government that works for you

THE ONTARIO LIBERAL PLAN FOR A MORE DEMOCRATIC ONTARIO
April 2003

During the provincial election of 1971, when I was a teenager, over 73% of eligible voters went to the polls.

By the 1999 election, the turnout among eligible voters was little over 50%.

When barely half our population takes the time to exercise their most basic democratic right, when turnout among young people and new Canadians hardly hits one-third, real change is needed.

People have lost faith in their politicians and their institutions of government.

Disturbing as it is, it is not hard to understand why.

For decades we have watched our democratic institutions erode. And for the last eight years we have seen these trends accelerate dramatically under the Harris-Eves government.

Public consultation on major legislation used to be automatic. Now it is the rare exception.

MPP’s used to be respected representatives of the people. Now they are bit players manipulated to do the bidding of the Premier and his unelected advisors.

Government advertising used to be an occasional tool to convey essential information to the public. Now it is an everyday abuse of taxpayers’ money by a government trying to make itself look good.

Elections used to be designed to foster public participation. Now the timing and rules are cynically manipulated to reduce turnout and minimize exposure of the government’s record.
It doesn’t have to be this way.

This is our agenda for reforming government. While the Harris-Eves approach has been to denigrate public service and promote narrow private interests, we will bring the people back to the centre of politics.

Our ambitious plan won’t cost taxpayers a penny. It will actually save millions of dollars while making government more effective, responsive and accountable to you.

Nothing inspires me more than the opportunity to combat the cynicism that far too many people feel about Ontario politics.

As we enter the next provincial election, I will have three children in university and a fourth completing high school. I find it unacceptable that their generation may be so turned off by our political system that they will virtually abandon representative democracy.

We cannot let that happen. I will not let that happen.

Join me in making the Ontario government your government.

Dalton McGuinty
Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party
The Harris-Eves government has grown further and further out of touch with your needs. They have favoured special interests over the public interest. We know that the government of Ontario belongs to the people of Ontario. Our decisions will be made in the interests of all Ontarians, not those of a select few.

The Harris-Eves government took every opportunity to exclude Ontarians from the political process. They shortened the election period, manipulated election dates for political advantage and distorted the rules to discourage tenants, students and rural voters from having their say. We will make the political process in Ontario more inclusive. We will hold elections on fixed dates, introduce Internet voting and work to increase voter turnout by at least 10%.

The Harris-Eves government diminished our democratic institutions by cutting off debates on major laws, failing to show up in the Legislature and presenting a taxpayer-funded infomercial instead of a real budget. We will make our institutions more democratic by freeing your MPP to represent you, mandating public consultation on all major legislation, requiring Ministers to attend Question Period and giving you the choice to change the way we elect a government.

The Harris-Eves government gave money too much influence and citizens too little. They more than doubled the limit on tax-deductible corporate contributions and effectively eliminated political spending limits. We will give you power over the role of money in politics, by asking you to set strict limits on the amounts political parties can raise and spend. We will put the public interest ahead of special interests.
The Harris-Eves government has wasted your money by spending almost a billion dollars on partisan ads, consultants and spin-doctors. **We will respect your hard-earned tax dollars.** We will ban partisan government ads, balance our budgets and give more power to the Provincial Auditor to make sure your money is spent wisely.
strengthening our democracy

The Harris-Eves government has attacked our democratic institutions for eight years. They limited debate and prevented MPP’s from representing you effectively. They eroded democratic accountability by creating a taxpayer-funded infomercial and passing it off as a budget. We will give you more power, respect your representatives and equip them to represent you better.

The Harris-Eves Record: Parliamentary Democracy

- Changed the rules to restrict debate and limit the power of your representatives.
- Forcibly closed debate on 60% of bills, up from 1% in 1985.
- Fewer than half of the bills introduced by the Harris-Eves government since 1999 have received public hearings.
- Since 1995, the Legislature sat only 78 days per year or 21% of the time. This year, the Harris-Eves “Christmas Break” will last until the end of April – 138 days!

