

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY****John Fraser****Interim Leader, Ontario Liberal Party****AGM Keynote****Length: 2029**

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- Good afternoon everyone ... and I mean *everyone* ...
- Look at this crowd!
- This is one heck of a family reunion.
- Our biggest Annual Meeting in 20 years.
- Bienvenue tout le monde à Hamilton
- Merci beaucoup pour être ici
- Même pendant la grande tempête de neige
- Before I get started, I just want to say that we are all very proud of the work that Deirdre Pike is doing during this by-election in Hamilton centre.
- Now... we have 1500 liberals here in Hamilton.
- I'm going to go out and knock some doors this afternoon for Deirdre...
- I encourage you all to go, if you can, spend some time helping to knock on some doors, or make some calls or send their team a donation.
- We all need to work hard to make Deirdre Pike the next MPP for Hamilton Centre.
- So welcome, and thank you for choosing to make the trip to Hamilton ...
- And to all of you who have come up to me and said such kind words ...
- I'm very grateful for your support.
- It's an honour to be the interim leader of our party ...
- Though I have to say that after doing this for a second time, even Linda has started referring to me as "the interim."

- Which, after 40 years of marriage....is concerning.
- **KATHLEEN**
- You know, Hamilton has a very special place in my heart.
- I'm proud of the roots I have here in Steeltown.
- My mother, Mary Costie, was born here, in Corktown.
- She was the oldest of 8 children.
- Her mom's name, was Henrietta Costie.
- And we called her, Grandma Henny...
- And then eventually - just Henny.
- They lived in a house, just a 15-minute walk from here on Liberty street.
- It wasn't an easy life for them...
- The Great Depression.
- Poverty.
- A husband and father who struggled with alcohol.
- But that didn't stop Grandma Henny from squeezing whatever joy she could out of life.
- She was a constant source of laughter and mirth.
- In fact, at her funeral she had only two requests:
- Play when the saint come marching in on her way out of the church.
- And one last drive around the neighborhood, past the house on liberty street...
- That's where we held the wake...
- On Liberty Street.
- Literally, on the street.

- It was summer, outdoors, and there were so many people celebrating her life...
  - And so much of the joyous energy she left behind.
  - Afterwards, we had to keep correcting ourselves because we referred to it as – Henny’s wedding
  - Which is what it really felt like, not a wake.
  - Her perseverance was legendary, and she passed that on to my mom who, despite all the odds against her, was offered a full-ride scholarship at Western, and became a nurse.
  - Maybe it’s the steel in these roots that makes me want to compare them to freight trains.
  - These women...they wouldn’t be stopped.
  - They were steady.
  - Never deviating from their track.
  - Always forward – powered by hope.
  - So it’s that sense of toughness, endurance, and sturdiness and hope that I am calling on as we begin this milestone AGM.
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- We’re grateful to our steering committee and our hosts for all that went into organizing this event.
  - Lately, we’re all having to make harder choices about where to spend our time and our money, and I’m proud that we could be here in Hamilton.
  - And that we could offer our members a good rate, in a place that’s central, and affordable.
  - And when it comes to putting on this event, there is no team more ready for this weekend than our incredible crew of OLP staffers at the party office.
  - They have, along with a core crew of dedicated volunteers...

- Put in the long hours..
- To make sure we have a great venue, an engaging program, and a lot of opportunity to spend time together while we chart a path forward through constitutional amendments and executive council elections.
- They have worked hard to make sure this would truly be as open an invitation as possible.
- Just for context...
- Everyone look at your table.
- If we put all of the OLP staff at your table, we would still have room for 4 more people.
- So before we all roll up our sleeves and pull up our chairs this weekend, please join me in giving thanks to the OLP staff and volunteers who have helped us to get here...we couldn't have done it without you.
- And to the incredible members of our Ontario Liberal Caucus – I am so proud of each and every one of you
- Mary-Margaret McMahon
- Adil Shamji
- Stephanie Bowman
- Ted Hsu
- Stephen Blais
- Lucille Collard
- Mitzie Hunter
- Their plates are full.
- Their resources are limited.
- And they do amazing work.
- And they do it with grace, patience and energy.

- They are supported by an incredible staff at Queen's Park.
- That why your Liberal Caucus is able to punch above our weight.
- And we need to do that.
- Because Doug Ford is intent on dismantling so many of the things that Ontario families count on.
- At a time, when families are struggling just to make ends meet - Doug Ford is focused on his friends,
- Hacking up the Greenbelt, and giving it away
- Making already rich insiders...even richer.
- He broke his promise to Ontarians.
- And make no mistake... he's got his sights set on carving up our healthcare system.
- We already know that families are having to use their credit card, to access primary care services for themselves and their children.
- That's not the healthcare system we built here in Ontario...
- Doug Ford's plan is to add more for-profit corporations... pitting patients against shareholders.
- And Ontario Liberals know there should only be one shareholder in Ontario's healthcare system that counts...
- And that's the patient.
- We all know, you can't serve two masters.
- We've seen this all before.
- The last time somebody told us we needed more for-profit in the system, it was Mike Harris, and it was about long-term care.

