

PLATFORM SHOWCASE QUESTIONS

Responses from Surekha Shenoy, 2022 Provincial Liberal Candidate, Cambridge

Please email responses to drkuhn@wusa.ca by May 24th

Questions submitted by the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA):

1. There is a high rate of unemployment, underemployment and low-wage employment experienced by disabled Canadians, and that access to post-secondary education can improve employability and earning potential. However, students with disabilities face some of the highest costs and experience the most significant barriers to long-term success. Provision of critical health services for students with disabilities remains uninsured under OHIP and the Ontario Bursary for Students with Disabilities (BSWD) remains limited in scope. ***If elected, what policies will your party put in place to increase access to health services and guarantee success for students with disabilities?***
 - a. Ontario Liberal Party's portable benefits plan will cover the cost of prescription medicine, dental care, mental health care, and vision care if someone does not have access to a private workplace or post-secondary student insurance plan.
 - b. We will also strengthen AODA standards, particularly for education and healthcare facilities as well as perform periodic enforcement to ensure that students with disabilities are being appropriately accommodated. We will also introduce mandatory training for post-secondary institutions' faculty members and staff so that they can ensure appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities.
 - c. Ford Conservatives cut the operating grants of post-secondary institutions making it quite challenging for them to keep up with the increased demand for specialized services for students with disabilities. We will reverse those funding cuts and ensure that post-secondary institutions have access to the funding and resources to deliver an equitable learning experience.
 - d. When the youth with disabilities transitions from teenage to adulthood, they notice a sharp decline in the volume of support that's available to them. Hence, we will evaluate the current special education system, identify the weaknesses, and partner with the service providers, educators, and various other stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition from teenage to adulthood with all necessary services being in place.

2. "Ontario has among the lowest funding levels per post-secondary student in Canada. As of 2018, the province's funding for each university student was [37 percent lower](#) than the average for the rest of Canada." ***If elected, what policies will your party put in place to ensure access and affordability for Ontario students?***

- a. We will remove interest on the provincial portion of OSAP loans. The Federal Liberals have already committed to removing interest on the federal portion of OSAP loans making OSAP completely interest-free.
- b. An Ontario Liberal government will reverse Ford Conservatives' cuts to OSAP. We will double OSAP funding so that students can receive more grants instead of loans.
- c. We will simplify OSAP and expand eligibility – making it the 'one window' people go to for help to learn at any stage of life by also integrating employment training supports.
- d. Our government will fully cover tuition for all early childhood education and personal support worker programs at Ontario's colleges, as well as medical and nursing students who commit to working long-term in rural and remote communities.
- e. We will also forgive all student loans for nurses, PSWs, paramedics and other health care workers who were on the front lines during COVID-19.
- f. We will keep tuition frozen while providing post-secondary institutions with higher operational funding so that they can continue to provide students with a high-quality learning experience.

Questions submitted by Wilfrid Laurier University Graduate Students' Association & Students' Union:

- 3. "Students can thrive during their academic journeys and contribute to their communities to the fullest of their ability if crucial basic needs such as housing are met. The availability and affordability of housing is a salient issue for all students, who often require **short-term, affordable units, that can in many cases accommodate family members, close to campus.** If elected, how will your party meet the housing needs of students to ensure this vulnerable group can succeed in their educational pursuits?"
 - a. For students moving out of their family home to attend university or college, housing is often the biggest cost. The supply of student housing did not keep up with the growth of the student population in Ontario. As a result, too many students are now forced to pay high rents or live in precarious and poorly maintained homes. Our government will focus on increasing the supply of homes suitable for students allowing the cost of housing to be more manageable for them.
 - b. We will extend 'as-of-right zoning' for building more student residences on campuses and eliminate development charges for purpose-built student housing. This means anyone who would like to build student housing would not have to go through lengthy approval and local permit processes which often increase costs, cause delays and deter people from developing student housing. Charging development fees on student housing is another practice that many consider inequitable. These fees are more appropriate for permanent family homes and waiving them for student housing will help us boost supply rapidly.