Your democracy should work in your best interests, not in the best interests of the party in power. The rules of the Ontario Legislature should help your elected MPP’s represent you, not make it easier for the Premier and his unelected advisors and spin-doctors to shut you out.

Fair elections on fixed dates

We will have fixed dates for elections.

We will take away the Premier’s “divine right” to set election dates when it is politically opportune for the government. It is time to put the silly guessing game behind us once and for all.

Instead, an election will normally occur every four years on a pre-determined date. In the event a government is defeated on a non-confidence motion, special rules will allow for an early vote.
**Voting reform**

You will decide how elections work.

The time has come for a full, open public debate on voting reform. When almost half of the public does not see the point in heading to the polls, we have already had a non-confidence vote in our democracy.

“Thoughtful Canadians have remained troubled by the first-past-the-post voting system, or by consequences of that system – cynicism about government, the centralization of power... the lack of effective checks and balances to that power, government out of touch with voters, and the regional alienation fuelled by skewed election results under and over representing votes.”

– Jeffrey Simpson, *The Friendly Dictatorship*

The only way to reverse this trend is through engaging citizens in an open and honest debate about our democracy. After consulting with the public, we will hold a referendum on whether we should keep our winner-take-all voting system or replace it with another.

Alternatives to our voting system could include some form of proportional representation, preferential ballots or mixed systems. What matters most is that you will choose the electoral system that best represents our democratic values and diverse society.

**Higher voter turnout**

We will target an increase in voter turnout of at least 10%.

Exercising your right to vote should be as easy as possible. The permanent voters list, used for the first time in the last provincial election, created serious problems that led to poor turnouts in low-income and high-rental-density areas, as well as among young Ontarians. We will counter these effects with supplementary, targeted voter enumeration to ensure that these groups are not overlooked.
We will also make it easier for disabled Ontarians to exercise their right to vote.

Combined with the other measures outlined in this document, these changes will help increase voter turnout in the next election by at least 10%.

**Internet voting**

**We will make online voting an option.**

It is time to bring the way we vote into the 21st century. We will ensure that Internet voting is an available option, without compromising security. It will not be mandatory for any voter.

Initially, online voting will be at a polling place or bank machine-style voting kiosk in a public place. As voters become more comfortable with the technology, it will evolve to include the option to vote from home or work on a secure Internet connection.

**Democracy between elections**

**We will give you new ways to make your voice heard.**

The Harris-Eves government listened to their advisors, not to the people of Ontario. We will create new lines of communication to make sure your voice is heard in government. For example, we will look to Citizens’ Juries, made up of representative groups of Ontarians, to provide advice on a broad range of issues.

Based on the traditional jury system, Citizens’ Juries have been used effectively in many jurisdictions, including Britain, the U.S. and Germany, as well as by the Romanow Commission in Canada.
**Respect for your MPP**

We will give your elected representative more power.

Your MPP should be free to represent your views, not just parrot the views of his or her party. We will make sure all non-cabinet MPP’s are free to criticize and vote against government legislation, with the exception of explicit campaign promises and confidence matters.

We will scrap the changes the Harris-Eves government made to the Standing Orders of the Legislature that concentrated power in the hands of spin-doctors and advisors. We will give more independence and power to legislative committees, including the right to initiate legislation.

We will bring a team approach to governing. We will respect and draw on the talents and expertise of every elected representative, including opposition members.

**Question Period**

We will show up for Question Period.

Under the Harris-Eves government, the Legislature sat too seldom. And when it did, the Premier and his ministers too often failed to show up for work.

We will require all cabinet ministers to attend at least two-thirds of Question Periods. Any cabinet member who fails to meet that standard will be fined $500 for each additional Question Period missed.
**Mandatory public hearings**

We will require public hearings for all major legislation.

The public should be given the opportunity to comment on any legislation of significance. Yet the norm has become the exception under the Harris-Eves government. Drastic reforms to education, municipal government and social policy have been forced through the Legislature without public hearings.

