**Province-Wide Parties Debate on Accessibility and Disability Issues 2018**

**DATE:** **Wed. May 16, 2018
TIME: 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
LOCATION:** **Tecumseh Auditorium, Ryerson Student Centre, 55 Gould St.**

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>>Melanie Marsden: Good evening, we welcome you, community partners, honourable guests and candidates to the Province-Wide Parties Debate on Accessibility and Disability Issues. My name is Melanie Marsden. I am the Project Manager, specializing in accessibility and inclusion, aiming to end gender-based violence at Springtide Resources in Toronto. I am also on the debate organizing committee.

As a First Nations woman with a disability, from the Mohawk and Ojibwe tribe, registered in Alderville, it is an honour this evening to read Ryerson’s land acknowledgment.

Toronto is in the ‘Dish With One Spoon Territory’. The Dish With One Spoon is a treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the territory and protect the land. Subsequent Indigenous Nations and peoples, Europeans and all newcomers have been invited into this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect. Chi-Miigwech.

I have the privilege of now, I'm sorry, sorry, I would like to invite Dr. Denise O’Neil Green Vice-President, Equity and Community Inclusion to give the introductory remarks and introduce the co-moderators.

>> Dr. Denise O’Neil Green: Good afternoon everyone and it's great to have everyone here this evening to engage in this program that focuses on aspects of disability, accessibility and really about the values ever equity, diversity and inclusion. Was mentioned I'm Dr. Denise O-Neil Green Vice-President of Inclusion at Ryerson University. The debate that has been organized this evening has been organized by a strong partnership comprised of non-partisan, cross-disability, community organizations and our Office at Ryerson University, the Ryerson Student Union, and the School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University.

Before I introduce our co-moderators, I just like to say the aspect of disability really has struck my family personally and my son uses a wheelchair as a result of an automobile accident. And that particular situation turned our world upside down and it really helped to open my eyes to how privileged I was in being able to use my legs and now that my son uses a wheelchair as a result of this accident, it made me really see how much the world needs to change to truly make all of us included. Those who have visible, as well as invisible disabilities and it is really important that institutions like Ryerson and other Universities strive to systematically, not only be diverse, but truly be inclusive of everyone and that's very important to me and important to my team and I just want to do a quick shout-out to one of my colleagues, Heather Willis, our Coordinator for Accessibility at Ryerson. She does a magnificent job and, yeah let's [APPLAUSE]

[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

Yes, she does a magnificent job and Ryerson is continuing to strive to be inclusive of everyone, especially our peers and colleagues and community members who have disabilities, whether visible or invisible. It is my pleasure to introduce our co-moderators for this evening's debate, Michelle McQuigge, yes Wooh!

[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE] And Mark Wafer. [APPLAUSE]

Michelle McQuigge is a reporter with the Canadian press, Canada's National Wire Service, also a regular contributor to Accessible Media Inc. Holds degrees in English literature and Journalism from the University of Toronto and Ryerson University, respectively. As she is totally blind, she goes everywhere with Reva, I hope I said that right. The world's cutest guide dog.

Mark Wafer is a well-known Canadian activist in the disability community. He is a relentless disability rights advocate and policy change instigator. Mark is a former Tim Hortons restaurant owner from Toronto. During his 25 years as a business owner Mark and his wife Valarie hired almost 200 workers with disabilities in meaningful and competitively paid positions. Mark is a member of the Federal Government Panel on Labour Market Initiatives for Canadians with disabilities. At this point I'll turn it over to both Michelle and Mark. Have a good evening.

>>Mark: Thank you.

>>Michelle: Thank you so much for the kind intro Denise, good evening everyone, it is a real pleasure and an honour to be here co-moderating, this debate on disability issues. Quick thanks to the planning committee and to all of you for your questions and showing up. Most of all to the political candidates who have joined us here tonight.

>>Mark: Thank you everyone for that warm welcome, the purpose of this debate is for Ontario's with disabilities and their allies to ask questions to the provincial Party about Party platform, commitments, programs and policies on accessibility and disability issues so that we can make informed choices on who to vote for in the June 7th, 2018 Ontario election.

>>Michelle: I would like to go over a few housekeeping notes before we get started. First of all, in terms of accessibility accommodations: we have with us five attendants, two ASL interpreters, two Deaf interpreters and captioning.

Because of the interpretation and captioning, there may be times when we slow down and allow for pauses and we will ask the political candidates to please do the same in order to give our interpreters an opportunity to communicate the messaging they were trying to put across.

For anyone who needs the washrooms throughout the course of the evening there is accessible gendered washrooms just outside and down the ramp of the Auditorium. Ryerson has been kind enough to live cast this debate, which is wonderful, broadcasts all across Ontario. The Webcast is being recorded, so if you are not comfortable being captured on the recording please let us know. The person you need to speak to for that purpose is John Mossa with the Centre for Independent Living in Toronto. John is in the room, off to my right. If you aren't comfortable being part of the pictures, please let John know. He is the head of the planning committee.

If you want to be part of the conversation for those on the Webcast or those in the room, you are welcome to do so on Twitter. Hashtag to use if live Tweeting this or even just taking part is #disabilitydebate2018. If you want to follow along on Twitter you can either monitor that hashtag or you can follow @CIL\_Toronto.

>>Mark: Ground rules, if you have a cell phone with you please put it on vibrate or turn it off. Please be respectful of the candidates and one another. Please do not use discriminatory, foul or offensive language tonight. Co-moderators have the right and responsibility to ensure a respectful discussion from all participants. Co-moderators may ask participants to leave if they violate this rule. Co-moderators will recognize the candidates before they speak. Candidates are asked to speak clearly and one person at a time so that Captionist and the interpreters have time to finish typing or interpreting the previous speaker's comment before the next speaker is recognize. This means that the Deaf and hard of hearing people in the room will not lose the opportunity to participate tonight.

>>Michelle: Now I will explain the format of the debate. The order in which the candidates will speak has been randomly selected just before we all got started this evening.

All candidates are going to be asked to introduce themselves and provide two minutes worth of opening remarks.

All the candidates will then be asked six questions the planning committee has developed. And they will have one minute each to respond to those questions.

The order of the candidates that speak for the first questions will then be reversed for the next one. So the order of candidates speaking will be alternating throughout the debate. The timekeeper will be given candidates a ten second verbal and visual notice to finish their remarks, just like that, and another verbal and visual notice (beeping tone) like that, when the time is up.

After the candidates have answered the first six questions that planning committee has developed, the co-moderators are going to be asking questions provided by you, the audience. You've submitted questions through Eventbrite and Twitter. We have chosen this format so we have a diverse range of questions, also maximize topics we can cover. After the candidates have answered they will each have one minute to offer closing remarks. Then of course the Centre for Independent Living will come forward to say thank you to everybody.

>>Mark: The order candidates for this evening are:

New Democratic Party - Monique Taylor, Hamilton Mountain,

Liberal Party – Damin Starr, Hamilton Mountain

Progressive Conservative Party – Christine Elliott, Newmarket-Aurora,

Green Party – Mike Schreiner, Leader, Guelph and

Candidates will be given two minutes for open remarks.

A Central question, opening remarks is what are your official Party platforms commitments, programs, initiatives, policies on accessibility and disability issues for the 2018 election campaign?

>>Monique Taylor, NDP: Thank you very much Mark and Michelle and having us this evening and for organizers who put this on, happy to be here, many of you may know that I have been NDP critic nor children and new services for the last six and a half years, for last two and a half years I've been the critic for persons with disability and accessibility as well as I was a member on select committee for developmental services. During this time, I have met with countless groups.

We know there are almost 2000 people living in our Province with disabilities. People who are facing a lack of access to general services. This means barriers in all corners of life. Barriers to education, barriers to public service, barriers to participation in all forms of public and private life. Not only are those barriers not right and not fair, but they come at a cost of 25 billion dollars annually. The AODA legislation has existed for almost 13 years. The Liberal government has failed to not only ensure the AODA targets are met, but they have failed to ensure that legislation is enforced. 60% of businesses right here in Toronto haven't filed accessibility reports. The government has let some of these businesses off the hook from filing all together. Unfortunately, we know Doug Ford conservatives have no plans for those with disabilities. He vowed to cut 6 thousand dollars from people already starved of public services. Our Province is at the best when everyone can live good lives and no one is excluded from their community. That means that we're making sure to make accommodations with distinct needs and strengths for everyone with lifelong supports that allow us to thrive. That's why I'm so proud to be here on behalf of Andrea and the plan we have invested for people with disabilities, thank you very much.

