

Harris legacy might live on in (gasp!) education [CA-ON] ^[1]

Author: Urquhart, Ian (Opinion)

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EXCERPTS

In the dying days of his regime two years ago, Mike Harris did not cover himself in glory.

He took a taxpayer-funded junket to Los Angeles with his girlfriend; flew a government plane to New Orleans to see the Super Bowl; sued the Globe and Mail for libel (with taxpayers picking up his legal fees); gave several speeches and interviews denouncing his critics and denying he had made any mistakes (except for not moving quickly enough to implement change); ate a \$620 meal at one of Toronto's most exclusive restaurants (courtesy of Hydro One); and set in motion the ill-advised deregulation of the electricity market and sale of Hydro One.

But one of his last acts as premier has actually produced something useful: the appointment of a task force to study "the role of government."

Specifically, the task force says education - or, "investing in human capital" should be the Ontario's top priority.

To achieve this goal, the task force calls for the introduction of all-day kindergarten; a "network" of child-care services for younger children; charter schools; the empowering of school councils; the return of province-wide exit exams for high schoolers; additional funding for universities deregulation of tuition fees; and for students, an income-contingent loan repayment program.

One might jump to that conclusion, especially after Premier Dalton McGuinty sat on it for seven weeks before releasing it last week, and then offered this cool assessment of its contents: "This report helps provide some context for the decisions we have to make now."

But maybe not. While much of the report will undoubtedly be rejected out of hand by the Liberals (including the recommendations for charter schools and deregulation of tuition fees), some of it dovetails with what the McGuinty government is already doing or at least contemplating (including performance agreements, the emphasis on early childhood education, and giving taxing power to the cities).

And the overall thrust - make education the top priority - happens to correspond with McGuinty's personal belief.

So in an unexpected way, Harris' legacy could live on in the form of this task force report.

- reprinted from Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

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