

## Teresa Armstrong – **NDP** – London Fanshawe

**1. Homelessness is a complex issue, crossing many government programs. Which pieces of your party's platform will be particularly helpful in addressing homelessness in our community?**

The most important components of our platform are the efforts we are making to help alleviate the skyrocketing cost of living. Many people find themselves without housing because they fell just a little bit behind and things spiraled down as interest built up on late bills, creating a cycle they were unable to break. Taking the HST off home heating, electricity, and gas at the pumps is an important step toward leaving more money in people's pockets, which can enable them to maintain housing. Electricity costs are up 75% in the past 8 years. We cannot afford to continue the expensive privatization experiment of the Harris Conservatives, something the current Liberal government has failed to reverse. We must move to re-amalgamate the different Ontario Hydro agencies back into a single entity and cut through the bureaucratic duplication. Ontario Hydro currently pays 5 CEOs \$3.5 million, with more than 11,000 employees earning six figure incomes. Compare that to Manitoba Hydro, where there is a single CEO who earns \$301,000. No wonder our utilities bills are through the roof! New Democrats are also committed to raising the minimum wage, as well as social assistance benefits, in order to help people before they become homeless. We will invest in new affordable housing, as well as invest in repairs for existing housing that has fallen into disrepair. So making life more affordable and developing new affordable housing units is the NDP's two pronged approach to this issue.

**2. Although housing is administered municipally, both the provincial and federal governments play an important role in setting directions and providing funding. How do you anticipate addressing the affordable housing crisis over the next 4 years?**

It is essential that both the federal and provincial governments fund new housing units as well as the repairs of existing units. The municipalities are already cash strapped, and property taxes and user fees were simply never designed to pay for housing programs. Obtaining funding from senior levels of government should not require municipalities to provide matching funds. With the current federal government demonstrating a lack of commitment to addressing this issue, it is more vital than ever that the provincial government help set the direction on this issue.

**3. Housing alone is not enough, as we also require housing with supports. What role do you see the provincial government playing in providing these supports?**

The provincial government has a critical role to play, because housing supports help relieve the pressure on the health care system. For the same cost as one hospital bed, we can provide 12-15 homecare visits for people who are otherwise able to be in a home setting. It is good, fiscally responsible policy to provide more supportive housing.

**4. Our recommendation receiving the most attention is the call for a 43% increase in social assistance rates. How do you feel about the current rates for OW and ODSP?**

The current OW and ODSP rates are wholly inadequate. Further there are unfair clawbacks because of benefits received from other sources. We must raise the ODSP & OW benefits, and allow a great measure of earnings from other sources before clawback in order to help those on assistance "catch-up". New Democrats will index social assistance rates to the inflation rate to keep people from falling further behind.

## Jeff Buchanan – **NDP** – London West

**1. Homelessness is a complex issue, crossing many government programs. Which pieces of your party's platform will be particularly helpful in addressing homelessness in our community?**

Our entire platform is developed around the principles of helping those who most need it. I am inspired by the words of Tommy Douglas: "A nation's greatness lies not in the quantities of its goods but in the quality of its life." Every part of our campaign agenda leads to this goal.

In addition to our extensive plans for increased housing and income supports outlined in the answers below, we will build an economic climate that creates and protects good jobs. And we have a plan to improve health care services for all Ontarians, including a comprehensive and accessible mental health and addictions system. As recommended by the "Navigating the Journey to Wellness" report, we will support the creation of a single body responsible for the design, management and coordination of a mental health and addictions system. Under this new system, Ontarians would have access to a consistent basket of services, regardless of where they live. This report recognizes the need for broad supports including affordable housing, coordinated primary care, and peer supports.

**2. Although housing is administered municipally, both the provincial and federal governments play an important role in setting directions and providing funding. How do you anticipate addressing the affordable housing crisis over the next 4 years?**

Affordable housing continues to be a local and national tragedy. It is shameful that one in five Ontario tenants pays more than half their income on rent. While 150,000 households are on affordable housing waiting lists, and growing every year, too many Ontario families live in overcrowded, substandard or unaffordable housing. This can't continue.

