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Tue, June 5 / 07

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News Canada

Mon, June 4, 2007

Preem: No tax hike, honest McGuinty says re-election vow can be trusted - 'not hiding a deficit' this time



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By **ANTONELLA ARTUSO**, QUEEN'S PARK BUREAU CHIEF

E-MAIL TO A FRIEND PRINT PAGE WRITE US LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Premier Dalton McGuinty says he will not raise taxes if his government is re-elected this Oct. 10.

The assertion was immediately challenged because McGuinty made just such a promise during the last election campaign only to bring in one of the largest tax hikes in the province's history -- the health premium.

"I won't cut your taxes ... but I won't raise them either," McGuinty said in a media advertising spot that ran throughout the 2003 provincial campaign.

When asked by one reporter why he should be believed this time, McGuinty said, "Because I'm in charge. I'm not hiding a deficit. You know I'm not hiding a deficit, and furthermore, the provincial auditor will confirm that I'm not hiding a deficit. That's the difference."

The Liberals blamed a hidden \$5.6 billion deficit left behind by the Conservative government of Ernie Eves for having to break their most prominent election promise.

PC MPP Elizabeth Witmer said McGuinty can't be trusted to keep his promise this time around.

"The reality is he broke more than just the tax promise ... he has broken 50 promises," she said.

The John Tory Conservatives have said they will roll back the \$2.6 billion health premium over

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a four-year mandate if elected.

McGuinty said the removal of the health premium will leave a massive hole that will require cuts to services.

"I didn't raise that health tax in order to raise my popularity ... I did it because we need to raise money for our health care system," McGuinty said.

The Liberals will review the health premium in 2009, five years after it was ushered in. The premium costs individual taxpayers up to \$900 a year.

NECK-AND-NECK

A new SES Research/Sun Media poll revealed this weekend that the Tories and Liberals are neck-and-neck heading into the next campaign.

McGuinty's Liberals and Tory's Conservatives are tied at 29.8% of popular support. The NDP are at 16%, the Green at 9.3% and the undecided at 15.2%.

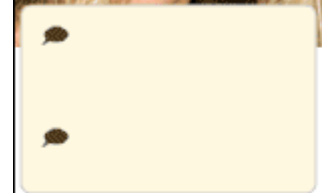
McGuinty told a gathering of 1,100 Liberals at a provincial council meeting yesterday that they should remind their friends and neighbours about how far the province has come since the Mike Harris/Ernie Eves Conservatives ran Ontario.

McGuinty said later in a media scrum that most voters don't pay much attention to politics between elections, particularly when times are good.

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