>>Damin Starr, Liberal Party: Hello everyone, it is an honour to be here with you this when evening to share in this dialogue of important issues. The Ontario Liberal Party has a long history of challenging the typical lens of which many of us see the world. To our credit it was our Party in government when the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act was passed in 2005. Through the AODA tonight we are witness to those improvements for all Ontarians, in areas of service, information, employment, transit and design, with guidance from the standards committee and the review process we continue to raise the bar and strive for tangible improvements in areas of health and education. As a father of six and a caregiver to two children living with developmental disabilities, autism diagnosis, let me assure you our job is not done. Under our watch in 2009, the last institutional model was closed allowing for a new chapter in inclusive and community-based living. We are neighbors, we are friends and we are family. As government we know we must invest in our people and that means everyone. With strong economic prosperity now and on the horizon, I believe the Ontario government, unprecedented, 2018 budget is sound and sustainable. This includes fully costed enhancements for developmental services, ODSP, mental health and Ontario amount autism Program. In our Ontario each and every person is entitled to dignity and respect. We are unwavering in that commitment.

>>Christine Elliott, PC Party: Thank you for inviting us to join you, many take granted, get an education, find a job, home, friends and raise our children with their busy schedules, we forget none of this is easy for people with disabilities it is difficult to get the support you need to be successful, elementary, secondary and limited situations post-secondary education. Difficult to find a job, many of employers are held become by a number of myths of people with disabilities that need to be dispelled. Students with disability need help to develop soft skills necessary to find a job and also need help to be matched with the right job with the right employer. It is difficult to find safe, affordable, accessible and appropriate housing. Thousands of people wait for years to move into subsidized and supportive housing and end up being market rental rates, which leaves very little for food and other necessities on ODSP budget. All of this needs to change. Every Ontarian deserves to live a life of purpose and dignity. One of the greatest change agents is of course AODA which will make Ontario fully accessible by 2025, yet time marches on, it is 2018 and we are not on track to meet this goal unless the implementation of the Act becomes a priority for government. This would be a priority for a progressive, conservative government. Ontario has a huge opportunity to develop a gold standard for accessibility and inclusion for the rest of Canada and for the world. It can be achieved if we move to advance vision across the Province and involve all Ontarians in its implementation. Thank you.

Mike Schreiner Green Party,

 >> I would like to thank Ryerson for hosting this event, I would like to thank all the organizers, Mark and Michelle for hosting and the land acknowledgment, I think that is so important having indigenous view and think about next seven generations in decisions we make today. I believe in the Green Party believes in inclusive, caring and just communities. And we cannot create those kinds of communities if there are barriers to accessing those communities. And that is why we have put forward a vision book that outlines a wide-range of issues of how we would have a bold plan to create jobs that put people and planet first. Part of the investment in putting people first is a historic commitment to bring forward a basic income guarantee in if Ontario, so that no one is left behind with an affordable plan for how to pay for it. We have an affordable housing strategy that not only has a plan to increase the availability of affordable housing supply, but also increase funding for supported housing, co-op housing and social housing. We believe deeply in affordable, accessible barrier-free transit with historic investment in expanding out Ontario transit infrastructure and help cover operating cost for municipalities so that transit remains affordable. I look forward to a conversation tonight about how we create barrier-free, inclusive communities in Ontario. Thank you.

>>Michelle: Candidates, planning committee has developed questions on these six themes: Accessible subsidized and supportive housing, employment, poverty reduction strategies, the Ontario disability Support Program, which we all know as ODSP, the accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act most of us know as AODA and education. Those are the themes in which the Committee will be asking you questions.

The order for the first question will be as follows. First Monique Taylor of NDP will speak, followed by Damin Starr of Liberal and Christine Elliott of PC Party and Mike Schreiner of the Green Party.

After the first question to the candidates, it will then go in reverse order.

The first question from the planning committee is on accessible, subsidized and supportive housing. According to 2018 housing index, Ontario ranks second highest share of households using more than 50% of income to pay rent. Specifically, Ontario's current stock of acceptable social housing and supportive housing does not meet current demand. Fully 70% of ODSP recipients have to rent in the open market, that means that they are going to be paying rents that are well above the $489 single person maximum shelter rate that ODSP recipients actually get. The question is this: With the urgent housing crisis, what is your Party's commitment to short-term and long-term investment strategies in these four areas: Low cost housing, social housing, accessible subsidized housing and supportive housing using Universal Design principles.

Monique Taylor, NDP:

>> Absolutely Crisis question we know we are hearing right across the Province. We hear from more folks on regular basis with their children, not children, now adults still living with their aging parents and not being able to find supportive housing. We are hear being from folks who are living in low standard housing unsafe, where people have barriers to bathrooms, to showers. So new democrats are committed to, in the first term of our mandated, to 12000 new homes. And that will work out to 30 thousand within ten years with 1.4 billion dollar investment. We will also add 65 thousand affordable housing units over ten years with the work of, through or with people as in not-for-profits and co-ops.

>>Damin Starr, Liberals: Thank you very much. We know the housing is important, we have known for a long time and we continue to make investments, every year we invest one billion dollars per year on housing. We know that it is not enough and that's why in the short term, over the next five years, we will be committing an additional nearly $600 million dollars to support social housing, for repair and retrofit. We are also negotiating and have achieved a deal with federal government on their national housing strategy. This includes building new affordable housing. I would stress to you to be concerned with NDP's plan. It is shaky at best because they have not identified anyway to fund their plan.

>>Christine Elliott, PC: Thank you, lack of affordable housing is one of the most urgent issues facing people with disabilities. Often housing only becomes available if an emergency occurs such as when a parent passes away. At that point person with a disability is placed in a group home with people they have never met. This is certainly not the way to provide people with a home. A far better approach is to have a range of options available to the person with the disability and/or family depending on their needs for future. Rental costs remain high and choices are few. They say the best way to bring down cost is to increase supply. Short-term we would maintain the status quo on rent control and not change it. And then in the longer term we would engage in discussions with builders about how to bring forward new options and more accessible housing. We also need to be innovative in developing new approaches, because if we keep going on in the same old way never find housing we need for people. Thank you.

Mike Schreiner, Green Party >> Everyone in Ontario deserves a place they can call home, as I talk to people across the Province, particularly southern Ontario housing affordability is a huge issue, especially with those with disabilities, we have a three-part plan. First of all, in addition to what is already budgeted in 2018 provincial budget we increase for supportive, accessible and social housing, additional 200 million dollars, to ramp up the supply of affordable housing stock, we require any new development, rental, condo, housing unit, any developer would have to have a minimum of 20% below market housing availability. That would ramp up the supply and then finally we need to be innovative with laneway housing, tiny housing and other forms to utilize existing building stock more efficiently.

>>Mark: Second question Many Ontarians with disabilities are underemployed or unemployed, in 2016 statistics Canada release figures for employment rate for disabled Canadians at 49% compared to 79% for the general population. 41% of Ontarians between 16 and 64 with disabilities, either unemployed or not in the labour force at all in 2010 compared with 14% of Ontarians without disabilities. The question is what Province-wide mechanisms, programs and internships is your Party going to establish and/or expand to secure employment for people with disabilities in Ontario?

Mike Schreiner Green Party, >> Thank you, when I was running my small business, we were always working with community living to have people with disabilities have meaningful well-paid employment within my company. One of the ways we were able to do that was supportive employment program was in place to assist us and I think we need more of that type of supportive employment programming in place. I also believe that we need to end the claw-back within Ontario disability support payments for people entering the workforce, because that creates barriers in terms of maintaining benefits and income. And then finally I'm deeply concerned about the closure of the sheltered workshop programs which I think the government made a huge mistake and needs to reverse, thank you.

>>Christine Elliott, PC Party: Thank you, many students stay in school until they are 21 because the fact is there is little out there in the community for them they are after, simply given ODSP application upon graduation and that's it. This is not acceptable. So what would we do? First undertake a campaign with employers to dispel myths out there with about hiring people with disabilities. Employers need to understand hiring somebody with a disability is not a charitable act it is a good business practice if you match the right person with the right job. Guidance counsellors need to work with student’s part-time work in school, which will help them find full-time work thereafter, they also need training and soft skills like writing resumes, job applications. Helping students prepare employment plan before they leave school is also a very important consideration. We would also work with community colleges to create mandatory community integration through cooperative education programs to provide students with opportunities for post-secondary education. Thank you.

>>Damin Starr, Liberals: Thank you very much. Like Mike, I'm a small business owner and I share his values in making sure that individuals, regardless of their challenges, have the opportunity for employment. Our Party also shares those values. Employment is key to inclusive, to inclusive society. For us we're raising the earning exemptions significantly. Recently the Ontario Liberals also released Access Talent to encourage that employment strategy and encourage and support those opportunities for people living with disabilities. So we, in the Ontario Liberal Party are confident that as we move forward education and supports in place will help redefine how we look at individuals that may be facing challenges.

>>Monique Taylor, NDP: Thank you. we will no longer require people to re-apply for supports after turning 18 and join long waitlist for respite, employment training, life skills, trainings and support services. We will invest 67 million dollars annually in increasing support that provides services to adults with people, with developmental disabilities so they can participate in their communities and have options for public services and a greater quality of life. In addition to creating 27 thousand new co-op placements and internships that allow graduates real world experience and we will take some of the job prosperity fund, 57 million dollars annually and make sure that we are improving those paths for under-represented groups. Unfortunately, the PC's have cut job prosperity fund I believe as of an announcement yesterday.