A long-term commitment to building housing is needed to allow housing providers to effectively plan and implement affordable housing projects. For too long, housing policy in Ontario has been driven by Ottawa – with the province simply following the federal government's lead. The NDP recognizes the need for stable and predictable funding and supports long-term funding for the expansion of affordable housing.

I pledge, along with Andrea Horwath and the Ontario NDP to set attainable targets for increasing affordable housing for the people that need it the most. We will invest in new affordable housing and repair existing sub-standard housing. And we will develop an Ontario housing plan that includes landlord licensing, inclusionary zoning and better tenants' rights. We must ensure that all Ontarians have safe and affordable housing by protecting tenants and building and repairing more affordable housing units.

We will proceed with our long term commitment whether or not the Federal government joins us as a partner. However, we will work with our Federal NDP counterparts to put pressure on the federal government to develop, fund and implement a national affordable housing strategy.

The bottom line is that housing is a human right and nothing should be more important to the government.

**3. Housing alone is not enough, as we also require housing with supports. What role do you see the provincial government playing in providing these supports?**

In addition to the points mentioned above, a New Democrat led government will enhance income supports to make housing more affordable. We will provide access to low-cost financing for renovations and retrofit measures to make maintaining a household budget more affordable. And we will take the HST off of electricity and heating bills. Some other related ideas include an increase in the minimum wage to \$11 this year and then tied to the real cost of living, a transit fare freeze, preventing hikes to child care fees, and a dental care program for low income Ontarians.

**4. Our recommendation receiving the most attention is the call for a 43% increase in social assistance rates. How do you feel about the current rates for OW and ODSP?**

ODSP and OW payment levels continue to be shameful. It should seem self evident when Ontario's 2012 rent increase guideline is 3.1% while the social assistance rate increase, including housing allowance, is 1%. It's impossible to make that math work out. And why do people with a disability lose 50% of income support for every dollar they make?

Obviously we need to increase the rates, the accessibility needs to be increased, the employment supports need to be increased, and most importantly, the need for compassion needs to increase. New Democrats will reduce the clawback of social assistance benefits from people with disabilities to help those who are able to move back into a job. And we will ensure social assistance rates keep pace with inflation.

I urge everyone to take a look at our Plan for Affordable Change to get more details on what an NDP led government will do: <http://ontariondp.com> And no matter what happens on October 6, addressing housing and poverty issues will continue to be a priority for me through my continued involvement in the community.

## Kevin Labonte – **Green** – London North Centre

**1. Homelessness is a complex issue, crossing many government programs. Which pieces of your party's platform will be particularly helpful in addressing homelessness in our community?**

The GPO will work with developers to ensure that 30% of all condominiums and new highrise apartment buildings are reserved for affordable housing. By making this an across the board policy we will ensure that no developer is treated any differently than another.

**2. Although housing is administered municipally, both the provincial and federal governments play an important role in setting directions and providing funding. How do you anticipate addressing the affordable housing crisis over the next 4 years?**

Since each community has different needs in terms of housing, we will work with municipalities and front line social workers to address their needs, whether that requires increased funding or changed to the planning act. The GPO is committed to ensuring that affordable housing is available for those that need it.

**3. Housing alone is not enough, as we also require housing with supports. What role do you see the provincial government playing in providing these supports?**

Clearly our social workers need a variety of tools at their disposal to help them assist their clients. The GPO will work with the various organization that deal with the issues affected by poverty and mental illness on a daily basis to find the solutions that work for each individual case.

**4. Our recommendation receiving the most attention is the call for a 43% increase in social assistance rates. How do you feel about the current rates for OW and ODSP?**

Today's OW and ODSP rates are not inline with today's cost of living. The GPO will revise both to ensure that those that require them are able to afford to pay for the necessities of life. The GPO will also be investigating the feasibility of a guaranteed income level for all Ontarians.