Public input is essential to good government. We will ensure that you have the opportunity to offer comment on all major bills.

**Accountable agencies and appointments**

We will lift the veil of secrecy on government agencies and appointments.

Major government agencies, boards and commissions are large and important bodies. Yet they operate with too little accountability to the people of Ontario.
Ontario Power Generation controls assets valued at over $16 billion. The LCBO receives over $2 billion in annual revenue. The Ontario Realty Corporation holds hundreds of millions of dollars in government land.

We will end the lack of transparency and accountability these organizations enjoyed under the Harris-Eves government and protect your investments.

We will empower a legislative committee to question the heads of these government-owned agencies on an annual basis. In addition to appointing qualified individuals to fill these roles, we will publicly disclose the annual payments — not just per diem rates — to all individuals sitting on agencies, boards and commissions. Employees will be subject to the same salary disclosure rules as public servants.

The kind of abuses uncovered at Hydro One must never be repeated. We will make all government agencies subject to the Freedom of Information Act and insist that they disclose significant expense claims by board members and executives.

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A valued public service

We will value our public servants and support them in their work.

Good government requires both inspired political leadership and a motivated, high-quality public service. One cannot succeed without the other.

The Harris-Eves government insulted public servants, eroded the capacity of the Ontario Public Service and erased the boundary between partisan and public service activities. At the same time, they awarded contracts to private companies to deliver public services, all too often resulting in higher costs and less accountability.

We believe in excellence in public service. We will respect and support the men and women of the Ontario Public Service and those in the broader public sector. We will harness their skills and commitment to help implement real, positive change for Ontario.

We will build our public service for the future. We will launch a campaign to recruit Ontario’s best and brightest to public service.
reducing the influence of money in politics

Under the Harris-Eves government, money has too much influence and you have too little. They raised donation limits to unprecedented levels and virtually eliminated spending restrictions on political parties. They spent more money on election campaigns and leadership contests than any party in Ontario history.

Rules for political contributions and expenditures should not be set by those who can benefit. You will set limits on the role of money in politics.

The Harris-Eves government opened the door to big money in Ontario politics. They effectively eliminated spending limits. They increased contribution ceilings by nearly 80% and more than doubled the limit on tax-deductible corporate political donations.

The Harris-Eves Record: Money and Politics

- Increased annual individual donation limits by 78%, from $7,000 to $12,500.
- Increased election year donation limits from $14,000 to $25,000.
- Effectively abolished election spending limits, by excluded spending on major categories like “research” and Leader’s tour.
- More than doubled the limit on tax-deductible corporate gifts to political parties, from $7,000 per year to $15,000.

We believe that public decisions must be made in the public interest, not in the interests of a few well-financed political supporters. That is why we will give you real power to decide what role money should play in the political process.
You will have the right to set lower limits on money in politics.

We need strict limits on how much money political parties can raise and spend. You should set those limits, not the people who benefit from them. We will ask you and your fellow citizens to set those limits through Citizens’ Juries. They will also set fines for abuse of those limits.

Limits on raising and spending money should not be limited to the brief few weeks of an election campaign. In modern politics, much of the “campaign” spending occurs before the election is even called.

Leadership contests are a free-for-all when it comes to raising and spending money. Ernie Eves collected more than $6 million to win the 2002 PC leadership – more than any party, much less individual, could legally spend during the province-wide election campaign in 1999.

Citizens’ Juries will be authorized to establish spending and contribution limits to apply to both pre-election spending and party leadership contests.

We will fully disclose donations in real time.

You deserve to know who donates to political parties as those donations happen. We will make sure contributions are disclosed in real time, as they occur, and made public over the Internet.

The same process will apply for real-time disclosure of contributions and expenses during party leadership contests.
accountability for your tax dollars

No government has ever spent more of your money and given you less in return than the Harris-Eves government. You deserve a government that respects the value of your hard-earned tax dollars.

