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Why Dalton McGuinty isn't worried about a record provincial debt, an exodus of trusted MPs and the Tim Hudak surge

By Kelly Pullen | Photography by Daniel Ehrenworth



Six months ago, Ontarians had barely heard of Tim Hudak. Now he's roaring toward victory. How do you plan to overcome his lead in the polls?

If we were to knock on a hundred doors and ask people what their top concern is, they're not going to say the polls. They're interested in good schools, great health care and the economy. Those have been our priorities for eight years, and we're going to keep strengthening them.

Some would say that your legacy will be defined more by the eHealth scandal and the G20 policing fiasco.

I expect people will take the really good things and the less-than-stellar things into account, as they should.

Voters have swung to the right federally and municipally. Do you think that trend is feeding Hudak's momentum?

The political firmament has been reorganized in some ways. But I can only be who I am, and our government can only do what it does, and that's to continue to be informed by the values of Ontarians. You know, my dad was the MPP for Ottawa South before me. He was shovelling snow off the back deck and had a heart attack and died at age 63. When he was alive I said, "I'm never going into politics—who needs this?" But it has been incredibly rewarding to shape the future.

Your focus on health care and education is admirable, but aren't you concerned about the immense financial costs of those programs?

I think the responsibility of leadership is to represent the future to the present. If you look at Toronto,

there are cranes almost everywhere. Look at Runnymede Healthcare Centre, Women's College and Toronto Rehab. Look at the investments we've made in our schools. I believe these are the things that Ontarians want. I am concerned with answering the question that families are asking, which is, "What do we need to do to grow stronger?"

You don't think it's "How do we save money?"

I grew up in a family of 10, so I understand how important it is to count the pennies. My wife Terri and I were living in a one-bedroom apartment when our third baby was born. I used to do my work on our ironing board. But I was also concerned about the kids having access to good schools. Our son Liam had asthma, so I wanted to make sure there was good health care available. Household costs are important, but if that's the only thing you're concerned about, our party isn't the answer.

Hudak has kept a surprisingly low profile for a party leader. What should the public know about him?

I'm concerned about his short-term thinking and simplistic approach to a complex world. His platform has a \$14-billion hole in the middle of it. You cannot address that hole without cuts to education and health care.

How do you counter his characterization of you as the Tax Man?

You let him do whatever he's going to do. I can only do what I'm going to do.

And what will you do if you lose?

You won't find me contemplating that possibility. If you said to the captain of a sports team, "You guys don't have the depth to go all the way in the playoffs, so what are you going to do?" the answer would be, "We're going all the way."

One of the complaints about you is that you're too stiff. Do you ever let loose?

Look, I am comfortable with who I am. Do I reserve a bit of myself for the privacy of my home environment? Absolutely. My most special times are with my kids and Terri, when I can wall off public life. If I wake up and my wife still loves me and the kids are still talking to me, everything else is gravy.