

Community Dispatch

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OPEN LETTER

THE IMPORTANCE OF UPLOADING ON COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

At a recent Halton Health and Social Services Committee meeting (September 27, 2011), Mayor Rob Burton of Oakville brought attention to the issue of uploading of provincial costs for social services and other services that may be affected by the upcoming Ontario provincial election. Community Development Halton shares these concerns, as we feel that provincial programs should be paid for by a progressive income tax system instead being borne by the regressive property tax base. We share with you an open letter prepared by Mayor Burton that clarifies this issue. We urge all Halton residents to reflect on these concerns.

*Joey Edwardh,
Executive Director*

Ontario voters are faced with a very important issue in the Provincial election being held on October 6th. Progressive Conservative Leader Tim Hudak has refused to commit to the 2008 agreement between the provincial government and Ontario municipalities to upload (transfer back to the Province of Ontario) social services and other costs, resulting in significant relief to property taxes. Mr. Hudak told Mayors who complained that he would make changes to wage arbitration rules for essential service providers that would be worth more.

When Halton Region financial staff did the math, they concluded that there will be an almost \$12 million hole in the Region of Halton's 2012 Budget after the provincial

election, if the Progressive Conservatives win and continue to refuse to commit to the 2008 agreement. Every program and service stands to suffer.

Halton taxpayers benefit from uploading ten times as much as they could from any altering of arbitration rules.

If uploading stops, we will have higher property taxes or serious program cuts. It's that simple.

By far the biggest component of the amounts that the current provincial government will upload from Halton taxpayers, \$11.7 million a year, is the so-called "pooling" contribution from local taxpayers to the City of Toronto for its social housing and welfare costs. Another \$6.1 million a year is for the costs of provincial welfare and court security costs, for a total of \$17.8 million a year to be lifted from the burden on Halton property taxpayers. The Oakville share is \$7.5 million a year.

In Halton, payrolls that are subject to arbitration are: police, fire, emergency and long term care. Oakville's share of these payrolls totals \$72 million. Bargaining has been coming in lately in a range under 3%. If arbitration changes led to a 1% lower wage increase in all essential services payrolls, Oakville's share of that change would be worth only \$720,000 to our

property taxpayers. The uploading of \$7.5 million a year from Oakville taxpayers is worth more than ten times this PC arbitration promise.

The Progressive Conservative Leader, Tim Hudak, should match the commitment given by the Liberal, NDP and Green parties to continue the shift of Toronto welfare and social housing costs and provincial welfare and court costs from local property taxpayers to the Province.

Duncan Foot, president of the Halton Region Police Association, said his members would hate to see local taxpayers caught between a decision to cut essential service workers or raise taxes unacceptably high. "Attacking the pay of essential employees such as police, fire, emergency and long term care workers who have no right to strike is unfair and short-sighted."

Carmen Santoro, president of the Oakville Professional Fire Fighters Association, said that the arbitration rules already require arbitrators to consider the ability of the municipality to pay salary increases: "The current system, ironically brought in under the Harris government, contains criteria for the arbitrators whereby they must consider the local municipalities ability to pay," Santoro pointed out.

The PCs, who say they need to find ways of paying for their platform promises, have already proposed a new downloading of costs to municipal property taxes, this time for the cost of hazardous waste disposal, which means a property tax increase of almost \$300 million for Ontarians.

Provincial uploading puts those costs more on provincial income taxes, which are shared among many people and businesses and not paid by many seniors and others on low or fixed incomes.

These PC proposals will hurt people who can least afford it.

The timetable that the Province of Ontario and Association of Municipalities of Ontario agreed to for uploading has given us a stable, long-term basis out to 2018 for municipal finances as we deal with controlling the costs of growth. The uploading agreement put us on a sound, business-like foundation.

It's amazing that PC leader Tim Hudak thinks that it's okay to rip up an agreement with municipalities. Governing is about reliable partnership agreements and fairness for property taxpayers.

Sincerely,

Mayor Rob Burton, BA, MS
Head of Council & CEO



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