>>Michelle: The third question, from the planning committee is on poverty reduction strategies. 50% of adults with disabilities have an annual income of less than $15 thousand dollars. People with disabilities of working age are about twice as likely to live on a low income as their counterparts without disabilities. 27.3 percent of food-bank users are on disability-related income supports. The question to the candidates is as follows: What is your Party's specific poverty reduction strategy to assist both low income working persons with disabilities and for people with disabilities on Ontario Works or ODSP.

>>Monique Taylor, NDP: Thank you very much, unfortunately over last 20 years we have seen services, social services cut by Harris cut by 21%, by Liberals haven't made things much better. We have seen families falling further and further behind into poverty. New Democrats endorse the income security road map for change. We will increase ODSP by 5% for three years and then OW, we will increase it 10% the first-year, 7% the second year, 5% the third year and then we will put it on an independent panel to ensure as it goes forward. We will provide Pharmacare, Dental Care, evaluate basic income pilot and ensure everyone learns at least a minimum of $15 an hour.

>>Damin Starr, Liberals: Thank you, thank you Monique for at least acknowledging we have done better than Mike Harris' government. So increasing social supports by 3% per item over the next three years is our plan and our commitment. Incentivizing employment by raising exemptions, re-identifying spouse identification for unmarried couples and fully exempting asset limits those are commitments we have made. All this leaves more money in the pockets of individuals, allowing them to make choices that they need to make and preventing some of the crisis that we are seeing today. We have to do that with a strong economy and now is the time and the opportunity. That's our commitment.

Christine Elliott, PC Party>> Five major priorities, two relevant to this question, one is bringing jobs back to the Ontario and the other is putting money in your pockets. To encourage job growth, reduce hydro cost, reduce unnecessary regulations, and reduce corporate tax rate from 11 and a half percent to 10 and a half percent, in order to make life more affordable for people with disabilities, we would continue with rent control to help make housing more affordable, eliminate Ontario income taxes for anyone making minimum wage, reduce hydro bill by 12%, continue a OHIP Plus program for affordable prescription drugs for Ontarians under 25, offer Dental Care to seniors, continue Ontario Autism Program, invest 1.9 billion dollars into mental health and addictions and invest 5 billion dollars into subways and regional transit corridors in GTA.

Mike Schreiner, Green Party, We have an honest conversation about poverty in Ontario this Province has never recovered from dramatic cutbacks of Harris government in 1990, for 15 years it feels like we have had strategy after strategy without action. While I will complement the current government for bringing in the basic income pilot the bottom line is we cannot allow that to be an excuse not to act on poverty right now. That's why we are calling for and have cost this in our platform, increasing Ontario Works and Ontario disability support payments to the same level of the basic income pilot, which right now is 75% of the low income measure. That would make a huge difference in people's lives because nobody can afford to live on current social assistance rates.

>>Mark: Question number four is around Ontario Disability Support Program, ODSP, people on ODSP, Ontario Works get separate amounts for basic needs and shelter. They have to regularly put on detail about their housing, like for example how much they pay, who they live with and their relationship status. People who homeless or in supportive housing or group homes get less money based on living situation. This when is discriminatory and prevents people from getting housing. Moving to the standard flat rate recommended in Income Security Road Map for Change would ensure everybody gets full benefit amounts would eliminate reporting rules and unnecessary paperwork. The question, will your Party implement the recommendation. If yes then how and when, if not please share with us why.

Mike Schreiner Green Party

>> I can say this as a small business owner, you know often times status quo politicians talk a lot about ending red tape for business owners, I think, I would like to, end it but what we need to do is eliminate red tape for the most disadvantaged in our society. And so we would absolutely implement the recommendations. The fact that people have to go here and fill out a form and there and fill out a form and somewhere else and fill out a form and every time you go do it, somebody is judging you in a way that doesn't treat you with dignity. And I think that is wrong. And that is exactly why we need to move to a basic income guarantee. No forms attached. People, as a citizen of Ontario, would have a floor they would not go below. Then we could end all of the red tape and the undignified ways in which we force people to apply for various support programs in Ontario.

>>Christine Elliott, PC Party: Thank you we do not support any program discriminatory and prevents people from getting safe, affordable, accessible and appropriate housing, we would therefore be interested in reviewing and considering in detail the benefits and potential detriments of the standard flat rate recommended in income security road map for change. With respect to ODSP and particular, since for many people it is a permanent income, we are interested in consulting with people with disabilities to determine what changes would be of greatest benefit. Of course the intent would be to make sure that people who are able to work part-time receiving ODSP don't have that back but able to keep any benefits from the results of their employment. Thank you.

>>Damin Starr: Ontario Liberal Party and current government supports this. So yes absolutely. We also want to include the rate increase of 3% per annum and changes to the income exemptions and also benefits including removing barriers. Those are our commitments today and over the coming years. We will continue to review, make changes as necessary and also commit to consulting on those issues as we move forward, as we have already done. So our standards committee will give us guidance as we move forward.

>>Monique Taylor, NDP: Thank you very much as I said previously we fully endorse income security road map and standard flat rate. You know we have heard from the other parties of their thoughts and how they figure that they are going to move forward, but we have seen Liberal government in power for 15 years and we have more people in poverty than ever before. The ODSP, if you are on ODSP, if you have a disability you are automatically being put into poverty and that's a shame. And it started with the conservatives with the 21% cut under Harris. So families are struggling, we need to ensure that we have procedures in place to make sure that it isn't onerous to be able to apply for ODSP. To make sure that people have a chance to get out of poverty, to get into the work force, that they have the supports in place to ensure that they can help the ways to employment. Under the Liberal government, that hasn't happened in 15 years, can't see is it happening under the Ford government.

>>Michelle: The next question is about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act which I feel we can safely all refer to as AODA. As of 2017, the government’s progress report states that 57 per cent of Ontario’s 56,000 private and non-profit sector organizations with at least 20 employees have failed to file mandatory AODA reports to the government declaring they have met current accessibility requirements. It means that 32,000 private sector companies required to file accessibility compliance reports have failed to do so.

The question is this: How will your party ensure AODA compliance and a higher level of accountability for the "for profit sector"? Please give specifics.

 >>Monique Taylor, NDP: Thank you very much having a strong accessibility policy means nothing if you don't have strong enforcement to go with it. We have repeatedly called on the government to utilize independent review process and to expand the current AODA enforcement activities beyond assessment of voluntary submitted accessibility reports. And NDP government will explore options to increase enforcement, including increasing the number of inspectors and certifying inspectors from other agencies to be able to enforce the AODA compliance. And NDP government will commit to publicizing ways for the public and public servants to report to the AODA. Currently there have only been six monetary penalties to, to businesses even though there have been thousands of violations. Government hasn't done anything about it, Liberal government has done nothing about it and allowed it to happen.

>>Damin Starr, LIBERALS: Enforcement is a challenge. We acknowledge that this when is a challenge for us and we have tried a pilot project where with we have trained other auditors from other Ministries to identify those compliance issues and we will continue to build on that initiative. Working with obligated organizations and stakeholders to provide further guidance on the enforcement issues, but we want to acknowledge that enforcement is not the only way forward. We need to continue to build education, we need to continue and acknowledge the need for integrated workplaces so that moving forward employers not only accommodate, but they appreciate the employees that they have regardless of those challenges that may exist. So we're committed to all of those things.

Christine Elliott PC Party>> Fact that half of 56 thousand organizations have failed to file mandatory AODA reports is simply unacceptable. PC Party fully supports the AODA and achieving full accessibility by 2025. To reach this goal is going to require allot more work than we have seen from the Liberals to date, however. A greater emphasis on enforcement is necessary to ensure compliance. All AODA enforcement powers should be utilized and reports on compliance statistics should be made public on a regular basis. More importantly, government needs to take leadership on this matter. How? First we would develop action plan to make sure we can achieve full accessibility by 2025. Currently no such action plan exists. Also important that detailed, technical accessibility advice be provided to organizations who want to be accessible but don't know how. Finally, we need to take action on the environment, need to make sure design professionals are properly qualified in design elements.

Mike Schriener the Green Party believes it is completely unacceptable that 57% of private sector employers do not have their mandatory plans in place. We also think it is completely unacceptable that the government itself is continuing to build public infrastructure that is not accessible either. I mean just look at the new transit builds that have just, you know, the new stations that aren't accessible. So we also, we need to have enforcement and inspectors for the private sector, we also need to ensure the public sector is achieving our goals as well. We absolutely support independent review of current standards and future standards with a plan of how Ontario is going to achieve our AODA goals by 2025 and finally, we need to have supports in place for private sector to access accessible design guidelines.

>>Mark: The final question for this segment of the debate is around education. Recently, approximately 300 parents of children with disabilities across the Province were surveyed as part of, if inclusion means everyone, why not me? The survey results found that students with disabilities still experience inordinate barriers to accessing a meaningful academic and social engagement in this Province. Even more troubling, statistics released by Ministry of Education in 2015-2016 reported that 47% of all suspensions and 49% of all expulsions involved a student with a disability. The question is, is your Party willing to create a new associate Deputy Minister and division at Ministry of education, have lead responsibility for ensuring that all planning and programming at the Ministry is designed and operated to ensure that students with disabilities can fully participate in and be fully included in schools and education services. If so, how and whether would you implement it. If not how will your Party create a more inclusive education system for people with disabilities.

