

Opinion | Doug Ford has fallen short. Vote for change

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Ontario NDP Leader Marit Stiles, Ontario PC Party Leader Doug Ford, Ontario Liberal Party Leader Bonnie Crombie and Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner at the CBC Broadcast Centre in Toronto on Monday, Feb. 17, 2025. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Chris Young GAC



By [Star Editorial Board](#)

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Doug Ford was elected premier seven years ago on a promise to address our multiple and overlapping crises. The cost of housing was skyrocketing, family doctors were highly coveted but rarely found, schools were crumbling. Ford reasonably argued that the Liberals had had their chance and failed. He vowed to do better. Now, as Ford and his Progressive Conservatives ask for your vote for a third time, consider this: each of the crises he promised to fix has gotten worse.

Under Ford's leadership, population growth continues to outpace housing supply, driving ever upward the cost of homes and rent. Many young people can't afford to live in the city where they work. Many Ontarians are fleeing the province for more affordable locales. Meanwhile, the homeless population is rising and food-bank demand continues to soar. Ford recognizes the problem. He promised to build 1.5 million new homes and created a task force to advise him on how to do it. Then he ignored most of its recommendations.

Or consider the family-doctor crisis that has tormented so many Ontarians and further strained an already overburdened health-care system. Ford's health ministry said last year that this was "not a major concern." Then, under political pressure, the government finally released something of a plan. But compare it to the more robust and detailed proposals of any other major party, and you'd be forgiven for thinking the PCs were still not majorly concerned.

On education, Ford deserves credit for making record investments in our K-12 system. Nevertheless, after seven years, our schools are falling apart. Some 84 per cent of Toronto public schools are in substandard condition, according to the Financial Accountability Office. Meanwhile,

amid persistent staffing shortages, boards are sometimes bringing in untrained replacement teachers to try to manage badly overcrowded and under-resourced classrooms.

All this has not come cheap. The Ford government has increased the province's debt by more than \$116 billion, running multibillion-dollar deficits every year and earning the ire of conservative groups such as the Fraser Institute in the process. Some of this spending, such as on education and infrastructure, was needed. But far too much has been spent on cynical politicking: More than \$3 billion for the \$200 cheques the province sent to every adult, including very rich ones. More than \$600 million to get beer and wine in corner stores one year early. Nearly \$200 million for an early election, which Ford said was necessary so he could get a clear mandate to deal with U.S. President Donald Trump. Never mind that he already had a clear mandate, especially to deal with the crises in housing, health care and education that have worsened during his tenure.

Ford is not without redeeming qualities. He connects with people. Many seem to trust him as safe hands during tumultuous times. He has professionalized his office after a shambolic first phase of his premiership, one marked by outrageous statements, senseless policy lurches and shocking cronyism. He has often worked effectively with the federal government, despite political differences, making significant and much-needed investments in infrastructure. His willingness to change his mind, as he did on the Greenbelt — and, it seems, on Trump — is laudable, even if we'd rather he showed more discernment in the first place.

And to be sure, the PCs have faced significant headwinds. The pandemic and the persistent high interest rates and supply-chain disruptions that

resulted would have made transformative progress difficult for any government.

But in hard times, Ford and his PCs have too often chosen easy political gimmicks, showing themselves to be not as serious as the challenges we face.

Fortunately, Ontarians have three credible alternatives, and a vote for any would be a well-spent vote for change. The Liberals, NDP and Greens have all put forward a slate of serious proposals that, if implemented, would at least put a dent in the defining challenges of the moment. Each understands the need to invest urgently to build more homes, recruit more doctors and do more to restore the province's education system.

Liberal leader Bonnie Crombie, for instance, has at times proved a worthy adversary for Ford. An effective critic of the government's record, she seems to get under the PC leader's skin. When she became Liberal leader, having spent a decade as mayor of Mississauga, she took over a party in the wilderness. She deserves credit, if the polls are any indication, for bringing it back into the political mainstream. Her party's platform contains many sensible, moderate proposals that seem suited to the political moment, though she would do well to be more forthright about how she's going to pay for them. Efficiencies alone would not cover billions in new spending, particularly if the Liberals were to follow through with their proposed deep tax cuts.

Marit Stiles's NDP has made a persuasive case that there can be no solution to the province's cost-of-living crisis without active government, including robust social programs. The party's platform is full of bold ideas worthy of consideration, though again, the gap between proposed new revenues and proposed new spending is troubling, as is the plan to increase the capital gains tax in this moment of Trump-induced

investment uncertainty. Stiles is an articulate, authentic and likable politician. But two years into her tenure as NDP leader, she's still struggling to get the attention of Ontarians. The province would be better off if she could find a way to change that.

Green leader Mike Schreiner is a chipper wonk whose enthusiasm for policy is infectious. His platform offers perhaps the most nuanced approach to the housing crisis, recognizing a role for both market and government solutions. Urged to run for the Liberal leadership in 2023, Schreiner admirably chose instead the slow and doubtless frustrating work of building the Green caucus one seat at a time.

As comforting as continuity may seem, what Ontario needs is change. Liberals, NDP, Greens: take your pick. A vote for any is a vote for a better Ontario.