

Jobs in focus as Provincial campaign hits Week 2



By Brock Weir

As the Provincial Election campaign settles into its second official week, local focus is shifting to jobs and public services.

Last week's announcement by Tim Hudak that 100,000 public sector jobs could be cut sparked questions on the campaign trail and came into focus earlier this week at a campaign fundraiser for PC candidate Jane Twinney.

Held before a packed audience of party faithful at Aurora's Aw, Shucks!, PC finance critic Vic Fedeli told the crowd that services Ontarians ?love, appreciate, and expect? in Ontario are ?under siege? due to growing deficits.

?We need to balance the budget because only a balanced budget will protect the very services you want and fight for,? he said. ?Because the budget wasn't balanced, the Liberal government cut physiotherapy for seniors, they cut cataract surgery three years in a row and they cut diabetes testing strips to seniors. That is the reality. That is what happens when you don't balance the budget. Now they are going deeper in deficit to \$12.5 billion. You can only imagine the cuts in healthcare that are going to come.?

These cuts, he argued, will be magnified the longer the budget is not balanced and the only way to get out of the hole is to cut these public sector provincial jobs by 100,000.

?We're not talking about doctors, nurses, police officers or any frontline workers,? Fedeli stated. ?We're talking about the LHINs (Local Health Integration Networks) and the \$300 million we spent on [them]. These are the fat cats who sit on six figure salaries who don't ever give you an MRI, take your temperature, and don't even put a Band-Aid on your finger and don't do anything frontline. This is \$300 million. That is the kind of cuts we are talking about.

?The Liberal talking points say that we are going to cut healthcare. They are the ones who actually cut healthcare this year because they actually have no money, because they spent the money and have gone into deficit. We are not talking about nurses, police officers, or frontline healthcare. We're talking the fat cats.?

Twinney expressed a similar view, stressing that frontline workers would not be impacted, but added the proposed cuts are necessary.

?There is going to be no impact on your frontline workers, the people who are going to be taking care of you,? she said. ?The impact is going to be through attrition, the people who are going to be retiring and the bureaucrats like in the LHINs who are not really doing any services that are directly affecting the residents of Newmarket-Aurora.

?There has to be some cuts. If there are going to be no cuts then we are never going to get Ontario out of debt and it is just going to

be worse and worse. In the end, there will be even more people out of work because of it. The bottom line is to get Ontario back on track. To do that, we're going to have to make some cuts to people who might be in positions who are not going to be affecting long-term care facilities, the people who are not going to be taking care of our seniors.?

Chris Ballard, Liberal candidate for Newmarket-Aurora, however, said he wasn't buying that line of argument. Stating he believed over 1,000 jobs would be impacted in Newmarket-Aurora alone under the PC plan, he said more details are needed on exactly who could find their jobs on the chopping block.

?I think that will have a significant impact on the day-to-day lives of many of us,? he said. ?I am not talking about nameless, faceless, government employees. We are talking about the people who take care of our children at schools, the people who take care of children with learning disabilities or autism. We are potentially talking about people who test our water to make sure it is safe. They are our neighbours, they are our friends, and they could be members of our family.

?People are asking me who are going to be losing their jobs. Will it be the teacher's aide? The administrator at the hospital or the secretary in the school? These are the people whose jobs are on the line, according to what we understand of this proposal. [Hudak] said that health and police would be exempt but I don't buy it. What about the secretaries, the administrative support, all of the people who make our hospitals work, and all of the people that make our police department work? They are on the line. If we lose them, all of the hospitals and our health care will suffer, the police services will suffer. This proposal has made people quite anxious in all sorts of areas.?