Mike Schreiner Green Party

>> The Green Party absolutely supports education system, yes we support the creation of Deputy Minister position. We need to actually go beyond that to reform Ontario's education funding formula. The fact the funding formula does not recognize additional funding for schools that have higher population levels of students with special needs is not acceptable. And the formula needs to be redesigned to provide the supports that schools need. We need additional funding for Special Education instructors, education support staffs, lower class sizes and more supports for teachers in schools to provide inclusive education for all students. And finally I, my time is almost up, do it in the next question. Of [LAUGHTER]

Christine Elliott PC Party>> Thank you the fact so many students with disabilities in Ontario face such barriers in obtaining education is very troubling, the survey results from parents on indicates much needs to be done in order to create much more inclusive system, we do need to create it. It needs to start with teacher training, teachers need to be taught in teacher college how to teach students with different learning abilities. Next, funding formula needs to recognize actual number of students with disabilities in a school board rather than the expected number to make sure that every student who needs assistance receives it. Students, parents and teachers are all unanimous in call for more educational in the classroom to help students with disabilities. Finally, government needs to work standards committee, to implement the recommendations and make sure they are disseminated and followed both in Ministry and schools across the Province to make sure that everyone gets the same quality education.

>>Damin Starr, Liberal Party: Our Party and our government is continuing, is working to continue with our education standards and development committees, looking for guidance and creating that path forward together. Clearing the backlog of Special Education assessments in schools with new funding detailed in budget 2018. Increase the, increasing the availability of mental health workers in Ontario High Schools. These are things that we have committed to. Not just talking about it, we're doing it. For the past 15 years we have been working towards improving constantly in our education system. It doesn't happen immediately. We are working towards it and these are our commitments moving forward.

Monique Taylor NDP

>> Ministry of education major barrier to effectively meeting the needs of students with disabilities, responses and supports that students of families have received have varied wildly across the Province, students with disabilities are no longer treated as an afterthought. That means keeping all options open when it comes to ensuring that students with disabilities can thrive. We will review the funding formula, we will make sure it is based on Special Education needs and not, not overall population and make sure that it has timely needs assessments. We will also build on Ontario provincial demonstration schools track records of success. Especially in helping students who are Deaf, blind or Deaf Blind and students with severe learning disabilities who need greater support. Liberal government has been in place for 15 years, students are falling furthered and furthered behind, less EA than are necessary and quite frankly with the cuts that Doug Ford is planning on making not sure where you are going to get the money for its EA.

Michelle: The Planning Committee has compiled over 40 questions submitted by you, the audience members using Eventbrite & Twitter, into themes. Mark and I will be asking many of your questions to the candidates as time permits.

The Planning Committee has chosen this format so we can maximize the number of Eventbrite and Twitter questions to the candidates. Also, this format helps us with our access accommodation needs.

You can be part of the conversation by live Tweeting us at **#disabilitydebate2018.**

Candidates will have 1 minute to respond to each question.

So let us begin

So the theme of our first social media question is housing. Eventbrite user Sandra asks, will your Party commit to development and implemental of universal income tested, portable housing benefits to help reduce the impact of poverty. If so, how and when?

>>Monique Taylor, NDP: Thank you very much, thank you for that very important question because yes we are fully committed to building 30 thousand supportive houses and 65 thousand affordable housing. The Universal Design is something that is absolutely critical to ensuring as we move forward in the Province that nothing is built in public funding and it will be encouraged in private build to ensure that we are using Universal Design so that measures are in place when folks need it. Income tested, portion of the question, um you know I think it is important to reiterate the fact that many people with disabilities are living in poverty and on ODSP, not able to keep up with rent, ensuring that we have affordable housing is absolutely critical.

>>Damin Starr Liberals We continue to make investments each and every year towards these initiatives, committing 600 million dollars over five years to support social housing in repair, retrofit, to make it more affordable and to allow people to live in dignity. We are working with federal partners to, on national housing initiative strategy to build new affordable housing. This is something we do together. We will receive guidance as we move forward and dedicate those investment funds as necessary to achieve success in all of these areas. It is an ongoing process, it doesn't just start today, it has been going for a long time while we have been in government and will continue to make those efforts work.

Christine Elliot, PC Party We know many people with disabilities wait many years to receive affordable housing, in fact people with developmental disabilities alone, a list of over 14 thousand people waiting for homes, some have waited over ten years, that means when on ODSP budget, if you are having to pay market rent you have very little less for everything you need to buy including food, transportation, clothing and everything else you need. We need to make sure we invest in a whole range of housing because everyone has different needs, some people can live more or less independently or can live independently, other people need to live with 24/7 supervision, don't concentrate on any one specific area, need to make sure a range of options available for people because needs change as time goes on as well. In terms of the principles of Universal Design, absolutely. I think it needs to start with government. Government needs to do inventory of own properties and show that, what accessible and what aren't and then we need a plan to figure out how we make them fully accessible by 2025.

Mike Schreiner with Green Party.

>> The Green Party absolutely supports increase in supply of accessible housing, one reason we believe portable housing benefit is so important so people have ability to choose appropriate housing that meets their particular needs and are not stuck in one particular place. Also we believe that accessible housing design should be a part of the training and licensing of people in the trade we are in a situation now shouldn't be building new builds that are not accessible. We know this is an issue, so needs to be part of a strategy, so much more expensive to retrofit than it is to do it right in the first place. I mean yes we need to retrofit, let's do it right in the first place. I outlined affordable housing strategy, I argue that we have the boldest plan based on international best standard to increase affordable housing in Ontario.

>>Mark: David asked on Twitter how would your Party prioritize affordable housing access for Ontarians most in need who have disabilities.

Mike Schreiner with Green Party.

>> Yeah first of all we support the current budget investment in supportive housing and we would increase that by 200 million dollars over the next four years. We think that investment in supportive social, accessible housing is critically important. But we also recognize that we need to increase the supply of affordable housing, period. Which is exactly why can we have been pushing so hard for inclusionary housing rules. I was happy when Liberal government brought inclusionary zoning rules then so disappointed with the rules themselves. Why don't we follow international best practices and require any new development whether it is rental, Condo, subdivision, whatever have a minimal of 20% below market homes available to people to dramatically increase the supply of affordable housing.

Christine Elliot, PC Party >>Michelle: Thank you we know there is a huge need for more affordable housing, that became, mental health an addiction select committee as well as development select committee, those were recommendations that all three parties made together so we know that it is something that needs to be done and is a priority because if approximate you have to wait five, ten years to get into affordable housing you are going to be really, really in trouble because you don't have any money for the other things you need to provide for. But we do need to make sure that we work with first of all we would protect rent control, that is a priority for us, that's one way to provide affordable housing in some decree, but which also need to work with builders to talk to them about what needs to be done if order to make sure that accessible units can be built in every building and to make sure that is a priority for them as well and that they will continue to build more rental units, right now the conditions are not such they are feeling inclined to do thanks to a lot of provisions made by Liberal government. We need to straighten that out.

>>Damin Starr, Liberals: As Mike mentioned inclusive housing problem that we initiated nothing is perfect. We have to start somewhere. We have initiated our dialogue with municipalities to work with them on creating more affordable units, also dedicating significant amount of the funds towards those programs and initiatives. These are also things that have been in the works for a very long time. So when people say that we haven't accomplished anything, we have, it doesn't happen immediately, we work towards a successful future and this is our way forward. Working together with municipalities, other stakeholders and community educations, making investments across the board. So everyone participates on this issue.

>>Monique Taylor, NDP Thank you very much, for New Democrats housing is a priority, we have seen for years the mess that has been left behind by other governments, conservatives downloaded it on to municipalities without any way to pay for it, Damin, Liberals did nothing to reverse to make sure we are a housing stock safe affordable, not crumbling, New Democrats, a third of a cost into making sure that we have homes that are livable and that can have repair cost and capital cost attached to them because currently we're seeing our housing stock deplete quickly, without the means to ensure that thousands of families are not going to be put on the street because their roofs are falling in if for New Democrats housing is major priority that is 12 thousand new supportive housing within our first mandate.

Michelle: The theme of next two audience questions is going to be employment. We have a question from David H. He asks for many years Deaf Ontarians have been underemployed or unemployed because of our education, health and legal system administrators assumes what is best for deaf people. Deaf Ontarians must go the extra mile just for a low paying job. What steps would you take to make things easier for us?

>>Monique Taylor, NDP: Thank you very much. Well we need to ensure first of all the assistive devices program is in place and is useable and that families have access to it for years we know that many folks don't even know that those programs exist. So making sure that supports are in place, that they have devices they need and ensuring that employers know the benefits of people with different abilities to be able to complete different jobs and so, you know, making sure that we are supporting agencies to get people into the workforce is absolutely critical for people with employment needs.

