

INSIDE QUEEN'S PARK

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HARINDER TAKHAR

Harinder Takhar is MPP for Mississauga—Erindale. Originally elected in 2003 he has served as Minister of Transportation, Small Business and Entrepreneurship and as Minister of Government Services.

IQP: Our standard opening question: what is your two-minute, elevator journey case for asking Liberals to choose Harinder Takhar as Ontario Liberal leader?

Takhar: I came to Canada with less than seven dollars in my pocket, so I understand the value of the dollar, and I've gone through other things that Ontarians are going through like recognition of qualifications when my experience was not recognized here. I had to find a job, work during the day and study at night. So that's why my platform actually is very people-focused. When I actually declared my candidacy I basically talked about the 100-day plan. Ontario faces a \$14B deficit. If we don't tackle the deficit, it actually translates into debt, and then there is about \$10B worth of interest that we are paying on that debt. We need to find ways to create jobs. That's why I'm proposing an Ontario small business government agency. It should bring a holistic approach so these small businesses. By providing them access to capital and opening new markets for them, we can actually create jobs.

IQP: Like Charles Sousa, you are a new Canadian. You are also a visible-minority MPP. How important are these factors?

Takhar: I don't like to pigeonhole myself like that. I have been in Canada for 38 years; I'm not sure how long you remain a new Canadian. My kids were born here; I got married here; I graduated here. So I see people as Ontarians and I see people as Canadians. That's how I would like to be perceived.

IQP: You have now released your fully-costed financial plan. Outline this for our readers, please.

Takhar: The key point of my plan is elimination of the deficit. So how I will eliminate the deficit is a three pronged approach: one is to actually increase revenue. I'm saying that we will increase the GDP by 1% over a 3-year period, and that will not only bring more government revenue but it will also have a multiplier impact on consumption, giving us a substantial amount of money to eliminate the debt. Secondly, there are savings there to be had. For example in school boards, the student population has gone down by about 120K while the workforce has gone up by about 25K. If we leave the in-class teachers in there, and eliminate what has increased since 2002 by 70%, we save about \$600M. Those were the recommendations of the Drummond Commission. I think they make a lot of sense, and I am prepared to implement them. Thirdly, we need to apply efficiencies to the way we do things in the Ontario government. I also propose that it's quite reasonable to reduce our workforce by about 3% over a 3-year period. I'm also saying that we need to look at the underground

economy, because it will yield incredible revenue. We should have a central procurement agency for the Ontario government, to save us from \$250M to over \$500M.

IQP: You have proposed an Ontario Infrastructure Savings Bond. Explain that please.

Takhar: Infrastructure development is one of the bigger issues that the province is facing. For decades, infrastructure was ignored. Our government has done quite well putting new infrastructure in place, but going forward there is a huge demand for infrastructure. Look at the City of Toronto. So the question obviously becomes how can we finance new hospitals, schools and highways? We will create dedicated infrastructure savings bonds. Right now, Ontario's debt is \$272B. A substantial portion of that debt is financed by foreign nationals. The interest income actually goes to the foreign nationals who do not pay any taxes in Ontario. I am proposing to apply competitive interest rates to these infrastructure savings bonds. They will be tax-free in Ontario, so that Ontarians can get a good return.

IQP: Where are you on the left-right spectrum?

Takhar: I am what I am, and my experiences have shaped my life. I consider myself very fiscally conservative. I would like to see every dollar stretched as far as possible. But at the same time, we must make sure that the needs of vulnerable people are met – for instance to protect vulnerable workers from exploitation by temporary labour agencies. We also want to assist people with disabilities as well. So I want to make sure that we balance the budget. I want to make sure that the jobs are created,

IQP: Which of your campaign proposals do you consider would surprise people?

Takhar: People will be surprised to find how much we can do with the \$10.5B interest we pay on the debt. That would allow us to build 29 km of new subways every year. It would pay for procuring 250K buses every year. Or we could double the number of doctors and nurses in the province. Those are the kinds of things we could do, if we could eliminate our total debt in this province. I also think people will be surprised how little we are spending on my campaign. It will come in below \$100K while my competitors are spending three to four times that. That basically says who I am, how I want to run the province and how I'm running my campaign.

IQP: Finally, redistributing electoral boundaries.

Takhar: Every vote should have the same importance. We will protect northern seats but other boundaries should be revised to equalize riding populations.

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