The Harris-Eves Record: Wasting Your Money

- Sold Highway 407 for a fraction of its value, then sold out commuters by allowing skyrocketing tolls.
- Wasted $662 million on private consultants last year alone.
- Wasted more than $250 million on partisan government ads.
- More than doubled spending in the Premier’s/Cabinet Offices since 1995.

The Harris-Eves government treats your money like it is their own. We think that is irresponsible.

We will treat your hard-earned tax dollars with respect. We will deliver a government that works as hard as you do to deliver value for your money.

Balanced budgets

We will balance the budget.

We will live within our means by balancing the budget and not adding to the debt.

The Harris-Eves government added $21 billion to the debt and was the second last government in Canada to balance their budget. We will comply with the Taxpayer Protection Act and balanced budget legislation, not bend the law at whim.
Respect for the people’s House

We will table the provincial budget where it belongs – in the Legislature.

It is a well-respected tradition to present the provincial budget in the people’s House – the Legislature of Ontario.

In 2003, the Ernie Eves government made a mockery of that tradition and of our democracy. The Ernie Eves government presented a “budget” in a makeshift television studio before a handpicked audience – a contemptible, unconstitutional attempt to escape public scrutiny.

Every Liberal budget will be presented where it belongs, before the people’s representatives in the Ontario Legislature.
The Harris-Eves Record: Canada’s First Unconstitutional Budget

“This decision is a gross affront to parliamentary democracy. It is an act of arrogance without precedent in the history of Canada.”
– Robert Marleau, Former Clerk of the Canadian House of Commons

“....there is a constitutional convention requiring the Government to announce its Budget in the Legislative Assembly. The Government’s proposal to give its Budget Speech outside of the House is thus unconstitutional.”
– Legal Opinion of Neil Finkelstein, Constitutional Lawyer, as delivered to Speaker Gary Carr

No partisan advertising

We will ban self-promotional government advertising.

The Harris-Eves government has wasted over $250 million of your tax dollars on self-promotional television, radio and print advertisements. Every dollar spent on self-serving ads is a dollar less for classrooms, water inspectors or CT scans.

We will implement the McGuinty bill to ban self-promotional government advertising and authorize the Provincial Auditor to review and approve all government advertising in advance.

“First, Ernie Eves’s government shouldn’t be using millions of dollars of taxpayers’ money to distribute what amounts to Tory party propaganda. And second, this pamphlet is another phase in the campaign to sell the budget to the voters before submitting it to the Ontario legislature – that is, another attempt to subvert parliamentary democracy.”
– Anthony Westell, The Globe and Mail, April 22, 2003
More budget scrutiny

We will make the budget more accountable by expanding the powers of the Provincial Auditor.

The Harris-Eves government hides half of the budget from the Provincial Auditor. They deny him access to the province’s balance sheet when it comes to spending by hospitals, universities, school boards, the hydro companies and other major organizations funded by the people of Ontario. We will give the Auditor the power to scrutinize them all so that you know whether your dollars are being well spent.

Open government

We will make the government’s business your business.

The Harris-Eves government has treated public disclosure as a threat to effective government. We see it as exactly the opposite – a basic right and an essential means of ensuring that decisions are made in the public interest.

Under the Harris-Eves government, the public has no right to know the details, and therefore no ability to judge the merits, of major transactions such as the sale of highway 407 or salary and severance provisions for executives of key corporations like Hydro One.
We will require that all future contracts signed by the government be subject to public scrutiny, including calls to tender, successful bids, asset sales and long-term leases.

Where legitimate confidentiality concerns prevent certain provisions from being released, we will make them available to the Provincial Auditor to make a public interest ruling.

You have a right to know how your money is being spent. We will make sure you can exercise it.
you have a choice

A choice between a tired, cynical government that is out for itself or an energetic, responsible government that works hard for you.

Between a government that undermines public institutions to serve private interests or one that puts the public first.

Between a government that shuts you out or one that invites you in.

Choose change. Choose government that works for you.

Choose Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberals.

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