>>Damin Starr, Liberals: So then we know that employment is key to an inclusive society. Truly. As a small business owner myself it is essential that we create inclusive working environments raising those employment earnings exemptions is key and also I just want to emphasize that last year we introduced the Access Talent which also is an employment strategy that encourages employers to employee those with special needs, accommodate and accept the reality that all individuals in society contribute in a consumer form and a workforce form to make sure our economy thrives.

Christine Elliot, PC Party We know Ontarians with disabilities, those deaf or hard of hearing have a very difficult time finding employment. I think what really needs to happen, Ontario as a government needs to show leadership that's what PC government would do, by dispelling a myth out there, employers still hold, they think it is going to cause problems in their workplace, that they are going to have more injuries or more expensive or they are going to have other issues with that. We know, been a study done on including a federal study that showed that is not the case, good business practice if you match the right person with the right job and you need to encourage employers to start thinking about that, not to leave anybody, that everybody has abilities if you match the right person with the right job it is an excellent business practice and I think it is incumbent on government to show that level of leadership and talk about those issues and I know that one of the moderators has a huge degree of knowledge and information and experience on that. So thank you.

Mike Schreiner with Green Party >> Inclusive employment goes hand in hand with inclusive communities and it is partly because, you know, support network outside of family actually comes through employment places often times and workplaces so having programs in place that match employers with people with disabilities including those who are Deaf or have hearing impairments is very important.

Having supports in place for employers to accommodate people with all abilities is essential. And I know, as I said earlier from running my own business what a rewarding experience it was for us to employee people with disabilities and have the supports to create that inclusive workplace and so I think we definitely need to educate more employers around the benefits of inclusive workplaces.

>>Mark: The following question is from Martininin, asked on Twitter. For people with disabilities in Ontario, under employment and unemployment are rampant, education is substandard, accessible housing choices are a myth. In capital letters, stop abusing us for something that isn't our fault. How and when would you implement changes to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to employment which provides for a reasonable standard of living not just a wage which allows for the working poor to remain under the poverty line.

Mike Schreiner with Green Party.

>> We talked about a number of strategies around inclusive employment. Bottom line is we need to continue working having more inclusive workplaces. The bottom line is, is one of the reasons that I'm so passionate about bringing in a basic income guarantee is that so everyone can live with dignity and have the income to live with dignity and so if you are either having trouble accessing the workplace or in a workplace situation that is not inclusive, is not supportive, you have the financial option to exit that workplace and know that you are not going to fall through the cracks. And that's why implementing a basic income guarantee at the low income measure is so essential for our economy and for our community and to make sure we care for all people in this Province.

Christine Elliot, PC Party

>> I think the solution has to start in High School. Has to start with guidance counsellors working with students being more knowledgeable about what the options are, about CICE if interested in post-secondary education, perhaps University programs, understanding what employers are out there and what skills students need, helping them find part-time work that can develop perhaps full-time work so they understand what it is they want to do and what they feel they are good at doing and want to continue doing for future. Everybody wants to feel they are needed, one of the key ways you can do that is by finding a job, I think there is a lot more we need to do in High School, I know for a fact, we went through my own family, my son was given the ODSP application when he graduated, when he was 21 and that was it. That is not an answer for people. People have abilities we need to make sure that we work with them to find out what they want to do and match them with the right employer. And for employers we have already talked about reducing some of those myths, so there is a lot that needs to happen in school.

>>Damin Starr Liberal Party: Education is essential to our way forward. So we will continue to work with our education system to ensure that those needs are identified, invested upon, recognize, so that we can create viable plans for individuals requiring special accommodation, ensuring that from that education process that they can move into a comfortable workplace that appreciates skill sets, that they can fill dignified in their participation in our economy, we will continue to do that. We won't simply let people fall through the cracks. None of our programs are necessarily designed to fail, we just need to make sure that those programs are supported moving forward.

>>Monique Taylor, NDP: >> Thank you so much as I said previously we would create 27 thousand co-op placements so that you can ensure young people when coming out of school, that very have an ability to get into the workplace, meet-up with programs that make sense for them, with employment that makes sense for them. We will ensure we are providing supports, 67 million dollars actually, that provide services to adults making sure that they get employment training, they get the life skills, that they are able to get the training and support necessary to go to work. And then we will make sure that we, we are going to take 57 million from job and prosperity fund and help create opportunities within different skill trades, within different pathways to enter the workforce and those dollars will be especially dedicated to people with disabilities.

>>Michelle: Theme for next two audience questions have to do with ODSP. Robin has asked the following, how will your Party make ODSP more responsive to the needs of people with disabilities from populations that face additional equity barriers, including single parents, people from racialized communities, indigenous people and others, so that their needs can be addressed through a strong equity lens. First we will hear from Miss Taylor of NDP

>>Monique Taylor NDP: Thank you very much for that question. You know we have been hearing from folks on disability of the challenges and the barriers they face on a regular basis of first of all applying for ODSP to be able to get accepted to receive those benefits. And then the reapplications, the new information that's constantly needed, the struggles that they, that people face when they have caregivers living with them or spouses living with them. So we need to ensure that the, the system works more seamlessly for people so that they don't have to constantly overcome another hurdle. Also making sure that they have enough dollars’ leftover, if they do get into the workforce, to ensure that not too much is clawed back from ODSP, so that they are able to get ahead is a priority. Thank you very much.

>>Damin Starr Liberal Party: We are recognizing the system isn't perfect. Continue to work towards increasing social supports and we are committed to increasing them 3% per annum over three years. Went to incentivize employment opportunities by raising those exemptions so people can earn more and keep more in their pockets. Redefining the terminology of spouse for those unmarried couples and fully exempting the asset limits. These are steps forward, they are not all the answers, but they are steps forward and our government and budget has proposed these as immediate changes moving forward.

Christine Elliot, PC Party

>> Many problems with ODSP, it really starts when a young person reaches the age when they become adults and have to apply all over again, even though their disability hasn't really changed nothing has changed have to apply again, often wait for the application to be proceeded with, have to answer a whole slew of questions very frustrating to themselves and their families and have to go on another wait list. It does need to be made more seamless so they don't lose benefits, don't become frustrated, want to be treated with human beings, which would be nice because that doesn't happen either. People are subject to number of indignities when being dealt with often by ODSP officials, make sure more stream-lined more human and make sure that we have to recognize that people's needs are different across the Province that might be okay supplement in some parts is simply unaffordable in place like Toronto. We need to make sure that in consideration to make sure people are treated with dignity. Thank you.

Mike Schreiner with Green Party.

>> ODSP needs just a complete overall from the application process to reapplication process, from the claw-back for work, from the spousal rules, from asset limits. The paperwork that people have to go through, the undignified way in which people are judged through that process, is all unacceptable. And that's why this system needs to be overhauled. I'm sorry, 3% a year increase giving the low rates we have right now is simply not enough. People can't survive on ODSP right now. I mean just, people in Toronto, Toronto housing market alone makes it incredibly difficult.

That's why we are calling for immediate increase in rates to 75% of the low income measure, with I is what basic income is around the Province.

>>Mark: Thank you. The following question asked on Twitter by **@ONelxn18** very hard to pronounce: ODSP rates are lower now in real terms than they were when the program started in 1998. Rates were frozen for eight years and, since 2005, only very small annual increases have been made. Will your party raise the ODSP rates to $1,915 which would bring them in line with what they should have been if they had kept pace with inflation? And if so, when would you implement this change?

Mike Schreiner with Green Party.

>> Yes we have already talked about that we would immediately increase rates. Let me tell you how to pay for it, because it is easy to say you are going to fund something if you don't talk about how to pay it. Governments often times have to make tough choices, Green Party has been opposed to the unfair hydro plan that the Liberals have brought forward because it is only going to reduce people's electricity rates by 25% for a few years and then they are going to sky rocket after the election. And the 3.5, almost 3.5 billion dollars that's going to cost, which is going to be 40 to 90 billion dollars over next two decades, we think that money should be redirected to supporting people who are the most vulnerable in our society. And that is where we would get the down payment on our basic income guarantee to raise rates immediately, as we move towards raising rates to the low income measure.

Christine Elliott, PC Party They need to be increased I would love to tell you, reason we can't do that, we are in a huge financial hole in Ontario that the Liberals have created. They have tripled debt since they took government, that means we are paying a billion dollars a month, a month in interest on borrowed money. Think what we could do that, a billion dollars we could invest into this sector. We need to know exactly what we are dealing with, should we form government and then we would have to develop priorities after that, but certainly helping the most vulnerable people in our society is a priority and that is something we would turn our minds to. I unfortunately can't promise we could do it straight away. We would do it as soon as we were able to. Thank you.