## Chris Bentley – **Liberal** – London West

**1. Homelessness is a complex issue, crossing many government programs. Which pieces of your party's platform will be particularly helpful in addressing homelessness in our community?**

The Ontario Liberals are building on our commitment to combat homelessness and poverty. We also recognize the need for local governments to tailor solutions to reflect local housing needs through more responsive and integrated services - our housing and homelessness program consolidation will do just that.

It will begin with five homelessness-related programs (including the Provincial Rent Bank Program) that are targeted for consolidation by 2013. For example, funding that must currently be used for another emergency shelter bed could instead be used to provide that person with transitional housing.

We have already made significant progress in addressing homelessness in our community. Since 2003, we've increased homelessness program funding by 30%. In 2010-11, we are investing over \$31 million in several prevention and transitional support programs.

If re-elected, I will continue to work hard to help combat homelessness and empower low-income Ontarians to break out of the cycle of poverty.

**2. Although housing is administered municipally, both the provincial and federal governments play an important role in setting directions and providing funding. How do you anticipate addressing the affordable housing crisis over the next 4 years?**

The Ontario Liberals know that affordable and secure housing provides the stability needed to raise families. We have therefore invested more toward housing than any previous government. To date, we have invested more than \$2.5 billion for repairs, new construction and rent supplements.

As the first government to establish a Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS), we will build on our commitment to ensuring that these housing resources are available. We signed an agreement with the federal government that guarantees four-year funding for affordable housing in Ontario (Investment in Affordable Housing — IAH). This agreement will see \$480.6 million invested in Ontario's housing stock — with \$240.3 million coming from the provincial government. Under IAH, the City of London received \$13,673,870. Our LTAHS provides greater flexibility to local governments so that they can deliver housing services that respond to their local needs. It will enable local governments to adopt alternatives to the current chronologically based wait-list system, and will facilitate tenant transfers across wait lists or across service manager areas.

If re-elected, the Ontario Liberals and I will continue to actively lobby the federal government for a long-term deal and a national housing strategy.

**3. Housing alone is not enough, as we also require housing with supports. What role do you see the provincial government playing in providing these supports?**

As part of our strategy to improve the affordable housing framework, the Ontario Liberals are delivering programs and services that are making a difference in the lives of low-income Ontario families.

We recognize that these families often need timely access to health and social services that meet their needs. That is why we established our "Open Minds, Healthy Minds" Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. The strategy provides a road map to enhance mental health services, and to provide the integrated services that will give people easier access to the right mix of supports. Better coordination across health and other human services - such as housing, income support, employment and the justice system - will lead to better mental health.

In addition to investing \$257 million over the next three years for our new children's mental health strategy, we will continue to provide our current annual investment of over \$400 million to mental health. We are investing 50% more in support for mental health services than in 2003. Ontario Liberals will commit an additional \$30 million starting in 2014 to improve mental health and addictions supports and services for adults.

We also recognize that employment supports and help with child care costs are important to families in search of gainful, sustainable work. That is why we ended the deduction of the federal National Child Benefit Supplement and accelerated the Ontario Child Benefit, providing up to \$1,100 annually per child – an 83% increase since 2008. Full-day kindergarten is providing families with an average of \$1,000 per year in child care savings. We also made important investments to help get people back to work through our Employment Ontario suite of services, our Second Career re-training program, infrastructure and stimulus spending

If re-elected, the Ontario Liberals will work hard to help ensure that a high-quality, accessible supports are in place when people need it.

**4. Our recommendation receiving the most attention is the call for a 43% increase in social assistance rates. How do you feel about the current rates for OW and ODSP?**

We understand that Ontario was hit hard by the recession, and many have turned to social assistance for help. To address these needs, and of those who cannot work due to a disability, the 2011 budget increased social assistance rates for the seventh time – bringing the total increase since 2003 to 13.7%. Under previous government, funding for social assistance was slashed and frozen.

As the first step in developing a concrete action plan that will make social assistance more sustainable and better at getting people into jobs, the Ontario Liberals launched the largest review of social assistance in 20 years. The review will help us to build a stronger, more integrated system.

The Ontario Liberals are also uploading costs for social assistance from the municipalities so that we can help them to invest more in local priorities, and control property taxes.

If re-elected, we will continue to strengthen the social assistance system.