- c. Our government will also better account for university and college students in future housing growth forecasts so that local plans account for the additional housing required.
 - d. A healthy supply of purpose-built rental homes can also be helpful for students to find suitable housing. Therefore, we will grant 'as-of-right zoning' status at sites where there is already purpose-built rental housing.
 - e. Ford Conservatives created a two-tiered rental market by scrapping rent control for some units. We will bring back rent control for all homes providing student tenants with stability and predictability.
4. "Since the onset of the pandemic, student employment is at a record low and youth have not fully recovered from the impact of lost time, wages, and experience. Opportunities are emerging but may not be achievable for many students who by 2022 have lacked skills and opportunities due to the impact of the pandemic. **If elected, how will your party support students and new graduates to ensure that they achieve the experience and skills necessary to strengthen the province's economic development?"**
- a. An Ontario Liberal government will invest \$1 billion in creating new and expanding existing programs to help our students keep up with the demands of the evolving labour market.
 - b. We will help students receive hands-on learning experiences through the Canada-Ontario Job Grant and SkillsAdvance.
 - c. We will help post-secondary institutions to create flexible learning options so that people of all ages can receive equitable access to up-skilling and re-skilling opportunities.
 - d. Short, highly-focused programs called micro-credentials can also help teach new skills quickly. Therefore, we will build high-quality, career-focused micro-credential programs in partnership with employers and educators. We will enhance the external review of existing programs for quality, making sure outcomes are tracked and learners are protected.
 - e. To keep up with the dynamic trends of the labour market we all sometimes need professional development or career counselling. However, in our current skills development system, once students graduate from post-secondary institutions, they have limited access to such resources. We will, therefore, expand universal access to free career counselling with targeted services for people in communities underrepresented in certain careers.
 - f. An Ontario Liberal government will promote innovative learning options such as joint college-university programs and support expanded paid internships, placements and co-op opportunities.

Questions submitted by Conestoga Students Inc.:

- 5. International student tuition continues to make up an ever-greater portion of Ontario's post-secondary institutional revenue. Unlike domestic students, for whom tuition increases are limited to a max of 5% per year based on their program, [the](#)

[Ontario government permits an increase to international student tuition of up to 20%](#). This discrepancy has created a distorted incentive for post-secondary institutions to target international students in [harmful, and exploitative ways](#). **What types of programs and policies will your party implement to address the targeting and exploitation of international students, and what kind of programs and supports would your party consider assisting international students once they arrive in Ontario?**

- a. International students help our campuses become more diverse in every sense of the word. They help post-secondary institutions to offer enriched learning experiences, facilitate the robust exchange of knowledge and ideas, and upon graduation many of them stay back and strengthen our labour market. Despite their incredible contributions to our society and our post-secondary institutions, they are often exploited, and their concerns get neglected. Ontario Liberal Party is committed to providing international students with an equitable campus experience.
 - b. We will act decisively against any deceptive practices and activities committed by any groups or organizations to protect international students from harm.
 - c. Our government will collaborate with colleges and universities to develop an international student strategy that better supports these students and encourages more of them to stay after graduation. This strategy and its implementation will help us evaluate current resources and services that are available for international students before and after their arrival as well as during their academic journey. Such an evaluation is necessary to identify the gaps in the system as well as to advance widespread consultations and collaboration to strengthen these resources and support systems.
 - d. Attracting, recruiting and retaining talented international students can help us boost the bilingual workforce. Therefore, we will partner with the federal government to increase the number of French-speaking international students, especially in Ontario's healthcare programs. Upon graduation, we will work on facilitating their path towards permanent residency so that they decide to stay back and join Ontario's labour market.
 - e. We will also create a pathway to permanent residency for international students who are interested in entrepreneurship and investing in local businesses upon graduation or starting their own business.
6. The unavailability of affordable housing in communities with post-secondary institutions has continued to force students to become long-distance commuters, living far outside their campus communities. However, with transit being underfunded across Ontario, as well as the loss of private transit providers like Greyhound, the necessary transit infrastructure and service to carry students within and between non-GTA communities is non-existent. This lack of transit options leaves students with no easy way to get to their schools, workplaces, or their

cultural communities. **How will your party work to *improve local public transit and community interconnectivity for areas outside the GTA, such as Brantford, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Guelph?***

- a. An Ontario Liberal government will cut transit fares to \$1/ride and \$40/monthly pass till 2024. This will apply to ALL provincial and municipal transit agencies including GO Transit and UP Express.
- b. We will invest \$375 million annually to support transit agencies and cover operational costs that will allow them to keep their bus or train fleet well-maintained as well as offer reliable and frequent services.
- c. We will support and fund the Waterloo Region ION LRT extension from Kitchener to downtown Cambridge.
- d. Our government will accelerate the GO expansion project (spearheaded by our Leader, Steven Del Duca when he was the Minister of Transportation) which will offer a two-way, all-day, GO rail service (every 15 minutes or less) between Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo.
- e. As much as it is important to expand transit network, it is also necessary to introduce last-mile and first-mile services so that use of public transit becomes much more convenient for users. Doing so, makes transit an obvious choice as opposed to the use of private vehicles. Therefore, our government will take the following actions:
 - i. Provide communities with \$100 million annually to build separated bike lanes and cycling trails, expand bike sharing and rental services and secure bike parking.
 - ii. Provide a 30% rebate for new electric bikes, mopeds or motorcycles up to \$500.