



September 21, 2011

Dr. Doris Grinspun, Executive Director
Mr. David McNeil, President
Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
158 Pearl Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5H 1L3

Dear Dr. Grinspun and Mr. McNeil:

Thank you very much for your letter and provincial election survey on behalf of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO). I especially want to thank you for all you do to support our nurses — and to continually promote their skills, education and knowledge.

I have always believed that nurses are the backbone of our health care system. It is therefore a pleasure for me to respond, on behalf of Ontario Liberals, to your questions and to address the vital issues you have raised.

As you know, in 2003 nursing was in trouble. The last government — the Harris-Hudak PCs — closed 28 hospitals, fired 6,200 nurses and allowed wait times to balloon and public confidence to plummet.

Our province was suffering a brain drain to the US with far too many over-worked nurses stretched to their limits fleeing under-paid part-time jobs for more rewarding work south of the border. The PC government dismissed the role of nursing and compared nurses to the surplus workers of hula hoop factories.

Ontario Liberals saw that nurses were holders of knowledge, drivers of innovation, advocates for the needs of families and patients — and strong, committed champions of universal public health care. And, as we rebuilt the health care system, we invested in and counted on Ontario nurses.

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Our plan has been to make Ontario the best place in North America to be a nurse. We have invested over \$1.5 billion in a comprehensive nursing strategy to rebuild our nursing workforce, support nurses and offer new and rewarding practice opportunities across the province.

Over the past eight years, we funded more than 11,500 new nursing positions. We instituted a nursing graduate guarantee that has helped more than 10,000 new nurses find work. We have increased the percentage of full-time nurses in the province from 50 per cent to 64 per cent. We have opened 25 of North America's first Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics — and we have expanded nursing scope of practice to include hospital admission and discharge, and open prescribing.

Working together, we have made great progress, but there is more to do. Over the next decade, Ontario's seniors' population will increase by 43 per cent. Demand for care will continue to escalate. Ontario Liberals know we can meet this challenge by working with nurses and other health system partners to develop smart, innovative policy solutions. Ontario Liberals look forward to working with you to make Ontario an even better place to practise and live.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dalton McGuinty".

Dalton McGuinty
Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party
Premier

Enclosure

QUESTION 1: Can we count on your party's support to bring Ontario's RN to population ratio in line with the rest of the country by adopting RNAO's call to increase Ontario's RN workforce by an additional 9000 RN FTEs by 2015?

In 2003, Ontario Liberals committed to fund 8,000 new nursing positions by the end of our first term in office. We delivered on that commitment.

In 2007, we committed to fund an additional 9,000 nursing positions beginning in the 2008/09 fiscal year. Despite the tough fiscal climate, we have funded additional nursing positions each year since 2008. By the end of the 2011/12 fiscal year, we will have funded an additional 4,400 new positions, getting us almost half-way to meeting our goal. We will continue to invest in new nursing capacity to reach our target of 9,000 new nurses for a total of 17,000 new positions since 2003.

We are also committed to continuing our efforts to retain mid- and late-career nurses. Ontario Liberals recognize the invaluable professional experience that these nurses have, and we appreciate the importance of their role as mentors for the early career nurses. We will continue to work with the sector to ensure that there are fulfilling opportunities for these nurses so that they will stay in the profession.

QUESTION 2: Can we count on your party's support to raise the full-time share of RN employment to 67 per cent in this coming year and to reach 70 per cent full-time employment in all sectors for registered nurses (RNs) and registered practical nurses (RPNs) by 2015?

Ontario Liberals are committed to seeing 70 per cent of nurses working full-time. Since 2003, we have made good progress on this front. Eight years ago, just over 50 per cent of nurses worked full-time. According to the College of Nurses, that figure is now at 64 per cent. We will work to reach 70 per cent by 2015.

Our plan to reach 70 per cent includes more targeted funding for full-time nursing positions, continuation of the nursing graduate guarantee, and mid- and late-career strategies to help nurses keep working full-time.

Only Ontario Liberals have a track record of progress on this issue, and a plan to continue moving forward. Under both the previous NDP and PC governments, there was a shift from nurses working full-time to working casual and part-time hours.

QUESTION 3: Will your party continue the guarantee full-time jobs for new nursing graduates, and, importantly, work with employers to ensure continuation of full-time employment for these new grads after the six months of government funding ends.

There is strong international competition for nursing talent. Prior to 2003 Ontario was losing this battle. We were seeing nurses leave Ontario to work south of the border. After graduating from nursing programs many young nurses could not find jobs in our province. The work that was available was invariably part-time or casual.

To retain young nurses, Ontario Liberals worked with leaders in the profession to develop the Nursing Graduate Guarantee (NGG) program. The premise is simple — every graduating nurse should have the opportunity to work full-time and gain invaluable experience on the front lines. Since the launch of the program, more than 10,000 graduates have been placed through the NGG. Of these, 86 per cent have gone on to find permanent work with the employer.

The NGG is a core component of our plan to make Ontario the jurisdiction of choice for nursing. We will maintain the program and work with nurses to ensure that even more graduates find full-time, permanent employment after their placement.

QUESTION 4: Can we count on your party's support to establish 50 additional nurse practitioner-led clinics by 2015 (in addition to the 26 we will already have by 2012) in order to extend access to primary care in all communities?