## Deb Matthews – **Liberal** – London North Centre

**1) Homelessness is a complex issue, crossing many government programs. Which pieces of your party's platform will be particularly helpful in addressing homelessness in our community?**

Ontario Liberals know that affordable and secure housing provides the stability needed to raise families and build futures. We have therefore invested more toward housing than any previous government. And despite a serious global recession, we stayed the course with these investments. To date we have invested more than \$2.5billion for repairs, new construction and rent supplements. Through our investments, we have built and repaired over 270,000 units and provided 35,000 supplements. Our investments have benefited more than 680,000 low-income Ontarians since 2003.

I am proud that Ontario Liberals were the first government to develop a Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS) and are committed to ensuring that the resources are available. It builds on our unprecedented investments to date, providing greater flexibility to local governments so they can create plan for housing delivery that are reflective of their unique local needs – including right here in London.

Our platform supports our on-going commitment to poverty reduction in Ontario. To date, we have put more money in Ontarians' pockets, through the Ontario Child Benefit, several increases to minimum wage, and an 11% increase to social assistance rates. We also laid out a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy, setting a target of reducing child poverty by 25% in 5 years. In our platform, we are committed to exploring the concept of a housing benefit, by asking our experts working on the Social Assistance Review to develop options and we'll work with municipalities, non-profits and developers to identify opportunities to help create affordable housing. We will also set the next poverty reduction target to continue making progress on this important issue.

**2) Although housing is administered municipally, both the provincial and federal governments play an important role in setting directions and providing funding. How do you anticipate addressing the affordable housing crisis over the next 4 years?**

Ontario's housing supply was put into a catastrophic state by the PCs. They underfunded housing and cancelled the construction of 17,000 new units. They downloaded the entire housing portfolio onto local governments without providing money to repair an aging system or to meet future demand.

Ontario Liberals have a different approach. We recently signed an agreement with the federal government that guarantees new, four-year funding for affordable housing in Ontario (Investment in Affordable Housing – IAH). This agreement will see \$480.6 million invested in Ontario's housing stock – with \$240.3 million coming from the provincial government. This will provide local governments with funding for an array of housing options and the flexibility to design strategies across the housing continuum based on local needs and priorities. This investment will improve access to affordable housing that is safe, sound and suitable for households across Ontario. It is noteworthy that both the PCs and the NDP voted against our 2011 Budget, which included our \$240.3 million investment.

**3) Housing alone is not enough, as we also require housing with supports. What role do you see the provincial government playing in providing these supports?**

Ontario Liberals are committed to providing effective supportive housing that meets the needs of the client. Our government has invested heavily in supportive housing programs for people with mental health issues, people living with HIV/AIDS, seniors. And we recently announced 1000 new supportive housing units targeted specifically at Ontarians with substance abuse and addictions challenges. Our commitment to this model is clear, and we will continue to implement these programs where appropriate.

**4) Our recommendation receiving the most attention is the call for a 43% increase in social assistance rates. How do you feel about the current rates for OW and ODSP?**

Our government is absolutely committed to our continued fight against poverty. I am proud that after the Conservatives cut social assistance rates by 22%, we have raised the rates seven times since 2003. In the development of Ontario's first ever poverty reduction strategy, it became clear that social assistance in Ontario wasn't working for people. As part of our strategy, the Liberals launched the largest review of social assistance programs in over 20 years. The review will examine social assistance and its relationship with other federal, provincial and municipal income security programs to gain a better understanding of how these programs, working together, can provide better outcomes for people. Ontario has appointed The Honourable Frances Lankin, P.C., United Way Toronto's past President and CEO, and Dr. Munir Sheikh, Canada's former Chief Statistician, as commissioners. The review began in January 2011 and will finish in June 2012.

In addition, our government has made significant strides in poverty reduction. We've raised the minimum wage to \$10.25, we introduced the Ontario Child Benefit, reducing a significant barrier for people leaving social assistance to move into the work force, and we are committed to a new poverty reduction target to continue making progress on this important issue.

## Khalil Ramal – **Liberal** – London Fanshawe

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