

April 4, 2011

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

VIA EMAIL

The Honourable Dwight Duncan
Minister of Finance
7 Queen's Park Crescent
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y3

Dear Premier McGuinty and Minister Duncan:

Re: Commission on Broader Public Sector Reform

I am writing to express OPSEU's deep concern about, and opposition to, the Commission.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Commission is really a search and destroy mission when it comes to public services.

First, your plan in the Budget to wipe out 1,500 jobs in the Ontario Public Service (OPS) in addition to the 3,400 job cuts previously announced means that entire programs will be eliminated. The OPS is already cut to the bone. It cannot deliver the programs it does now with fewer staff. Your government has been given that message by Deputy Ministers and other senior staff.

The Commission will finish the job – not only for the OPS but for the rest of the Broader Public Sector. We will undoubtedly see recommendations calling for cuts to public programs and services, privatization on a large scale and new schemes to reduce wages and benefits for a downsized public sector workforce.

Why do I say that? Because this is exactly the vision laid out in one of the business-funded reports quoted in the Ontario Budget, *Shifting Gears: Paths to Fiscal Sustainability in Canada*.

This report, written by University of Toronto faculty and “supported” by accounting firm KPMG, envisions a provincial government that solely sets policies and standards. The report advocates that other “actors” deliver services and, alarmingly, ensure compliance with government standards.

In their pernicious, race-to-the-bottom world, the report's writers – and funder – believe that slashing wages and benefits in the broader public sector is actually an “equity” issue. This is presumably because then all workers, whether in the public or private sectors, will struggle to give their families a decent standard of living.

I should note this report calls for exactly the kind of comprehensive policy and program audit that your government has committed itself to undertaking with this Commission.

The appointment of TD Bank economist Don Drummond as Chair is further proof in our minds that the Commission will destroy quality public services.

For the past year, Mr. Drummond has engaged in what must be called a misinformation campaign designed to gain public acceptance for increased privatization of our health care system.

His predictions that health care would take up 80 cents of every program dollar gained widespread coverage despite the fact that the trend line was actually going in the opposite direction. Health care has declined from 46 cents of the program dollar to 42 cents within the last three years.

As a percentage of our overall economy, public spending on health care has been stable for close to a decade.

We also reject Mr. Drummond's call for a means test to determine which seniors would be eligible for the Ontario Drug Benefit. This attack on the universality of health care is totally unacceptable to OPSEU, and likely to most Ontarians.

While the Finance Minister has taken health care and education privatization off the table, it is not clear that Mr. Drummond has accepted these instructions. There was not a person present who did not understand what Mr. Drummond meant when he said he would consider "almost anything" to fix the province's finances, including health care and education.

Given this health care campaigning, we consider Mr. Drummond's appointment to reflect a shift in values by your government. His work cannot be viewed as an independent and objective evaluation of the state of public service delivery.

Mr Premier and Mr Minister: back in 2003 we took you at your word when you said you would rebuild public services. That still has not happened. Ontario already has the third-lowest program spending per capita among the provinces and the second-lowest cost for government administration, i.e. the Ontario Public Service.

Ontario doesn't need a commission that will promote privatization. We don't need more corporate-driven policies pushing a cheap labour future.

What we need in Ontario are healthy, safe communities, a future with decent jobs for everyone, tax fairness and greater democratic control.

That is why my union will share our concerns about the Commission within our membership, the labour movement, our community allies and the public at large, including a call for a boycott of this Commission.

Sincerely,



Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President

cc OPSEU Executive Board Members