>>Damin Starr Liberal Party: So as mentioned through this evening, we have already committed to increasing social supports by 3% annual over next three years. I understand, there is many of us that could say that's enough, what is important is that we are recognizing the crisis that we have before us and we are acting. So we are not just talking about doing this, we're implementing measures to work towards a resolve. Incentivizing those employment exemptions so that we are raising them to allow people the opportunity to work when those opportunities arise. So they can keep more money in their pockets. And then we are redefining those identifications that make financial commitments per month more complicated. Our goal is to reach success, not hinder it. so we keep working towards it.

>>Monique Taylor NDP: Thank you very much, yes as I have said we would increase ODSP 5% annually and then we would tie it to an independent panel. I find it absolutely shocking that the PC say that they are in a deficit and they can't increase ODSP to our most vulnerable population but yet they can lower Corporate taxes for the most profitable corporations in our Province and then we have Liberal government who says that they haven't really had time to be able to get it done, but you know they are going to get it done now. They have been there for 15 years and we have people living in severe poverty. I mean we have had more than enough of these conversations, I'm absolutely shocked that I'm sitting at this table listening to yes we're going to do it, but we haven't done it in if 15 years and no we can't afford to do it because we are in a deficit.

Maybe we should increase corporate taxes like New Democrats are going to do to ensure we can take care of our most vulnerable population.

>>Michelle: Theme of next few questions from our audience is on the AODA, Eventbrite user Gary asks following questions for all of you. How is your party adhering to the AODA accessibility measures for this election? Are your party headquarters, local riding association, election campaign materials, all candidates’ meetings, constituency offices, and Queen’s Park offices accessible to persons with disabilities? Please give specifics.

 Monique Taylor, NDP

>> Thank you very much I'm quite proud that's something of a priority to me, to campaign office to our literature, to I have people in wheelchairs in my campaign office and they have more than enough room to get around, they have access to bathrooms it is something that needs to be a priority and we need to lead by example.

We need to ensure that the government leads by example. By hiring people with disabilities at queens' Park currently that doesn't happen. That we have Pages who are young kids who come to our, the legislator to be able to participate, that we, we need to ensure that we can bring kids in with disabilities. So leading by example is absolutely a priority for me and something that it is unfortunate this government has not provided or even chose to do.

Damin Starr Liberals

>> In this campaign I'm actually going around visiting people at their homes. They don't have to come to me, because I'm making the effort to go to them. I think it is important that we, as individuals, make the effort to reach out so that's how we're approaching this campaign. We're making ourselves available so that when those conversations take place we can listen, we can understand, we can accept and improve as we move forward. That's my commitment here and actually I'm extremely grateful that we have this opportunity to have this conversation because I think learning is a lifelong experience. I think it happens every day, so my opportunity to be here today is equally that. So I'm committed to hearing everything that is happening and making the changes necessary moving forward.

Christine Elliott, PC Party

>> Accessibility in the built environment is extremely important to me as well and one of the things that concerned me during the time I was at Queen Park not very accessible, if you have tried to make your way around there, the doors are heavy, don't have door openers, a lot of stairs, elevators don't work very often so there is a big problem there. We need to start with government and make sure government becomes accessible to everyone. We also should have Sign Language interpreters so everyone can understand what's going on at Queen Park, that doesn't happen. I can tell you in my previous job as patient Ombudsman we were to move into office government leased office, be wasn't accessible to people. Given many of my clients had mobility challenges I refused to move in until we found a place that was accessible. It should not be government buildings continue to exist that aren't accessible, we need to do a full inventory of government owned buildings and leased buildings and develop action plan on how we are going to make them fully accessible. Thank you.

Mike Schreiner with Green Party

>> Green Party believes accessible built environment is essential and we too are leading by example. So I made sure my campaign office is accessible, we made sure our provincial office is accessible and our Party events are accessible and we have even had times where, you know, we have reached out and thought we had a facility that we wanted to have an event in and canceled when we learned it wasn't accessible, we want everyone to access our events, our Party, and us as candidates and leaders in that Party. And I believe government has to start that example as well. Yeah I mean Queen Park is one of the least accessible buildings. I mean it is tragic how inaccessible it is. Even just crossing the street to queen Park you practically take your life into your hands and that's the people's building, it should be accessible to all people.

>>Mark: How will your party address the "big problems with the province’s accessibility recommendations which are the lack of guidelines, enforcement, and strength behind building code regulations."?

Mike Schreiner with Green Party.

>> Yeah this is a huge problem. And it is exactly why we needed independent, you be public accountable process to review existing guidelines and enforce existing guidelines and have the personnel in place to enforce existing guidelines. But also to examine many shortfalls in our existing guidelines and develop stronger guidelines moving forward, so we know we are going to achieve our AODA goals for 2025. But what I found so frustrating and disturbing is how much new government infrastructure being built right now that's not accessible. I just don't even understand how that's possible in 2018. Knowing that we have the AODA rules and aspirations in place.

Christine Elliott, PC Party

>> I share the concern we don't have a plan in place to make sure when we build new government buildings that are very expensive that we don't have them properly checked to make sure they are fully accessible. Part of the problem is that many of the design professionals, architects and so on don't necessarily have the training to understand what is accessible design and some mistakes are made, not intentionally, but they happen. That should not happen with public money. Anything that's built now needs to be built properly, it does cost a lot more to retrofit than to build properly in the first place we need to make sure we do that to make sure we give design professionals guidance they need. If they don't have qualifications it needs to be sent to appropriate professional that can provide the information, the guidance they need in order to make sure it is fully accessible. We need to have a plan; we need to make sure we know how we are going to achieve full accessibility under AODA by 2025. We don't have that; we need that now.

Damin Starr Liberals

>> Obligated to continue working with the organizations and stakeholders and they continue to provide us guidance. We're always listening. We have run a pilot project including other auditors from other Ministries to help with compliance issues, to again inform us moving forward. So we continue to make efforts in this front. I can assure you that we respect the AODA and we are working towards success on that, on those issues.

We continue to strive; we can't just dismiss our efforts.

Monique Taylor, NDP

>> Thank you very much not anywhere close being ready for 2025. When we see public buildings that are being built that are not properly accessible David Lepofsky has put out videos on a regular basis showing the faults of new buildings that are being built with public dollars. That's absolutely ridiculous, building new subways that aren't accessible that don't have the proper initiatives to ensure that they are safe. You know, the government has not ensured that there is any, I'm getting tired, it's that time of day. Gees, that there is enforcement in place. I mean like I said there has been over, been thousands of complaints and yet only six enforcements in place that's just neglectful.

>>Michelle: Theme for next two questions from the audience is education. Eventbrite user named Krista asked the following all children have right to education, education and schooling does not look the same for every child. Transportation to school is currently a privilege and not a right. How are boards being accountable for the funding they are given when they refuse to work with families to arrange transport to school, several children with extreme behaviours are risks to other students as well staff. What is your plan for addressing these risks and providing those children with an education? we will begin with you.

Monique Taylor, NDP

>>Monique Taylor: We will change Special Education funding formula to be sure it is based on a child's needs. We need to ensure that we have enough supports in the classroom to meet those needs, whatever they may be and we need to ensure that we have proper transportation for these young people to and from school. You know, and with the lack of funding and the lack of transportation it is because the lack of funding that's going into our education system and our boards are having to constantly move dollars around to ensure that supports are available. So it is a priority for us to ensure that we have a Special Education funding formula based completely on the child's needs and that those funds move with that child and that the pockets and envelopes of dollars for education are properly ensure transportation.

Thank you very much.

Damin Starr Liberals

>> Constantly working with education standards and development committees. They provide us guidance and we continually work with them. It is important that all children in our education system receive decent, dignified learning environments. Constantly making those efforts. We are making investments and Special Education assessments so that backlogs are cleared up. We will continue to make those investments as we move forward, as we have done. We also want to increase the availability of mental health workers at our High Schools. And so we are making those investments also. It is a constant ongoing affair.

Christine Elliott: PC Party

>> Every child in Ontario does deserve a right to education, it is difficult to get an education if you can't get to school. Reality is many students need to be bussed to schools and I know there are some arrangements being made now between a public and Catholic school boards to share busing to reduce cost and provide greater coverage to students. If there is a concern with student with special needs or a disability that needs to have extra help on the bus, then they should have extra help on the bus for their sake and for the sake of the other children on the bus. We already talked about the need for more educational assistance in classrooms, it could also be on the bus. I think we really need to take a look at the funding formula to make sure that we provide for all of the needs of students with disabilities, getting to school and at school and after school. That's not going to change until we start working with the standard committee on educational and health care, need to move forward with that and to implement recommendations as soon as possible.

Mike Schreiner with Green Party.

>> Inclusive education includes opportunity for everyone to get to school safely. And do you know how much of the transportation infrastructure budget is dedicated to safe streets? Zero. One of the reasons the Green Party is advocating for permanent long-term infrastructure funding for safe cycling and walking is not just because it is an environmental form of transportation, but because we need safe streets for people to be able to safely walk to the places they need to go and for many people with disabilities, the opportunity to go, travel through your neighborhood to school should be a safe experience. We also support changing the outdated and restrictive terminology around how we defined students with disabilities in the education act to be more inclusive and reflective of Ontario Human Rights Code.