Ontario Liberals are proud to be a leader in establishing this new care delivery model, in which Ontarians benefit from having Nurse Practitioners (NPs) as the lead provider of primary health care. Since opening Canada's first NP-led clinic in Sudbury in 2007, we have worked with the nursing community to expand access to NP-led clinics. We are on track to open 25 new NP-led clinics by 2012. When fully operational, they will register and deliver care to over 40,000 patients.

Our platform, *Forward. Together.*, commits to continuing our efforts to ensure that all Ontarians have access to high-quality family health care. We will work with front-line providers to improve the coordination of local health care services to expand access to care and improve access to same-day services, after-hours care, house calls, and online and phone consults. We will increase the number of NP-led clinics, with our investments guided by community need.

QUESTION 5: Will your party support the immediate elimination of the competitive bidding model in favour of publicly-funded, not-for-profit alternatives for allocating funding for home care and health service providers?

Home care is a fundamental part of our health care system. Ontarians have told us that they want to receive care in their homes rather than in an institution — it is good for their health and for the sustainability of the health care system.

Ontario Liberals have listened. Since 2003, we have instituted a 64 per cent increase in funding to Community Care Access Centres (CCACs) — that means we now spend \$2 billion a year on home care services provided through CCACs. We have also more than doubled funding for all community support services, from \$419 million to \$817 million. And we introduced the Aging at Home Strategy, allocating \$1.1 billion over four years. But, as Ontario Liberals, we are relentless reformers — and we know there is more to do.

Through our 2011 Budget, we made the commitment to begin shifting resources from the acute sector into the community sector. We demonstrated our commitment to this principle by instituting, for the first time, a multi-year funding increase to the community line of three per cent in each of the next three years. Our platform includes an additional three million hours of home care for the frail elderly, above and beyond these increases.

As we continue to invest in home care, our focus will remain on enhancing access to care and improving patient outcomes. We will hold providers to account for delivering on enhanced quality of care. In the past, when we were concerned that procurement decisions could compromise quality of care and continuity of service for clients, we intervened to halt bidding practices. We will continue to ensure that home care contracts are awarded to providers who can deliver the highest-quality services to Ontario patients.

The PCs will not tell you what their plan is for home care because they do not want to tell you how they are going to fill the \$14-billion hole in their platform. We need to remember that when they were in power they cut the vital home care services Ontarians depend on — with a 22 per cent cut in nursing and a 30 per cent cut in home-making services between 2001 to 2003. Their simplistic plan for caring for the aging population is to only build more nursing homes. That approach will certainly not meet the needs of our aging seniors' population.

QUESTION 6: Will your party support increasing the minimum wage by 75 cents per hour each year over the course of the next mandate, so that people working full-time can rise above the poverty line? This means the minimum wage would increase to \$11 per hour in 2011, \$11.75 in 2012, \$12.50 in 2013, and \$13.25 in 2014.

Since coming to office, Ontario Liberals have increased the minimum wage seven times. As a result, the current minimum wage is \$10.25 an hour — a 50 per cent increase over 2003 and the highest provincial rate in Canada. These increases outpaced inflation and helped make up for a nine-year freeze in Ontario's minimum wage from 1995 through 2003.

Going forward, we want to take the politics out of setting the minimum wage to ensure Ontario never falls behind again. That is why we will appoint a minimum wage advisory committee to provide recommended options on how to determine the minimum wage for future years. We look forward to the best advice from this committee.

QUESTION 7: Will your party commit to closing the remaining coal-fired generators by 2012, while keeping them on standby reserve to be operated only in event of an emergency?

We have closed eight coal units and coal use is down 90 per cent compared to 2003. By 2014, Ontario will be coal free — the equivalent of taking seven million cars off the road, and making us the leader in North America.

We are also making Ontario the North American leader in clean energy — we have gone from 10 wind turbines in Ontario to 900. The world's largest solar farm has been built in Sarnia. In contrast, both the PCs and NDP have pledged to kill clean energy for purely political reasons, which would also kill the 50,000 jobs it is creating.

Under the PC government, the use of dirty coal increased 127 per cent and Ontario was forced to import expensive US electricity, costing Ontarians almost \$1 billion in 2002 and 2003 alone.

QUESTION 8: Will your party commit to cancelling plans for the construction of expensive and risky new nuclear plants?

Our plan reduces how much nuclear power we rely on. Right now, over half of Ontario's electricity comes from nuclear. But, under the Ontario Liberal plan, the proportion of our province's electricity that comes from nuclear will fall from 52 per cent to 46 per cent.

Older nuclear units will be shut down at Pickering, taking 3,000 megawatts (MW) of nuclear capacity offline. They will be replaced with units at a different location that have only 2,000 MW of nuclear capacity.

When we are replacing our older nuclear units, we will make public safety the number one priority. We will incorporate the most advanced safety measures in the world. We will also ensure that we get a price that is affordable for families and that is competitive with the price of renewable energy.

QUESTION 9: Will your party adopt aggressive targets to greatly enhance conservation and improve energy efficiency and support safe, green sources of energy such as wind, water, solar, biomass, biogas and combined heat and power?

In 2003, our electricity system was in a state of crisis — families and businesses did not know if their lights would stay on.

Since 2003, Ontario Liberals have brought online 8,900 MW of cleaner energy to make up for a lack of supply. Local communities play an important role in moving our province forward, and we look forward to the opportunity to work closely with them to get these choices right.

Our clean energy plan is bringing online more than 10,700 MW of new clean, renewable energy from sources like wind and solar. At the same time, we are creating a new clean energy industry by creating 20,000 new jobs, on the way to 50,000 by 2012.