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ADDRESS TO ONTARIO NDP CAUCUS SEPTEMBER 6, 2023

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good morning team!

It is so terrific to be here with all of you, as we start our Caucus Retreat here in beautiful Kitchener.

Look at all of us... a strong, 29-member team – representing every corner of this province. From the north, to the south. The west, to the east. From downtown Toronto to Sandy Lake First Nation in the far north west. From Nepean to Windsor, from London to Hearst. We have a powerful movement here... and outside these doors. With volunteers eager to connect with Ontarians. Riding Association members. Activists. All across this great province.

I'm proud of the work we are doing in our communities and at Queen's Park.

And I'm grateful ...

Grateful for the trust you have put in me, and for how we have worked together to take on a government that is hellbent on making a select few of their already very rich friends, even richer...

A government that has **rejected** the basic principles, the oath that we all swore when we were elected – an oath of ethics, integrity, accountability, and trust.

With each passing day Doug Ford and his Conservative government seem to be getting more audacious, more brazen with their tactics.

They've pushed Ontarians to the brink and Ontarians have had enough.

Going into these past few months, I knew we had our work cut out for us dealing with municipal overhauls, the continued sell-off of our public health care and ...B and oh my god the Greenbelt--

Ontarians --- and all of us – knew something didn't smell right about that deal.

Queen's Park

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But I can honestly say, we were all surprised by the depth of what was revealed by the Auditor General's investigation. Sadly, it confirmed **exactly** what we had been saying – that this government has been up to some very dirty deals...

And now the Integrity Commissioners report – even **more** damning and all the more reason for us to keep up the pressure and stay focussed on exposing the truth for Ontarians.

Our work. Your work – your focus – has resulted in the resignation from Cabinet – finally – of Minister of Housing, Steve Clark.

But now is not the time for us to rest, because we are just starting to get the answers about what happened here. And Ontarians deserve the truth.

And if we don't stop the corrupt Conservatives from carving up the Greenbelt, and selling off our healthcare and education systems to the highest bidder... they will do this over and over and over again. I mean, bulldozing the greenbelt through dodgy backroom deals shows you just how far they'll go.

The work **we** did to get those reports – which finally gave Ontarians some transparency - was SO important and none of it would have been possible without **all of you** – we know that Ontarians are counting us to not leave any stone unturned... but also deliver the solutions they so desperately need to survive the current housing, healthcare, climate and affordability crises.

The Ontario NDP's presence at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference was all the confirmation I needed that everyone -- from municipalities, city councillors, reeves – really, most Ontarians -- are fed up with where Doug Ford is leading this province.

We met with 26 delegations at AMO and so many people are **still** reaching out to me and my office, to thank us for the work we are doing, to thank us for SEEING them and the housing, cost-of-living, and funding issues they are facing...

People are **ready** for the values, the policies that **New Democrats** bring to the table.

Even, yes, in communities where they have voted conservative for generations. I know because I've spent my summer on the road – talking to people about what they are going through and hearing their ideas to fix things.

Because we - the Ontario NDP – we're about giving people **a leg up**;

bringing people **together**;

investing in health care, education, mental health;

making sure that working people have what they need to support themselves, their families and their communities;

Because it's by building **strong and caring communities** that we'll build a truly prosperous Ontario

The Greenbelt scandal is a glimpse into the way Doug Ford and the Conservatives operate, and it is also a perfect example of what we stand against:

Cronyism. Insider deals. Using the power of government not to make life better for people – but to enrich a wealthy few.

It makes my blood boil that we have a government that is **willingly** and **consciously** putting our environment, food security and well-being at risk, under the false premise that this has anything to do with housing or affordability.

They're disrespecting the people who put them into office, taking them for fools – because Ontarians know very well that developing luxury sprawl on the Greenbelt, will do nothing to build the affordable housing we need... and **everything** to make life even more expensive.

The Greenbelt grab just shows us how little they care, if they even care at all.

They're willing to risk this province -- our province – as well as present and future generations.

The Greenbelt is a jewel. It's prime agricultural land. It gives us food. Protects us from floods. It's a carbon sink. It's where Ontarians go to hike and experience nature. And this government wants to take that away from us? Well, they have another thing coming...

All of you, holding Doug Ford's feet to the fire – forcing him to listen...because once the Greenbelt, and its vital and crucial ecological land is gone, it's gone forever.

This summer made my resolve even stronger. Our province was – and is – literally burning. Things have never been this bad – I know we're all in this to protect future generations from extreme weather events – heatwaves, heavy rainfalls and severe storms -- I know we're fighting so hard because we know what's at stake for our neighbours and the communities we represent. .

For future generations.

Doug Ford is playing these games because he's cynical, because the Conservatives are cynical, and they believe the people of this province are cynical.

No. That's so far from the truth.

Disillusioned, maybe – but Ontarians are not cynical.

