

## **Doug Ford: Ontario's premier 'for the (rich) people',**

[By Bob Hepburn, columnist, \*Toronto Star\*, Apr 24, 2019](#)

For all his blustery talk about understanding “the little guy,” the truth is Doug Ford has lived a privileged life, one that few people other than the rich in Toronto get to enjoy.

His father owned Deco Labels and Tags, a successful business that meant the Ford family lived a safe, secure life without the daily problems faced by many of the poor and disadvantaged in Toronto or around Ontario.

Doug Ford never had to go hungry, never had to worry about whether his mother or father could find an affordable apartment, never had to figure out how he could pay for a lawyer if he got into trouble with the police, never had to fear about being unable to afford to go to college or university.

And when Ford dropped out of Humber College after attending classes for barely two months, his daddy gave him a job at the family company, thus saving his son from frantically looking for work to pay the bills — or worse, asking for social assistance in order to survive.

So it should come as no big surprise that despite his mantra about being “For the People,” Ford has emerged as premier “For the Rich People.”

That’s because since becoming Ontario premier last June, Ford has gone out of his way to introduce measures that overwhelmingly hurt poor and disadvantaged residents while enacting tax cuts that will save huge dollars for the rich.

The evidence is overwhelming:

On public health, Ford is making massive cuts in funding to public health units, a move that will cost Toronto Public Health \$1 billion over the next 10 years. That translates into cuts in school breakfast programs that feed hungry children, daycare and restaurant inspections, water-quality testing, pre- and postnatal care for single mothers, and detection of emerging threats to public health. Even the Ford-loving Toronto Sun has warned the premier to be careful about the public-health cuts.

On libraries, Ford, who once said he would close a library in his neighbourhood “in a heartbeat,” has slashed by half the funding for two vital library services in northern and southern Ontario. Library officials claim this will dramatically affect rural and Indigenous communities.

On minimum wages, Ford killed the planned increase in the base pay from \$14 an hour to \$15. Instead he favours a low-income tax credit, but financial experts say this won’t help low-wage workers anywhere near what a \$1-an-hour raise would.

On legal aid, Ford cut funding by \$133 million this year and \$31 million for 2020. The cuts mean fewer services for people who cannot afford lawyers in criminal cases, family conflicts, landlord

disputes, and refugee and immigration cases. Regretably, funding has been cut so badly in recent years by the former Liberal government that Legal Aid Ontario now usually can take on cases for people earning less than \$17,000 a year, which is well below the threshold of just a few years ago.

On harm reduction sites, Ford cut funding to three supervised drug-use sites in Toronto that are already overwhelmed with people dealing with drug addiction.

On student aid, financial assistance for college and university students will see cuts this year of more than \$300 million.

At the same time, Ford has pointedly catered to the rich by cancelling a planned surtax on high-earners proposed by the previous Liberal government that would have generated \$275 million in revenue for the province.

Most Conservatives have remained silent as Ford slashes and burns his way through the province's long tradition of support for those most in need. But one of the Conservatives' biggest fundraisers in Toronto has privately expressed concerns about the direction the Ford government is taking, noting only four or five people close to Ford are making all the major decisions.

Indeed, most cabinet ministers, according to the prominent fundraiser, are mere window-dressing, with little input into decisions, little consultations and little influence. By acquiescing to Ford's worst decisions, they have become mere enablers for the premier.

It's time people across Ontario ask themselves: Is it right for the government to turn its back on hungry children, libraries, low-paid workers and others who deserve help? Is this the Ontario we really want?