



## Ted Chudleigh column

### Halton Compass

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#### Doing what Liberals do

Confronted with looming problems Premier McGuinty is doing what Liberals do – tweaking here, tucking there, but ignoring the elephant in the room.

Taking action means making a decision, forging a direction, accomplishing specifics. It also means that some people will disagree with you, some won't vote for you and your priorities will be exposed to scrutiny.

The McGuinty Liberals are so uncomfortable making tough choices that they avoid making any substantive change at all.

And so it goes.

Now, five years into our latest bout of Liberalism, our economic fever is rising and Ontario has become the weakest province in Canada. More than 72,000 Ontarians have left our province, mainly for Alberta. Ontario is on the verge of needing equalization payments as a have-not province in Confederation. We need strong medicine to cure our economic ills. And the Liberals wonder if we should say the Lord's Prayer in the Legislature.

Ontario's infrastructure has been neglected. The foundations are beginning to crack. The pressures on roads, rails, and bridges have caught up to us. The Liberals talk about fixing it but there is little evidence of action.

Health care priorities have shifted. The Liberals spent their first term shuffling money from chiropractic, physiotherapy and eye care services into knee replacements, MRIs and cataract surgery. However, while McGuinty rearranged the deck chairs on the good ship Ontario he ignored increased population in the GTA.

The McGuinty government has not provided funding to hospitals that are struggling to keep up with higher demands from increased populations. Without that cash GTA hospitals are in deficit and are

seriously looking at laying-off nursing staff. And while wait times on some procedures have been reduced I'm getting letters on other health concerns which have been ignored.

School funding is a problem that will not go away. Locally our public school board cannot find the money needed for playground equipment and instead demands that already hard pressed taxpayers fundraise for the money. The Premier promised years ago that he would fix the Harris government's funding formula but his lack of action suggests that he's afraid of the negative reaction to any proposed 'fix'.

The economic crisis deepens and jobs are leaving the province.

After describing the first signs of trouble as 'a little downturn' and those who were worried as 'cry-babies' the Liberals have done nothing but huddle together and look concerned. They know the problems will pass, but trapped by their ideology they cannot break the inertia of inaction and try measures which would deflect and shorten the downturn. They have decided that ideological purity is more important than solving the problems of Ontarians.

Overly optimistic revenue projections, higher than expected fuel costs and inflation pressures are beginning to bombard our economy. The Liberals have projected a balanced budget, but tagged with unrealistic expectations, it is almost surely going to be a deficit by the end of the year.

The Liberals have done nothing to counteract these challenges. It isn't in their DNA to take them on. It is Liberal policy to ride the wave of good times without regard for how those times became good. It reminds me of the film Groundhog Day; as the Liberals endlessly drag us through the same script over and over, unable to summon the courage to take a different approach.

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