

# Why Doug Ford deserves to win

By Conrad Black

Ontario is going to the polls next week with a year remaining in the Ford government's present term; voters don't generally like premature elections unless there is a good reason for them. Counterintuitively, the country did reelect Justin Trudeau in a premature election in 2021 on the basis of his handling of the Covid pandemic, which was in fact absurdly overreactive, authoritarian, and grossly expensive. He was assisted by the fact that the official opposition's position



Doug Ford speaks during the Chief's Gala at RBC Place in London, Ontario on Wednesday January 29, 2025. PHOTO BY DEREK RUTTAN/LONDON FREE PRESS/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

was that they would establish a royal commission to evaluate the official reaction to the pandemic instead of coming out slugging and making the government pay at the polls for its poorly thought-out and executed response to the

public health crisis. The current Ontario election is later in the mandate than the 2021 federal election was and the reason for the election call is to give Doug Ford's Progressive Conservative government a strong mandate to deal with his province's response to trade and related challenges arising from the United States government's threat of sharply increased tariffs.

While this would not normally be thought primarily a provincial issue, since provinces do not have authority over external trade, as Ontario has about 40 per cent of Canada's

population and probably 70 per cent of its manufacturing, and Premier Ford has been very vocal in calling for a vigorous response to the Americans, his reasoning for returning to the voters is not implausible. The facts that the federal governing party is changing leaders and that there will be a federal election this year sometime between April and October, could be deemed to confer additional influence upon the premier of the country's most populous province and the one where increased tariffs would have the greatest impact. In terms of visible partisan energy, it has not been a very conspicuous campaign. There are relatively few signs extolling the virtues of the parties and the candidates, but that may be a consequence of the unusually cold and snowy winter that is not at all conducive to inserting election signs in frozen ground.

My own attention to the campaign has not been particularly attentive but from what I have seen, both the Liberal leader, Bonnie Crombie and NDP leader Marit Stiles, have done reasonably well in their first elections as party leaders and both made a respectable showing in the debates. Premier Ford is a well-known commodity in Ontario and particularly in Toronto where in the 2014 Toronto mayoral election, standing on the popularity of his late brother Mayor Rob Ford and himself, "Ford Nation," he ran a very strong second to incumbent Mayor John Tory, who was effectively a fusion Liberal-Conservative candidate. Ford had over 80 per cent of Tory's vote and pulled almost 150 per cent of the vote of the present mayor Olivia Chow who was essentially the NDP candidate, (and the widow of the all-time most successful NDP federal leader, Jack Layton). Doug Ford has the mind of a businessman and considers himself a businessman rather than a politician and his government has a good record in achieving job creating investment. He has avoided the egregious truckling to the employees of the provincial government that is the stock in trade of the Liberals and the NDP, but has not had to endure the obstructionism and confrontations that

bedevilled the last elected Ontario Conservative government of Mike Harris. The premier is forthright, unpretentious, likeable, and competent. He's not as formidable as John Robarts or as articulate as Bill Davis or as cultured as Bob Rae, but he is solid and sensible and effective and is even further from Dalton McGinty and Kathleen Wynne, authors of Ontario's very own negative economic miracle that almost made it a have-not province.

In order to make a recommendation, I have scrutinized the platforms of the contending parties. On education, the Progressive Conservatives are preferable as they have confined themselves to a commitment to spend \$1.3 billion building or expanding 45 schools, where the NDP will not only spend \$830 million per year on school repairs, it will hire more staff, end streaming between applied or academic tracks, add \$1500 of funding for every elementary and secondary school student, permanently increase base funding for post-secondary education, increase funding for the student assistance plan, convert loans to grants and wipe out interest on student debt. This is a recipe for fewer and fewer graduates of secondary school and university capable of earning a living from what they have learned, for lower standards of proficiency in all school and university graduates, no incentive at all for better teaching and better results, and continued descent towards schools becoming merely daycare centres and universities deferred-unemployment halfway houses. The Liberals will discourage international student enrolment and will be only slightly less extravagant than the NDP in trying to buy votes with forgiveness of student loans.

On environment and climate change, the Progressive Conservatives are expanding nuclear and hydroelectric power and will open battery storage plants. The NDP will bring back electric vehicle rebates and support electrical vehicles with more chargers and building code requirements to support this, and will generally assist conversion from propane, oil, or

coal for residential heating. The Liberals have been practically silent on the subject and the Green Party's proposals are too horrifying to bear recitation here. On healthcare, the government has a plan to add \$1.4 billion to connect two million more Ontarians with a primary care provider and ensure that everyone waiting for a family doctor will be in touch with a primary care team by next year. The NDP are guaranteeing that every Ontarian will have a family doctor through a plan that will cost \$1 billion per year through the next four years, to bring in 3500 new doctors, reduce medical paperwork and facilitate 13,000 internationally trained doctors to work in Ontario. It also plans regional health centres and 15,000 new nurses over three years and more generous workplace safety and insurance compensation it claims that it would fund universal mental health care and clear the youth waitlist and bring back closed harm reduction spaces to combat drug abuse. The NDP plan is hideously expensive moonshine. The Liberals will guarantee every Ontarian a family doctor close to home within four years including an investment of \$3.1 billion to attract 3,100 family doctors and by doubling medical school places as well as accelerated qualification of foreign trained doctors. They too promise administrative efficiencies. Both the NDP and the Liberals have ambitious plans to build or acquire large numbers of affordable homes. They both have a cornucopia of further spending promises with the customary imprecision about how they expect to pay for any of this other than by piling more debt onto the groaning provincial treasury.

I intend to vote for the reelection of the Ford government. It is the party most aware of the failures of our education system, the most fiscally responsible of the parties, is unafflicted by the suicidal insanity of climate change hysteria, and all three principal parties seem about equally purposeful in trying to repair the shambles of our collapsed healthcare system, (which Justin Trudeau and Mark Carney think makes us a superior society to the United States-but that is a

subject for the next federal election). Let's reelect the Progressive Conservatives.

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