

Liberals want to cast social spending spree as pro-business investment^[1]

Ontario Liberals will go to voters in June painting their recent massive spending on child care and other social programs in a unique light.

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EXCERPTS

The Ontario Liberals will go to voters in June painting their recent massive spending on child care and other social programs as pro-business investment.

In a major Canadian Club speech Wednesday, Economic Development Minister Steven Del Duca signalled that affordability and expanding opportunity will be themes of the government's re-election plans.

"As a government, we're on the side of both employers and employees, because we're on the side of Ontarians," Del Duca told a Bay Street luncheon audience of around 200 people at the Fairmont Royal York.

The minister conceded that some business owners have expressed concern about the government raising the hourly minimum wage from \$11.60 to \$14 now and to \$15 next Jan. 1.

"I know that some of you, the very employers who have helped turn our economy around, are finding that choice hard. Particularly in businesses where margins are tight," he said.

"But ... if there are kids who don't look at their future with the same kind of hope as my kids, (and) if there are moms and dads struggling to make a decent wage when all the stats say our economy is strong, then we have to do more for them."

Del Duca noted the government "reduced the corporate income tax rate for small business from 4.5 per cent to 3.5 per cent, and (has) been cutting unnecessary red tape to help businesses grow."

"Here's the reality of Ontario's 21st century economy: Our competitors aren't places that make low-value goods in low-skill and low-wage economies," he said.

"We compete with places in the world that create high-value, high-quality goods produced by highly skilled and educated workforces ... places such as Germany, Japan, New York and California."

To bolster that, the government has launched pharmacare for everyone under 25 and free university and college tuition for low and middle-income families and has announced free child-care for preschoolers aged 2 and half years and up in last week's budget, Del Duca pointed out.

“For a family with just one child in university, free tuition represents thousands of dollars in savings over four years,” he said.

“So that more of us, including young moms and dads, have the time and the resources they need to find and keep a great job, we’re investing in free childcare for preschool-aged children. This investment will save families an average of \$17,000 per child during these preschool years.”

Never once mentioning Progressive Conservative Leader Doug Ford, who leads Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne in every public-opinion poll and has promised to slash spending by 4 per cent, Del Duca warned “you cannot cut your way to the top.”

“You cannot attract bright, innovative, diverse, educated, globally minded young workers if a government is trying to turn the clock back to a nonexistent past, where there is no climate change, where kids don’t need to learn about their bodies and their health in school.”

-reprinted from Toronto Star

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