

# Taxes not an issue with York voters: MPP

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It's your hard-earned money — those income tax dollars sent to the government.

But that's not all when it comes to taxes and fees you are on the hook for.

The Harmonized Sales Tax. The on-and-off-but-not-completely-gone eco fees. The skyrocketing energy bills and gas prices.

Enough, you might say.

However, "With the introduction of the HST, most Ontario families are paying less in income taxes," Ontario Liberal Party co-chairperson MPP Greg Sorbara says.

You may be shaking your head, but in Mr. Sorbara's own account, some 300 families in his Vaughan riding that recently answered his knock on their doors had no issues with taxes, fees and the high cost of living.

"Not one single person raised issues with the HST or the eco fees with me," the former finance minister said.

As Ontarians head to the polls next month, party leaders are busy campaigning on why you should trust them in turning the economy around and balancing the budget.

For the record, the province's deficit is \$15 billion — not \$16 billion as the Liberals initially announced, Mr. Sorbara said.

He attributed the deficit to various stimulus programs Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government invested in during the global recession.

He said the good news is they are ahead of the schedule to eliminate the deficit by 2017, the same time by which Tim Hudak's Progressive Conservatives promise to balance the books.

The difference? While the Conservatives are promising no tax increase, the Liberals are simply saying they have no plans to raise taxes.

In other words, "We are the only party that will lower your taxes", said Tory MPP Peter Shurman, who is seeking to be re-elected in his Thornhill riding.

"McGuinty will raise the tax and implement programs you've never heard of. We don't call him the tax man for nothing."

Under the Tories' Changebook plan, the HST will be removed from your hydro and home-heating bills, Mr. Shurman said.

They promise to scrap eco taxes on everyday items such as light bulbs, batteries, iPods and laptops. They also promise to drop time-of-use pricing for smart meters and lower income taxes by 5 per cent on the first \$75,000 of taxable income.

## ONTARIO '11 VOTES

If elected, Mr. Shurman said they'll ask each ministry to find a 2-per-cent saving and all 630 agencies and boards will be reviewed.

"We have a price tag on everything," he said, adding changes will be made with benefits to families and without cutting essential services.

Mr. Sorbara doesn't buy it and called the Tory plan "a shell game" and "tax trickery".

He said there's a \$14-billion hole in Mr. Hudak's plan that will reduce public services and increase residential and property taxes.

He argued that taking the HST off only home heating and hydro bills — something Ontario New Democrat Leader Andrea Horwath is also proposing — doesn't have much credibility and will result in public service cuts.

"Removing the HST is the wrong approach and it'll have significant impact on the treasury," Mr. Sorbara said. "Health care and education will be compromised."

Mr. Sorbara said the Liberals are already providing some relief through a 10-per-cent rebate program to offset the hydro bill increase due to HST implementation last July.

But Mr. Shurman criticized the move as a "bribe" saying Ontarians have been used as an ATM by Mr. McGuinty.

Not true, Mr. Sorbara countered. Other things the Liberals are doing to lessen the financial pressure faced by many include the full-day kindergarten program, which he said has eliminated child-care fees for some families, and the newly proposed grant to help middle-class families with 30 per cent of university and college tuitions.

As well, Mr. Sorbara said they are uploading \$2.7 billion from municipalities to control property taxes and will reduce the Ontario Public Service by 5 per cent (more than \$500 million in savings) by March 2012.

Like the Conservatives, the Liberals will review the province's major agencies to find \$200 million in savings by 2014.

Fast forward to 2015, that's when the Ontario Greens promise to balance the budget by without raising taxes or cutting services, said Trifon Haitas, the Green candidate for Oak Ridges-Markham.

Mr. Haitas said his party will fight to lower personal income taxes by immediately increasing the personal tax exemption by \$2,000.

While the NDP isn't promising when to balance the budget by, its goal is to provide affordable and realistic changes, said Joe Whitfeld, NDP candidate for Oak Ridges-Markham.

Mr. Whitfeld said even though they support the Liberals' full-day kindergarten, the NDP will invest \$125 million annually to help private day-care centres that are impacted by

the program.

Other NDP promises include protecting the pump from gas gouging, freezing transit fares, helping people save for retirement, getting electricity prices under control and helping farmers produce local foods.

While Mr. Sorbara claimed he hasn't been bombarded with complaints about taxes and fees, Mr. Shurman said he has.

"There's no prompting required. They say, 'I can't afford it anymore, when are you going to get rid of this guy (Mr. McGuinty)?" Mr. Shurman said.

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