlers distributed a release about the premier's yet-to-occur visit.

We read a media missive written in the past tense about an event yet to have a present, let alone a future.

"This campaign is a watershed, a clear choice between our vision of the future or the same old Conservative approach, a choice between strengthening public services or putting them at risk," the prepackaged material predicted from Mr. McGuinty.

"Ontario Liberals fight for publicly funded education, for

publicly funded health care," foretells Mr. Chan.

With time ticking, the players are executing a hurry-up, run-and-gun offence with little regard for on-field propriety.

It's meet, greet and beat a hasty retreat.

Finally, the campaign bus arrives and nondescript rally music kicks in. The premier wades through the crowd, gripping and grinning, reminiscent of a prize fighter en route to the ring.

He tries to bring the aforementioned media material to fruition.

"The Conservatives want to take half a billion dollars from our publicly funded schools and divert it to private religious schools," he said. "That's a bad idea. That's why this election is a choice between moving forward with the Ontario Liberals or going backwards under the Conservatives."

Good night. And, awash in adulation and loud chants of "four more years," Mr. McGuinty and entourage were on the bus.

Answers to the prickly questions about Markham's growth, traffic woes, doctor shortages, poverty and homelessness will have to wait.

Slam bang, thank you, Mr. Chan. That's campaigning on the fly.

Who's running in Oak Ridges-Markham Whitchurch-Stouffville's riding



PHIL BANNON
Progressive Conservative
www.philbannon.ca



JANICE HAGAN
New Democratic Party
http://ontariodp.com/node/1473



DR. HELENA JACZEK
Liberal
www.liberal2007.com/votehelena



PAT REDMOND
Family Coalition Party
www.familycoalitionparty.com

For candidate biographies, visit yorkregion.com



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