



September 24, 2007

Mr. Larry Ketcheson
CEO
Mr. Frank Prospero
President
Parks and Recreation Ontario
406-1185 Eglinton Avenue East
Toronto, Ontario
M3C 3C6

Dear Mr. Ketcheson and Mr. Prospero:

Thank you for your email regarding the Ontario Liberals' future plans for parks and recreation in Ontario. I value the excellent working relationship we have enjoyed over the last four years. Together, we have made great strides for our province in the areas of trails, parks and physical activity. I welcome this opportunity to respond to your questions.

Question 1: What steps will your party take to preserve and enhance our parks, trails and open spaces?

As you know, in the fall of 2005 our Liberal government announced the Ontario Trails Strategy, along with \$3.5 million to support its implementation over a 5-year period. The strategy envisions a world-class system of diversified trails, planned and used in an environmentally responsible manner, that enhances the health and prosperity of all Ontarians. We designed the strategy to support our efforts to improve the health of Ontarians through active living.

We protected a permanent 1.8-million acre Greenbelt across the Golden Horseshoe that preserves greenspace that otherwise could have been paved over. That is an area larger Prince Edward Island. On top of this, we created 200,000 acres of parkland across the province.

If re-elected, we will continue to work on and implement the Ontario Trails Strategy in collaboration with respective stakeholders through our work with the Ontario Trails Strategy Coordinating Committee. In addition, in our platform,

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Moving Forward Together, we have committed to providing tax incentives to encourage Ontarians to stay active in their daily lives — including a break on PST on bikes and bike helmets, and tax credits for families with children enrolled in organized physical activities.

Question 2: What will your party do to address the infrastructure deficit? What measures will your party take to ensure that everyone in Ontario has access to affordable recreation, sport and parks facilities and programs?

One of the many deficits left behind by the previous Conservative government was the infrastructure deficit in the community recreation sector. That is why the Ministry of Health Promotion commissioned your organization to study the state of sport and recreation facilities in Ontario. We have used that study as a basis for negotiating with the federal government to redevelop community recreation infrastructure.

Since coming to office, our Liberal government has made progress in correcting this situation by investing \$74.5 million in 48 new sport and recreation infrastructure projects to help families, children and seniors get active and stay healthy. These projects included the construction of new multi-purpose facilities, facility upgrades, repairs, the creation and maintenance of trails, and investments in not-for-profit community recreation infrastructure.

We have created the Communities in Action Fund, which has provided \$23.5 million over the last four years to over 800 local community recreation organizations and has enabled over one million Ontarians to get active. We are making better use of our existing resources by reducing gym fees in all school boards for before- and after-school programming through our \$20-million Community Use of Schools Program. And we launched the Healthy Eating, Active Living Action Plan to encourage all Ontarians, especially youth, to live a healthy and active lifestyle.

While we are heartened by the progress we have made to date, there is more to do. In addition to the above-mentioned tax incentives, we will make sure families can depend on modern infrastructure — by investing at least \$60 billion over the next 10 years in critical infrastructure such as public transit, roads and bridges, water systems, waste solutions, and cultural and community recreational facilities. We will continue our successful Communities in Action Fund and double

the amount of funding for the Community Use of Schools Program to further reduce the economic barriers to accessing our schools after hours, and thereby reduce the costs faced by non-profit organizations that rely on schools to deliver programming.

Question 3: What will your party do to address the obesity epidemic and support active living?

The obesity epidemic is an issue that concerns us and that we are addressing. We were the first party in Ontario to create a Ministry of Health Promotion to actively support and promote a healthy lifestyle. We recognize that obesity has direct and indirect impacts on the Ontario economy, drives health care costs, is linked to the development of particular chronic diseases and severely affects the quality of life of many Ontarians. We will also do more to help the one in three Ontarians living with a chronic illness. Over the next four years, we plan to address these issues with the following initiatives:

- Making schools even healthier by banning trans fats from all school cafeterias, prescribing a healthier menu that conforms to the new *Canada's Food Guide* and creating an Ontario Fitness Challenge program to fight childhood obesity
- Doubling funding for our Community Use of Schools Program
- Expanding the number of intramural activities available to students
- Providing tax incentives for Ontarians to remain active and healthy
- Launching a multi-pronged campaign to reduce the rate of childhood obesity — similar to the successful launch of our efforts to reduce smoking
- Investing in community recreational facilities
- Helping the growing number of Ontarians living with diabetes through a mix of prevention, technology, personal planning and access to specialized resources and health professionals — all designed to improve health and reduce health care costs.

Question 4: What will your party do to support youth engagement? How will your party use recreation and sport to promote community safety?

Ontario Liberals understand that the best way to help young people make good choices is to give them opportunities and support. A core part of our youth strategy has been to keep young people active — in after-school activities, in their communities and in part-time and summer employment opportunities.

One of the first things we did in government was to open up our schools to after-school activities by providing \$20 million annually to our school boards to make after-school space affordable. We are building on the success of that program in our platform by doubling funding for our Community Use of Schools Program to ensure that space is affordable across the province and free in communities that need it most.

We have invested significantly in community supports for our young people and have undertaken initiatives to connect them to opportunities in their own communities. Specifically, our \$28.5-million Youth Opportunities Strategy provided new and expanded support for youth in under-served communities for things like employment and skills training, youth outreach workers, school-based supports and better information and access to services. The core objectives of the strategy are to build stronger communities and help young people faced with significant challenges achieve individual success. This strategy includes a number of worthwhile programs — partnerships between schools, police and community agencies. Some of these are as follows:

- Youth in Policing Program — a partnership with the Toronto Police Service and the Durham Regional Police. We received 1,000 applications for the program and hired 100 youth from under-served Toronto neighbourhoods and five from Pickering for summer jobs with police in 2006; we also hired 167 young people in the summer of 2007.
- Summer Jobs for Youth Program — we hired 1,650 youth from across Ontario in the summer of 2007.
- Youth Outreach Worker Program — supporting agencies in communities across the province now employ 67 youth outreach workers to work with young people to build relationships, provide advice and connect them to appropriate services and supports in their communities.
- A School-based Prevention/Diversion Program — to be offered in 18 communities across the province by the end of 2007: it supports peer conflict mediation, enhances community referrals to address root issues for youth in conflict with the law, and increases youth success in school.

It was also important for our government to invest directly in community programs and activities for young people through initiatives like our \$15-million Youth Challenge Fund, which sponsors local programs, training and jobs for youth in under-served communities in Toronto. Our government provided an initial investment of \$15 million in 2006 — and will match private sector contributions up to an additional \$15 million — for a potential total investment of over \$45 million over the next three years. We also provided \$3 million as a one-

time unconditional grant to support the community-designed "Down with Guns" program led by the Toronto Community Foundation and the African Canadian Christian Network.

Over the past four years, we have made great strides together in rebuilding our parks and recreation infrastructure. Ontario Liberals are dedicated to continuing to invest in and support the promotion of healthy lifestyles for Ontarians. Thanks again for this opportunity to respond to your questions and, especially, for your important work in enhancing the quality of life of Ontarians.

Please accept my best wishes.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dalton McGuinty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dalton McGuinty
Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party
Premier

