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Preemed for future

After 2 rocky years at top, McGuinty says he's become 'more practical'

 By **ANTONELLA ARTUSO**, Queen's Park Bureau

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TORONTO -- Premier Dalton McGuinty doesn't dance around the 'L' word.

Emerging from two volatile years in office, McGuinty says he's a more seasoned leader who has learned from bearing the painful label of liar, but remains committed to doing what he thinks is right.

"With respect to breaking my word on not raising taxes, that was the most difficult decision I've made and I hated changing my mind on that," McGuinty said.

NEW NUKE PLANTS

"But in the end, it's not really about me. It's what am I supposed to do that's right for Ontarians."

In an interview with Sun Media to mark his second anniversary in office tomorrow, McGuinty said he's "comfortable" with his most controversial decisions: Raising health taxes, opening the door to new nuclear plants, using private money to fund public hospitals and nixing sharia -- although they all carry considerable political



Premier Dalton McGuinty says he's "comfortable" with his controversial decisions, such as raising health taxes. (Jonathan Hayward, CP)

YOUR TURN

Do you think Dalton McGuinty is doing a good job as premier of Ontario?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Results



canoe



risk.

"I'm hopeful that Ontarians will see through those decisions and others that I'll be called upon to make that I'm actually trying to do what I think is right for Ontario," he said.

"I think I have become more pragmatic, more practical in terms of what do I have to do to make things work around here.

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"I think also there is a learning curve in this job. I'm better at this job two years in ... this job's not unlike others in that regard."

McGuinty leaves little doubt his government is about to embark on the construction of new nuclear generation, favouring that option over reneging on an election commitment to shut down coal plants.

While he's confident he can keep to his revised plan to close coal plants by 2009, McGuinty said a stable supply of electricity will always be his first priority.

The premier said he feels his government has achieved much at the halfway point, but still has more to do in education and health care before it faces the voters again on Oct. 4, 2007.

Opposition parties are far less enthusiastic about the Liberals' record.

Tory MPP Tim Hudak said increasing energy costs, the McGuinty health tax and cancelled 2004 income tax cuts have left Ontarians with a lot less coin in their pockets.

"Dalton McGuinty has been an expensive premier for the people of Ontario -- the average family is now paying over \$2,000 more per year in additional taxes and costs that they weren't paying when he was elected," Hudak said.

NDP Leader Howard Hampton has no praise for the Liberals' energy plan, saying the government has done nothing to promote conservation.

WORK TO DO

Certainly, McGuinty has much work to do to meet the benchmarks he set for himself and his government -- significantly higher student achievement and reduced health care waiting times.

He is also aware that global forces, such as high oil prices and an auto glut, are putting pressure on an economy he needs operating on all cylinders.

Still, McGuinty said he's "very comfortable" with where he's at right now.

"Over the course of the next two years now, it's just keeping our shoulder to the wheel and getting that job done," McGuinty said.

POLL FINDINGS

Top things people like about Dalton McGuinty in the SES Research poll:

- Nothing -- 39%
- Unsure -- 24%
- Honest -- 8%
- Doing a good job -- 3%

Top dislikes:

- Nothing -- 26%
- Lied/Liar -- 25%
- Weak -- 9%
- Unsure -- 8%

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Next story: [Liar label starting to peel away, poll finds](#)



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