>>Mark: Following question was asked on Twitter by Martininin, why are accommodations for disability so horrific for education and advanced education, where is the funding or needed support to gain the skill to pursue a Higher Education?

Mike Schreiner with Green Party

>> Yeah Higher Education should be accessible for everyone and part of the challenge we face in Ontario with Higher Education is that we have the lowest per student funding for colleges and universities of any Province in Canada and so we have to increase the funding available to colleges and Universities so they have theory sources to support all students, including students with disabilities. We need programs in place to ensure that everyone can pursue their educational dreams. We need to ensure that we have inclusive and accessible buildings, inclusive and accessible classrooms and inclusive and accessible educational support programs to help all students with all abilities succeed in our University and colleges. Go ahead, that's fine. I guess I have two seconds, anyway. [LAUGHTER] I thought that was the bell.

>>Christine Elliott PC Party: Thank you part of the requirement that all students have the right to receive an education includes post-secondary education as well. But the reality is that many students with disabilities are just simply written off when they are finished with High School. We can't do that. There are many, many talented people out there that want to and can contribute, have the right to go to colleges and Universities. One of the programs I'm really in favour of is CICE, Community Integration through Cooperative Education at community colleges, provides students if they need it with a facilitator to go subject the study of their choice, receive a certificate at the end of that, that gives them the skills they need in order to receive employment. Problem is not mandatory in community colleges right now, something they provide if they have enough money left over. It shouldn't be that way. Every student should be accommodated for. We should make sure all students with disabilities have the option to access those programs where they live because right now only scattered in small parts across the Province.

Damin Starr Liberals

We know there is always more to do. In our 2018 budget another 3 hundred million dollars over the next three years to support students with disabilities. Bringing total funding for Special Education to 3 billion dollars next year. This funding eliminates wait lists for professional assessments and student needs, 600 additional staff, in multidisciplinary areas, be hired, Higher Education assistance, better staffing to shape unique needs of students. We are making those investments and we continue to move forward.

Monique Taylor, NDP

>> Thank you very much. New Democrats have recognized the struggles that young people face to be able to go to post-secondary school with the cost being the highest in the country, Ontario rank being last on per student funding in Canada. We are seeing if you qualify for OSAP we give you a non-repayable grant to be able to go to post-secondary school. So that goes with the initiatives of providing the 27 thousand co-op placements and of using the job prosperity fund. Lots of, initiatives for funding to ensure that young people have the ability to go to school and to have an education.

>>Michelle: The theme of the next two questions from audience member is children with disabilities. This next one is a collaborative effort from Eventbrite users Sherry, Lynda and Geoff, question they submitted read as follows. This question is with regard to Province special needs strategy. Clearly is no strategy after four years of work. The special needs strategy is a train wreck. Families have been waiting since 2013 for a solution and are most vulnerable children and youth can wait no longer. This needs your urgent attention. Will you commit right now to direct funding for rehabilitation services for children and youth with all disabilities?

Monique Taylor, NDP

>>Monique Taylor: Thank you for this question, thank you Sherry and Ontario Disability Coalition, I know this question is from you. Yes, we need to ensure that kids are able to get services they need. We don't need to be relying on diagnosis to ensure that a child gets speech therapy. We need to make sure that whatever that child need is that we can get them the supports that they need. We have kids who are waiting years just to be able to get an assessment and if the family can afford to pay 2000 they can pay for that assessment. That's absolutely shameful. This is very rich Province that has ability to ensure that our children have the supports they need in place to get a healthy start at life. And by putting them on wait lists and not providing services is absolutely shameful. We have seen what they did with autism file in trying to cut kids off at 5. Thank goodness we were able to reverse that. We need to be sure all kids get the services they need.

>>Damin Starr, Liberal Party

We continue to invest in special needs. We continue to invest in speech and language pathology, we continue to invest constantly and make commitments based on coherent working system to provide those needs necessary and on the autism file, because I am a father of two children living with autism, I'll speak to that particular issue. There is never a wrong time to do the right thing. We made a mistake and we accept that and through discussion and dialogue with parents and organizations across this Province long before you had yourself ejected out of the legislature, we change that program. And we made it accessible. The concept of advocacy is to be at the table, not to be ejected from it.

>>Christine Elliott PC Party:

>> Yes we do believe in direct funding this is something we have talked about for a long time. I'm glad we are finally seeing it in autism program, reality in some parts of the Province aren't direct service providers and families know how to spend the money for son or daughter to make sure they get the services they are actually going to help them. It is really important that we proceed with that, with autism I think there is a bit of a concern now because some of the direct service providers are also the one that provide or decide upon funding for families and they are telling people that you, you could get direct funding but could get direct service a lot faster. That's a Conflict of Interest to me and it has to be stopped.

We need to make sure parents and families and individuals have a clear choice to make if they choose direct funding should be able to get it as quickly as they can get direct service.

Mike Schreiner with Green Party

>> We support a special needs strategy that provides direct funding for children who need those services. Autism does not end at 5, it is something that we need to provide services for people of all ages. I just want to thank the parents especially and the people who mobilized in support of children who needed services and but, you know, it shouldn't take that kind of activism to do the right thing. And so providing rehabilitation services, better funding for developmental services, speech therapy services, and a range of services for children with special needs is something government should fund and there should be a strategy design so that those families and children have the supports they need and have access to the services they need.

>>Mark: The following question was asked on Twitter by Polly. School staff are not trained to deliver education to students who are non-verbal, with dyslexia, low vision, hard of hearing, use augmentative or alternative communication. How can these children reach full potential, what will your Party specifically do?

Mike Schreiner with Green Party

>> One of the reasons I think it is so important to change the funding formula is schools receive the resources they need for the special needs population within that school instead of the resources just being directed based on population. It should be based on needs and we need, that way those schools can hire the personnel they need to support students and teachers and staff and we also need to ensure that education system has the training and funding resources in place to have the trained personnel to provide the services that are students need.

>>Christine Elliott PC Party:

>>Christine Elliott: I think it does need to start teacher college, not every student learns same way, students have different learning abilities, teachers need to be taught how to adjust to that and make sure every child gets services and help they need in classroom, the funding formula does need to change to make sure it reflects actual number of students in a school board who have disabilities, not just what they expect might be the case. Because everybody in a school needs to recognize that students have different learning needs, not just the teachers, it is the educational assistants, the school bus operator, the lunchroom supervisor, it is the custodian, everybody needs to understand that you need to respect the needs of each and every child. So we need to make sure we concentrate on that, not just focus on the lack of teacher training, everyone needs to be trained to make sure all students are safe, cared for and receive the help they need.

>>Damin Starr, Liberal Party

>>Damin Starr: Ontario Liberal Party and the government continually make these investments each and every year. As our economy strives we have identified that we can make significant investments now. These investments are going towards exactly what we are expressing here at this table. That's increase staffing in our schools to support individuals with special needs, psychologists, behavioral specialists, speech and language pathologists, social workers, all have been mentioned here at this table. I'm confident that the millions of dollars that will go towards our education system through our budget recognizes those needs. Thank you.

Monique Taylor, NDP

>> Thank you very much I'm very proud of the advocacy that we were able to do to push the government to establish an education standards committee and the countdown began where the government said they were going to do it and it took them over a year to put out the application just to get people on the Board where people were inquiring on a regular basis, the government was ignoring it and not getting it done. So I'm happy I was able to push them hard enough from the inside sitting at the table to make sure that we got it done. But, you know, in just in 2017 the government cut funding to boards by more than 4.6 million dollars, for Special Education. So that is not moving forward, that is putting it behind, putting us furthered behind and it is not giving our kids with special needs the ability to reach their full potential. Second class citizens in our education system and it is disgraceful.

>>Michelle: Our last question of the evening is on the theme of the AODA, it comes from David L. [LAUGHTER] he has asked the following. All parties supported the enactment of the accessibility for Ontario's with disabilities act in 2005. It is widely recognized that the AODA is not on schedule for Ontario to reach full accessibility by 2025. The government, we elect in June will have the last real chance to get Ontario back on schedule. The AODA alliance has asked all parties to commit early in their mandate to create a detailed multi-year plan to get us there on time. Will you promise, here and now, to do so?

Monique Taylor, NDP

>>Monique Taylor: Yes, absolutely we will make sure we provide education into the private sector, that we, you know, ensure that anything moving forward in the public sector, new builds, have the accessibility and have the proper design to move forward and we need to ensure that we have the enforceability in place to if get the naysayers or people not moving quickly enough to push them, to get it done. Everybody has a right to a free and accessible environment and by not ensuring that the AODA is on track is letting people down. So we are committed to making sure that we putted our best future forward and getting folks on track to ensure 2025 success.

>>Damin Starr, Liberal Party

>>Damin Starr: Yeah, absolutely committed. To this process, as we move forward. We know it is a challenge, we have recognized that it is a challenge and within our government we are making changes to achieve those goals. We will continually be working with organizations and stakeholders to achieve compliance. We recognize within our other Ministries there is an opportunity to have inspectors constantly trained to identify compliance issues and we are committed to educating our private sector and our public sector to identifying not just the compliance issues but the benefits of why compliance is necessary. It is important not just for us as people, but for our economy.

