

Hastings-Lennox and Addington election candidates wouldn't buy into the 2018 Ontario budget

By Sarah Sobanski

Four of the area's five candidates running in the upcoming provincial election are critical of the Liberals' 2018 budget, released in the last week of March.

The Ontario government said the 2018 budget included "significant new investments in health care, child care, home care and mental health, and new measures to create more job opportunities for people across the province."

The budget aims for "better and faster access to mental health and addictions services" and invests hundreds of millions of dollars into hospitals this year alone.

Seniors can look forward to a benefit that will help them live at home longer and a public transit tax credit. For those 65 and over, prescriptions will be free.

For the average Ontarian and their family, partial dental and drug benefits will be available to those without them and child care will be free for children two-and-a-half and older until they can go to school. There are also plans to create jobs.

Much of the budget's plans reflect funding for promises made before the budgets release such as better access to OSAP funding.

Prince Edward-Hastings MPP Todd Smith called the budget a Liberal attempt to "cling to power" in a release following the budget announcement.

"Premier Wynne confirmed that she thinks your vote is for sale and that the public can be fooled," he said in his release noting the budget's \$6.7 billion deficit. "The promises found in this budget aren't worth the paper they're written on. We've seen years of broken promises on everything from eHealth and tax increases to hydro rates."

He suggested the "third largest line item in the budget is interest on the debt, which now costs Ontarians more than a billion dollars a month."

The Prince Edward-Hastings riding has been divided into the Bay of Quinte and Hastings-Lennox and Addington ridings for this year. Smith previously announced he'd be running for Bay of Quinte leaving North Hastings voters to choose from a new pool of possible MPPs.

The riding's PC candidate for 2018, Daryl Kramp has similar thoughts about the new Ontario budget.

Kramp told *Bancroft This Week* he's listened to a lot of budgets come and go over the years. He said many of them have "wish lists with some form of credibility" where the Ontario 2018 budget does not.

"This one here, literally it just smacks of desperation. If people buy the promises then I have to think that they believe that buying swampland in Florida's a bargain," he said. "This budget, the Liberals are promis[ing] saying literally everybody will get everything and of course it will all be free."

Kramp said the Liberals want to "max out the credit cards of an entire generation."

"The simplest solution is to remove them from office and to bring some sanity back into the parliamentary process where you can bring forward a budget that's doable," he said.

Trillium candidate Lonnie Herrington agreed. He criticized the budget as "a prime example of the lengths that the Liberal... government will go to manipulate the people into voting for them again."

Herrington commended the promise of broadband internet service for rural areas. He was also in support of investments in the budget for health care, though he said he wanted to see more focus on frontline health care staff. He said he didn't see any investments in business, any commitment to dissolve green energy contracts, tax relief, WSIB reform, amalgamation of tax funded ministries or a commitment to reduce provincial debt. He estimated the debt was more than \$312 billion and climbing with the new budget.

"It is dishonest and inaccurate," said Herrington. "There is no proactive action on prescription costs in the province... The budget shows no measurable degree of success or outcomes for the taxpayer." As a result of this, many citizens are now looking for [tax relief](#) for compensation.

NDP candidate Nate Smelle also drew attention to the proposed pharmacare and dental care benefits which he suggested weren't complete or universal. He said they should be.

He called the budget "nothing more than a desperate attempt to buy votes" without following through on previous promises.

"The people of Ontario are not going to fall for it," he said. "Wynne and the Liberals have had every opportunity to help the middle-class over the past 15 years, however instead they have repeatedly chosen to cut, and privatize the public services that are meant [to] improve our quality of life."

He added, "Fortunately, we do not have to settle for Wynne's poor planning or Ford's lack of a plan. Once elected, Andrea Horwath and our team at the Ontario NDP will make health care a top priority in Ontario. We are the only party with a plan in place to provide universal pharmacare and complete dental coverage for every person in Ontario."

Riding Liberal candidate Tim Rigby went against his competitors' nay-saying. He said the budget addressed "the tremendous change that is occurring in the economy, social structure and wealth distribution within our society."

"The tremendous challenges our social, economic, educational and governmental institutions face will not be met with the old policies of simply cutting taxes to the wealthy," he said. "We must create opportunity for all citizens and this budget is right on track to meet those challenges. There is more work to be done, of course, but the people of Ontario, and Bancroft, will be much better able to face the future with this budget."

Rigby said the budget addressed some of the concerns of Bancroft residents brought to his attention at a March 25 public concerned citizens' meeting.

"These programs are provided in the context of a balanced budget for 2017-'18 and a deliberate choice to make investments in care and services that people in this province rely on," he said. He called the proposed deficit "modest" and noted the budget outlined a "path back to balance by 2024-'25."