

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? We're not being short-changed

To hear Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau tell it, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Tories ?still don't seem to get Ontario.? Really? Well, in the last election, Harper ? who, unlike Trudeau, was actually born and raised in Ontario ? won 73 seats, compared to just 11 for the Liberals and 22 for the late Jack Layton and his so-called ?Orange wave.? So Harper must know something, an even more crucial issue than in the past because redistribution has added 15 new Ontario seats the next time out.

So why, you may wonder, does Trudeau believe Harper doesn't ?get? Ontario?

Easy. Because Harper and his team of high-profile Ontario ministers don't agree with Premier Kathleen Wynne's profligate spending, a pattern which she inherited (and continues pretty much unabated) from her predecessor Dalton McGuinty. According to Trudeau, in a speech to Markham Liberals last Friday, he says Finance Minister Joe Oliver should be working alongside Wynne ?to build a plan to help Ontario proper. Instead, what does he do? When she (Wynne) put out a budget focused on jobs and growth, he attacked it as a ?route to economic decline.'

?Think about that for a second. That's Canada's finance minister undermining consumer confidence in the province that is 40 per cent of our country's economy,? said Trudeau. ?That's just short-sighted, partisan and irresponsible. And it needs to stop.?

Fact is, when it comes to ?short-sighted, partisan and irresponsible,? nobody fits that description better than Ontario's Liberals ? the ones whom Trudeau would emulate ? who, among other things, have managed to gut Ontario's finances to the point where, instead of the engine that runs the Canadian economy, we've become a ?have not? province, recipients of hand-outs from the more successful provinces.

It's not all government's fault, of course, but the typical Liberal solution of spend, spend, spend, hasn't worked in Ontario ? and indeed, doesn't really work anywhere. At least, not for long.

So what has Oliver and the Tories done? They've watched their spending ? not as closely as your humble correspondent would prefer ? but nevertheless, they're on the way to erasing deficit financing and, instead of paying out hundreds of millions just to satisfy the debtors ? as Ontario continues to do ? they'll actually have money to spend on programs and people.

If Trudeau really wants to go beyond the superficial partisan pap which passes for depth in his lexicon, he might ask why Ontario, under current (mis)management, accounts for 36.8 per cent of the country's entire economy, yet with a deficit of \$16-billion, it represents a full 70 per cent of all provincial debt combined.

Talk about irresponsible and short-sighted. Yet the budgeting that Trudeau says Harper and Company should endorse essentially ? with the exception of a few minor tweaks ? keeps right on piling up this unsustainable debt.

It shouldn't come as a great surprise, one supposes, since Trudeau comes by his fiscal irresponsibility honestly, having watched his late father Pierre start us on the rocky road down the fiscal cliff several decades ago.

(And if Trudeau is upset about the so-called ?partisanship? of the Tories, perhaps, in the interest of non-partisanship, he might want to offer a word or two about former Liberal prime minister Jean Chrétien who, after the Liberals won all but one Ontario seat in 1993, had his finance minister Paul Martin fight federal debt by passing it all along to the provinces, cutting cash transfers by 21 per cent over two years and freezing them for the third. That's something Harper hasn't done, although it would have been easy given his healthy majority, and it would have made Ontario's current situation far worse than it already is. Is this really what Trudeau wants, assuming he's thought beyond his throwaway sound bites?)

Here's some facts Trudeau may wish to consider when he ? like Wynne and her crew ? argue that Harper is short-changing our province.

Unlike the Chrétien approach as mentioned above, the Tories have increased cash transfers to the provinces ? including Ontario ? at a record rate since taking office in 2006, pushing them up 22.5 per cent in 2009-10 alone as part of a stimulus plan to offset the recession.

And despite Liberal (and NDP) claims that the Tories have cut health spending, they've increased health transfers by 6 per cent a year and have announced plans to keep doing that until 2017.

Don't take my word for it. You can look it up. It's all on the public record.

Trudeau may drop in and try to hype up his Liberals for next year's election. That's fair enough.

But what isn't fair is to make up his own facts. And what isn't smart is to promote the notion of an ideal government being one prepared to spend us into oblivion.