>>Christine Elliott PC Party:

>>Christine Elliott: Yes, progressive conservative Party is, action plan to make sure full accessibility under AODA can be achieved by 2025, this was a lapped Mark piece of legislation passed in 2005 by all the parties in legislature, I think we are all proud of it. We all realize how important it is for people with disabilities to achieve full inclusion and full accessibility and it is incumbent on government to renew efforts to do something to make sure we can achieve this goal. Right now we are behind, not on track to achieve it, we need to step it up. We need to make sure we enforce existing standards, make sure we develop education and health care standards, take up the recommendations that are recommended by the Committees, implement them as soon as possible and make sure that they are disseminated across the Province. This is an issue too important for people with disabilities, in fact for all Ontarians we cannot let this pass, we must achieve that goal.

Mike Schreiner with Green Party

>> Green Party is committed to having action plan in place immediately to reach our 2025 target, because we are so far behind right now and I'll have to be honest with you, David, my role is probably going to be hold one of the three status quo parties accountable on this. Because for far too long we have said, as a Province, we would act on this and here we are 13 years later and we are so far behind and that is unacceptable. And so a plan needs to be in place to ensure public and private achieving of full inclusion and accessibility and we need to ensure that no public dollars go to building any more infrastructure not accessible. We need to ensure we have inspectors in place to enforce rules we have and make sure we have rules in place to achieve 2025 targets. And our job will be to make sure that happens and work with you to make sure that happens.

>>Michelle: Thank you Mr. Schreiner, I have a surprise for all the candidates, we have one more question. [LAUGHTER] And still we persisted.

>>Mark: Question from Frank. Will you support the federal accessibility legislation, including ASL and LSQ recognition? There are many countries that recognize Sign Language in their legislation as per the United Nations Convention and Rights for Persons with Disabilities and also amend provincial accessibility legislation that recognize Sign Language?

Mike Schreiner with Green Party

>> Yes you know I think one of the things I think is so important about this, a lot of the conversation tonight has really been about the accessibility of our Built Environment which is essential. But accessibility goes far beyond our Built Environment. And accessibility includes a wide range of inclusive issues including Sign Language and interpretation at all events and so that is essential, it is important and it is something the Green Party supports.

>>Christine Elliott PC Party:

>> Yes conservative Party would support this as well, it is important to make sure we don't leave anybody out, that we need to make sure Sign Language is protected for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing, everyone deserves to be included, to be included in events, to be included in employment, to be included in everything that everybody else takes for granted in their life. No one should be left behind, we need to make sure that everyone is provided with full rights of communication.

>>Damin Starr, Liberal Party

>>Damin Starr: I support. I think it is necessary that everybody have the right to be included. I think that nobody should be exempt from participating in society. I hold those values, not just for myself but for my children moving forward. I think that if we make commitments we need to abide by them and we will continue to work on these issues to make sure they are implemented moving forward and done in a sustainable and satisfactory way for each and every person that is experiencing challenges moving forward.

Monique Taylor, NDP

>> Thank you very much, yes I definitely support that initiative. I think building inclusive communities has a lot of meanings and by ensuring that Sign Language part of that inclusive community is important. You know Sign Language is a universal language and it is something that is shared by many people so it is something that we need to ensure is a priority, we feed to ensure priority in government, we need to ensure it is a priority in schools. Like in the demonstration schools have they done a wonderful job in making sure that our young people have the ability to reach their full potential, so I think it is a great initiative of moving forward and something that I would support.

>>Michelle: Thank you all to the candidates, no more surprises that is indeed the final question. We want to offer thanks to everyone in the audience in the room with us tonight as well everyone on Twitter for your excellent questions. We are now going to offer candidates one minute a piece to offer closing remarks. And the order of closing remarks will be as per usual with the format. We will begin for the last time, with Taylor of NDP.

Monique Taylor, NDP

>>Monique Taylor: Thank you very much again I would like to thank organizers for having this important discussion this evening. This is a conversation that needs to be happening on a regular basis, so it is the right opportunity to be able to talk to parties, moving forward in the election. Making sure that this is on our radar and that these are priorities for all parties regardless of where you end up in positions of government or opposition, it shouldn't matter as Christine said this is something that many of us have agreed on for a lot of years in the legislature and that you know making sure that most vulnerable population has supports in place to ensure that they can reach their full potential, this he have safe environment, that they have a have safe affordable housing, good education, I'm really proud of Andrea Horwath and NDP, in the platform we have put forward to ensure that people do have the opportunity for change for the better. Thank you very much

>>Damin Starr, Liberal Party

>>Damin Starr: Thank you very much I do share Monique's sentiments on necessity of having this dialogue more frequently. It needs to be happening all the time. We actually need to instill it in our young people so that when they become adults and the decision makers these are no longer debates. You must be able to trust your government to implement progressive mandates. The way they view different abilities. In this election we are asking for your support to help us ensure that government continues to work for you. A truly inclusive society ensures everybody participates. I am just one candidate but we are a team. There is a way to make positive change occur each and every day.

>>Christine Elliott PC Party:

>> Well thank you very much for inviting us to join you tonight. Thank you all for being here and really important questions on the barriers and issues facing people with disabilities. It is important to continue this conversation; this isn't just one thing we do before an election because it is incumbent on a government to take this seriously to use AODA as the road may be to achieve full accessibility by 2025. But it doesn't just stop there, so much more that we need to do, we need to continue to build on that. One of the things we really need to take a look at is how does government operate or react to this? We can't just look at one Ministry, well this when is the Ministry responsible and nobody else has responsibility, that's not the case, people are multidimensional, many things going on in their life. We need to make sure government deals with people as human beings and consider housing, health, justice issues, all of the other things that we need to figure out to make sure that people with disabilities are able to lead full and happy and inclusive lives. Thank you.

Mike Schreiner with Green Party

>> I want to thank you for being here tonight and the organizers, this is democracy in action, people power change is having engaged citizens talking about the issues that we all care about deeply. I want to thank my fellow colleagues here at the table for participating as well because these types of conversations are so essential to building the kind of inclusive, caring, livable communities that I believe in deeply and while we all might have difference of opinion on the way government works, and should work, policies and visions are for the future I mean the one thing I did hear tonight, was opportunity for us to work together and collaboratively across Party lines to ensure that we meet this Province meets our 2025 standards and let's all commit to doing that together.

>>Michelle: Thank you and all candidates for your closing remarks. [APPLAUSE]

>>Mark: Thank you candidates. Thank you candidates for your answers to the questions and your commitment to accessibility and disability issues. I would like to introduce David Meyers from the Centre for Independent Living in Toronto and planning committee member for this evening closing remarks.>> [CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

David Meyers >> Thank you for sharing in this exciting and important evening with all of you, really advances our democracy, really happy to be here. The Centre for Independent Living in Toronto and planning committees, community partners would like to thank Michelle McQuigge and Mark Wafer for co-moderating this evening's debate, give a shout-out, great job. Thank you so much. [CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

The candidates from Progressive Conservative Party, Christine Elliott, Newmarket-Aurora, shout-out. [APPLAUSE]

Oh and the New Democratic Party, Monique Taylor, Hamilton Mountain.

[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

The Green Party leader Mike Schreiner from Guelph [APPLAUSE] and

Liberal Party – Damin Starr, Hamilton Mountain. Thanks for being here.

Now I'm thrilled to thank the non-partisan planning committee, that's, non-partisan debate planning committee community partners: Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, BALANCE for Blind Adults [APPLAUSE], Birchmount Bluffs Neighborhood Centre, [APPLAUSE] Canadian Hearing Society, [APPLAUSE] The CNIB, [APPLAUSE] Center for Independent Living in Toronto, [APPLAUSE] Citizens with Disabilities Ontario, [APPLAUSE] Ethno-racial People with Disabilities Coalition of Ontario [APPLAUSE] , ODSP Action Coalition [APPLAUSE] North Yorkers For Disabled Persons [APPLAUSE] And Springtide Resources. [APPLAUSE]

A lot of work went into planning this evening, I tell you, our community partners, shout-out to John Mossa, our quarterback for the Committee. [APPLAUSE] Way to go John. Great work as usual.

We would finally like to thank office of Vice-President Equity and Inclusion of Ryerson University, Ryerson Student Union and School of Disability Studies, Ryerson University for providing the Tecumseh Auditorium and livestreaming this important debate across Ontario, shout-out to Ryerson. [CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

Most of all we want to thank you, our debate participants, for attending this evening, filling this Auditorium and also for those of you here with us via Webcast across Ontario. Your questions help shaped the conversation, a lot of your questions reflected a call for all the provincial parties, asking for our vote on June 7th, to help build the Province inclusive of people with disabilities. That's our call. And it is our turn now to make informed choices and vote on June 7th. Got to come out and vote folks, okay. Thanks so much. For being here. [CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

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