When I was at the Metro picket line recently – and thank you to all of you who joined that line and others -- I heard from workers who have been working for Metro for almost 40 years on \$20/hour wages. They're close to retiring yet they're on the line, striking. Because they know it's not about them, but about the workers and people that are coming after them.

They were fighting because they want their successors to be able to afford food in the very store they work in. So that CEOs and executives don't line their pockets with profits off the backs of people who are on the ground, working outrageously long shifts, but proud of the service they provide and the communities they feed.

And those Metro workers – they exercised their people power – and they *WON*.

No, the people of this province are not cynical.

They are tired of the status quo from Conservative and Liberal governments and the scandals they bring – from Greenbelt corruption to gas plants, Walkerton, Ornge, eHealth... governments that put their own interests first, and the needs of Ontarians last.

I saw my friend, Unifor National President, Lana Payne on Labour Day and we were talking about this moment we are in. It feels historic. Things are bad for so many people. But they are also not willing to settle for half measures, or meagre offerings. they've had enough.

Lana has this saying that I remember from back home in Newfoundland when I was growing up.

A match to a blasty bough...

First of all... you need to know what a blasty bough is. It's when you have a branch of pine or fir, and it's dried up so much it's practically grey...

And years ago, employers, merchants, underestimated the ability of fishermen and plant workers and such to organize into a union. But things had gotten so bad. Decades and decades of exploitation and injustice.... that when the idea struck, it was like a match to a blasty bough... The fire was lit.

Over and over regular people are underestimated. Taken for granted. But then.... the fire is lit.

People are looking at us to lead the way, and to do things differently, and they are seeing how New Democrats **stand up for them**.

When I look around this room, I see the resolve, desire to shake things up. I see how each and every one of you are turning up for your constituents, door knocking, listening, and doing things differently.

I still think about when I flew into Thunder Bay for the swearing in of new Nishnabe aski nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler. His words on what it means to be a leader really moved me.

He said it's a privilege. That comes with listening. And of always learning. From your successes and your mistakes.

One of the big reasons I ran to be leader of this party is because the disillusionment Ontarians have at the moment was - frankly - making me sad.

So many people chose not to vote last election because they believed their vote and voice doesn't matter.

But we know that it does.

And we are connecting with them. In every corner of Ontario. And we are making sure they are heard. And we are showing them the difference we can make. Together. And that... that is true leadership.

I'll say this much -- it's not an easy time to be in Opposition, but the work we're doing is more important than ever.

I'm excited about where we're headed. I'm excited about the next two and a half years to 2026 when we win government.

We've already made real progress.

Doug Ford and the Conservatives are sweating from the way we're turning up heat on them on behalf of the people of this province;

how we're standing on picket lines with workers from Hamilton to Toronto (hello TVO) to Ottawa (hello Hydro workers) to Windsor to Bradford (library workers!) while the Conservatives are busy making cozy backroom deals with insider developers;

how *we're* taking the climate crisis seriously while they rip open important ecological land;

and how we're *actually fighting* to make life more affordable in meaningful ways when they can't think beyond constructing McMansions and luxury spas for millionaires.

Over the next few days, we're going to continue to define our solutions – our offer – to the people of Ontario to make life easier for them.

To raise wages and lower the cost of living – so people don't have to live paycheque to paycheque. This is a need we've already heard loud and clear while we've been out canvassing for Debbie Chapman, our terrific candidate here in Kitchener Centre. People. Need. Relief.

We're going to continue to define our solutions to make life easier for people.

Our solutions to shorten wait times for health care and keep ERs open.

Our solutions to ensuring our children, our elders, the most vulnerable in our communities get the support they need, when they need it.

Our solutions to get the federal *and provincial* governments **back in the business of building homes that people can actually afford**

And to build strong, caring communities where everyone has access to quality public schools, good jobs, clean drinking water, social supports, decent, safe jobs, and the opportunities for a good life that everyone deserves.

Ontarians are noticing the difference. More Ontarians are writing to us; saying thank you for standing up for them; asking what they can do to help; and how they can join the progressive movement.

And I want to thank all of you for the work you have been doing each and every day... serving your communities. Serving Ontarians. NDP MPPs do more because we never take this privileged position – or the oaths we’ve sworn – for granted.

We’re fighting for affordability, public health care, stronger services, yes... but we are also fighting to return basic order to government and democracy, too. Returning *trust*.

Let’s continue to stand united. Let’s stand strong. And let’s keep pushing back against this government’s dirty and selfish politics.

Let’s continue to *win more for people*.

Today and everyday till we win government in 2026.

Thank you for all your hard work and passion. Merci! Meegwetch!

We can work together to reach this vision, now, and for the future.

Because Ontario wouldn’t be where it is today without the work that our municipalities do each and every day.

Thank you for that work, and all that you do.

Thank you for keeping Ontario moving and running.

I look forward to meeting and chatting with you all.

Thank you!

Merci!

Meegwetch!