- The pandemic showed us all just how just how wrong that direction was.
- Ontarians just can't trust Doug Ford to protect our public healthcare system.
- I want you to know, that your Ontario Liberal caucus will work to protect a healthcare system where patients come first.
  
- Now, let's talk a bit about us.
- Here is something you need to know.
- In the last election, we got more votes than the NDP.
- We held our vote from 2018... and the NDP lost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a million votes and the PCs almost 400,000
- Our fundamentals are good and we know we still have a lot of work to do.
- That's why you're here at this AGM...
- We are going to decide how we vote for a new leader.
- We're also going to elect a new executive.
- Being here with all of you now, heading into these important moments ... it's exciting.
- So let's remember who we are, where we've come from and what we're here to do.
  
- We're going to have an exciting leadership race.
- This AGM is all about framing how we're going to run that leadership race.
- There are already people who are putting their names out there, and there'll be more to come.
- The NDP... they didn't have that.
- Only one person wanted to be the leader of the official opposition.

- I just find that so hard to believe.
- That because... a leadership race is important.
- Not just because you're going to elect a new leader.
- It's about the journey.
- Done right, that journey takes us to every corner of this province.
- It makes us work where we need to work.
- We invite new members.
- We listen to Ontarians... where they live.
- About the things that are most important to them.
- And we have a healthy debate about ideas and aspirations.
- All of this will build up our party and give the new leader a party that's better positioned to fight in 2026.
- And the NDP... missed out on that.
- We won't.
- My friends ... my Ontario Liberal Family ...
- This weekend, we are taking the first steps on this journey of renewal together.
- But we've been packing and preparing for this long before now.
- This family... we've been together for over 160 years.
- Renewal isn't a new concept for us.
- It's part of building together.
  
- We're an open party.
- We are inviting people into the family, just as we always have.

- And the thing that makes us different is that we're not tied to an ideology.
- We are experts at building and renewal because we realize that doing the most good relies on making good choices.
- You know, I was in this grade five classroom once ... spending time with kids is one of the best perks of the job ...
- And I spoke...like I'm doing right now.
- The kids, well they're falling asleep at their desks... and then I say to them,
- 'Ask me any question.'
- Now, every once in a while you get a question that totally blows you out of water and this 10-year-old girl stood up with one of those.
- She asked, '*What's the hardest thing about your job?*'
- My first thought was how I usually answered when friends asked.
- I used to say that I sit all day and it's going to kill me
- But in my head, I know I can't give her that answer.
- And then it hit me....here's what I told her:
- **It's not being able to do all the things that you want to do for people.**
- And I think that's the hardest thing about being a Liberal.
- We know you can't choose everything,
- We have to focus on those things that are most important ... and we have a record of doing that.
- Making lives better.
- Making schools better
- Making hospitals better.



- Making sure we have a clean environment, for all to enjoy.
- Building a strong economy.
- And supporting the most vulnerable among us.
  
- We made choices about full-day kindergarten ...
- We made choices about creating a Greenbelt ...
- We made choices about eliminating coal ...
- We focused on things like the HST, the Ontario child benefit and even 2-day, all-day go – here to Hamilton.
- We focused on those things and we worked hard on them.
- And all those things...
- Those are all things that last.
- Even though they're trying their best with the Greenbelt.
- No one's taking away full day kindergarten.
- No one's going to bring back coal.
- No one's reversing the HST which is good for business.
- That young lady asked me that question eight years ago, and I've never forgotten it.
- Every era brings with it its own choices.
- And in this one, we'll have new choices to make.
  
- That's why we're having a leadership race.
- In this process, we'll polish our best ideas ... pulled from every corner of Ontario.
- Representing every community in this province.

- We'll rally together and welcome new members, volunteers and strengthen our party financially.
- Our new leader will be voted in in the way we choose.
- That person will be one of many exceptional candidates who made the choice to come forward.
- And we'll have each other.
- And that's what *government* is really all about.
- It's the opportunity to be there for people.
- So, we'll start by being there for each other.
- And when we do that ... then we can be there for everybody in Ontario.
- Our Ontario Liberal family sticks together.
- Now we're going to have to work hard for what we earn.
- And that work starts this weekend.
- And when we finish this iteration of renewal ... and it's time to head to the polls again in Ontario...
- We'll still be the ones showing people that we're going to be there on the things that are most important to them.
- That's why Ontarians are counting on us..
- Because we've got to defend public health care and fight for their future.
- And we're going to continue to fight for great public schools for our kids,
- A real plan to fight climate change,
- And an economy where everyone has opportunity.
- We'll have choices to make. We always do.

- And as always, what we're doing, we're doing together.
- Thank you, Merci