

NDP promises \$12-a-day child care and lower deficits if elected ^[1]

The child care promise is the cornerstone pledge of party's ambitious 97-page platform, Change for the Better, launched Monday.

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EXCERPTS

Andrea Horwath is promising affordable child care — free for families who earn \$40,000 or less and an average of \$12-a-day for most others — if the NDP wins the June election.

That's the cornerstone pledge of the party's ambitious 97-page platform, Change for the Better, launched on Monday at Toronto Western Hospital.

"Our plan is not based on your little one's age; it's based on making sure everyone has childcare they can afford," said Horwath, taking a shot at the Liberals' new free daycare plan, which is limited to pre-schoolers aged two-and-a-half years until junior kindergarten.

About 70 per cent of Ontario parents would either have free child care or pay an average of \$12 a day in a licensed not-for-profit daycare — considerably lower than the \$100-daily-rate, now paid by some.

The NDP leader, who also vowed to increase by 50 per cent the number of child-care places in her first four-year mandate, said change is in the offing June 7 after almost 15 years of Liberal governance.

"Who will replace (Premier) Kathleen Wynne?" asked Horwath, cautioning against gambling on right-wing rookie Progressive Conservative Leader Doug Ford.

"Doug Ford's billions of dollars in cuts will hurt the very people who need help. He'll cut hospitals. He'll cut our children's schools. He'll cut transit, child care and so much more," she said.

"That's not change; that's going from bad to worse."

Horwath insisted an NDP government would be more fiscally responsible than Wynne's Liberals.

In that vein, her administration would run a \$3.3-billion deficit this year — this is half the Liberals' \$6.7 billion shortfall — and, just as the Grits have forecast, remain in the red for five years before balancing the books.

The New Democrats' fiscal plan, signed off on as "reasonable" by former parliamentary budget officer Kevin Page, is bolstered by higher taxes.

An NDP government would raise the corporate tax rate to 13 per cent from 11.5 per cent, close big business loopholes, and increase personal income tax on amounts earned more than \$220,000 by one percentage point and on earnings more than \$300,000 by two percentage points.

As well, a new three-per-cent surcharge will be slapped on luxury cars and SUVs that cost more than \$90,000.

"We are going to protect middle- and lower-income families and make sure everyone has better services," said Horwath.

"To get it done, we will make sure the most profitable corporations and the wealthiest people start paying their fair share," she said, noting rich businessmen such as Ford will see their taxes rise.

"Let's ask those at the top to pay a bit more."

Along with means-tested child care, which would be free for low-income earners and an average of \$12 per day for others, the NDP is promising publicly funded dental care for the one-third of Ontarians without workplace coverage.

While the Liberals have a free pharmacare program for seniors and those 24 and under for 4,400 medications, the NDP would cover all age groups, but only for 125 prescription drugs.

The New Democrats would hike hospital spending by 5.3 per cent annually and add 2,000 beds immediately.

On electricity, the NDP would buy back the majority stake of Hydro One that Wynne sold off, using dividends from the shares to bankroll

that.

But the party would cancel the Liberals' "Fair Hydro Plan," which has already cut bills by 25 per cent through a costly borrowing scheme.

"It was a desperate move and completely unsustainable," the platform states.

The NDP believes its own proposals, including an end to time-of-use pricing, could cut hydro bills by 30 per cent, more than offsetting the end of the Liberal subsidy.

As a sop to teachers' unions, Horwath would end standardized Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) testing.

"We should focus on improvement without driving teachers to 'teach to the test.' We estimate this will save \$40 million, which we will reinvest in the classroom," the platform states.

The Tories, who have abandoned the 78-page People's Guarantee program of former leader Patrick Brown, have yet to unveil their new election platform under Ford.

Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care interim co-ordinator Laurel Rothman lauded the NDP for focusing on affordability for infants and toddlers as their first priority. However, she said it would be "a challenge" to ensure there are enough new licensed spaces and trained early childhood educators (ECEs) to work in them.

"Many more ECEs are required to work with infants and toddlers than preschoolers. And they require a physical space that is more specialized," she said.

The Liberals have promised offering free child care for preschoolers by 2020 as their first priority because there are already 110,000 licensed spots available. By contrast, there are only about 12,000 infant spaces and 43,000 toddler spots.

With files from Laurie Monsebraaten

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