



**Yasir Naqvi, MPP**

**Ottawa Centre**

**Pre-Budget Consultation Report**

**Churchill Community Seniors Centre  
345 Richmond Rd., Ottawa, ON**

**February 27, 2010  
10:00 am – 12:00 pm**

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## Ottawa Centre Pre-Budget Consultation

On February 27, 2010, MPP Yasir Naqvi held a pre-budget consultation in the constituency of Ottawa Centre. It was an open public meeting that was advertised through community newspapers, invitations to community groups and service providers, email and various local websites. In attendance were representatives from community associations, non-profit organizations, service providers and residents. Those that could not attend, but wanted to participate, were invited to submit their written comments.

The goal of the consultation was to outline the community priorities for the 2010 Ontario Budget. To do this, participants were divided into working groups and were asked to answer three questions that had been posted by Minister Dwight Duncan on the Ministry of Finance website. The responses to these questions, both from the participants in attendance and the written submissions received, are summarized below.

### **1. What processes should the government put in place to enable it to move out of deficit?**

It was suggested that despite the economic climate, our government must continue to maintain and support our core services, particularly in the health care and education sectors. Participants noted that this type of social investment provides an excellent opportunity for economic stimulus. Improving school infrastructure and the creation of affordable housing should be a priority. It was also suggested that we make a greater investment in tourism, both by promoting Ontario abroad, particularly in Asia, and by investing heavily in festivals to support local economies. Participants spoke out against a “slash and burn” approach to reducing our deficit, and argued that the selling of Crown assets, while providing a short term solution to the deficit, would ultimately harm our province.

Ontario should be expanding into new and innovative markets, particularly green technologies and renewable energies that would provide long-term potential for job creation and revenues in the province. Such efforts could increase international trade and make Ontario a leader in these industries.

It was also put forward that our government consider renegotiating our current debt, providing for lower interest rates and a longer-term payment schedule. Taxes should hold firm, particularly for the lower and middle class, and the raising of the retirement age should also be considered. The Ontario Real Estate Association has suggested that a reduction in the provincial land transfer tax rate could help to offset the implementation of the HST with residential real estate transactions.

Overall, it was stressed that our government be accountable for the manner in which public money is being spent. We must be able to show taxpayers how and where their money is being spent throughout the province.

## **2. What steps should the government take to streamline and provide better public services to Ontarians?**

Our government should undertake a review of existing government programs in an effort to reduce redundancies (particularly between Ministries and different levels of government), and to eliminate ineffective or underused programs. Ministries should work in conjunction with each other, as opposed to operating in “silos.” Compartmentalizing services is counterproductive; increased cooperation and cohesion of services would improve overall government efficiency.

It was suggested that in an effort to save costs, we should limit the size and growth of the public service. We should also discourage the fiscal year-end “spending spree” that occurs within government departments. Instead, we should be encouraging departments to come in under budget by rewarding savings with the assurance of budget consistency for the following fiscal year. The issue of federal transfer payments was addressed, and participants felt that Ontario’s contributions are disproportionately high. They recommended that we renegotiate the value of our required contributions with the federal government. Participants noted the necessity for our government to reach out to the public through grassroots and community organizations for original and innovative ideas on how to improve Ontario’s financial standing.

There was a lot of discussion about how we can improve the cost-effectiveness of Ontario’s health care system. Participants stressed the need to create a more integrated system by increasing access, province-wide, to both primary and secondary service providers and community health hubs. Improvements should be made to the OHIP billing system, with a focus on quality of patient care, rather than quantity of services received. The creation of an Ontario Health Research Council was also put forward, which could be responsible for designing an overall health research strategy for Ontario. Additionally, the involvement of big business in Ontario’s health care system was discouraged, and participants outlined their support for the elimination of public-private partnerships (P3s). We should tap in to the potential of our province’s immigrants, particularly with regards to foreign-trained doctors and other health care professionals. We must make it easier for these residents to become accredited in our province so that we can benefit from a larger workforce and an increased knowledge pool.

Additionally, it was suggested that we continue to invest in our public transportation systems, and that we retain control of our province’s vast array of natural resources. We should also continue the process of uploading social services delivery from the municipalities. Finally, it was advised that the public must be made aware of the true cost of public services, as this will increase awareness and promote conservation. This could apply to services such as health care, tuition, hydro and water costs, and rental fees.

**3. Government priorities are job creation, health care, education, strong fiscal management and economic growth. How should the government balance this multitude of priorities? Give the considerable challenges, what should be the core priorities of the 2010 Budget?**

Health care remains a top priority, particularly as our population ages. More effective programs are required, such as the integration of the health care system mentioned above. A more preventative approach should also be useful, and could include an expansion of the Smoke Free Ontario program, or an increase in measures to reduce the spread of disease and better manage chronic illnesses.

It was noted that we must keep a strong focus on education, particularly in early learning, as this has long-term, positive effects for our province. In addition, we should regain a focus on vocational training and apprenticeships, as this sector is in dire need of skilled workers, and such measures could be used to retrain those in need of work throughout the province. It was suggested that education and job creation are complimentary rather than competing priorities, and that future programs should recognize this relationship. We need to create jobs that will be permanent, and should focus on new markets, such as green technology which will provide economic stimulation and offer long-term benefits for Ontarians. Funding to affordable housing and poverty reduction should also hold firm, as these priorities create opportunities for citizens, particularly those who are at-risk.

Participants highlighted the need to develop an overall long-term strategy that addresses Ontario's needs. They advised against the cutting of programs for short-term gain, noting the need for extended and preventative strategies that will improve our province in the long run. In particular, the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) was mentioned as a body which is not conducive to long-term growth in Ontario. Participants felt that the Board makes short-sighted decisions that contribute to unmanageable sprawl, and a strain on services and infrastructure in Ontario.