

PLATFORM SHOWCASE QUESTIONS

Please email responses to Drkuhn@wusa.ca by May 24th

RESPONSES ARE SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE KITCHENER-WATERLOO REGION NDP CANDIDATES ~~
PERSONALIZED BY FORMER COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES CRITIC LAURA MAE LINDO, INCUMBENT
CANDIDATE KITCHENER CENTRE

Questions submitted by the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA):

1. There is a high rate of unemployment, underemployment and low wage employment experienced by disabled Canadians, and that access to post-secondary education can improve employability and earning potential. However, students with disabilities face some of the highest costs and experience the most significant barriers to long term success. Provision of critical health services for students with disabilities remain uninsured under OHIP and the Ontario Bursary for Students with Disabilities (BSWD) remains limited in scope. ***If elected, what policies will your party put in place to increase access to health services and guarantee success for students with disabilities?***

Prior to being elected I was the Director, Diversity and Equity at Wilfrid Laurier University. I saw the impact of ableist policies on students, faculty and staff within the sector and worked diligently to ensure that people with disabilities had access to the supports they needed to thrive. When I was elected in 2018, I once again set out to ensure that the post-secondary sector created pathways to success for students with disabilities, this time, through my critic portfolios which included being Ontario's critic for Colleges and Universities as well as Ant-Racism. What I found was that Ontarians with disabilities had been left behind by decades of Liberal and Conservative cuts and neglect. My colleagues and I are committed to ensuring that the Ontario NDP policies take into account the lived realities of people with disabilities on and off post-secondary campuses and, if and when they do not, we will continue to advocate for the changes we need to ensure that post-secondary campuses are guided by policies that develop more inclusive and accessible campuses by drawing on our understanding and application of critical disabilities theories in all that we do.

The Ontario NDP has pledged to double Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates from current levels by the second year of our mandate. They will then be indexed to inflation, ensuring no one in Ontario will live in legislated poverty. This will provide disabled students with the stable income they need to pursue their studies without fear of running out of money or taking on excessive student debt. It is notable that this updated commitment to increasing ODSP comes on the heels of intense and much-needed advocacy for ODSP recipients who made it clear that the maintaining of low-wages in these social services resulted in legislated poverty. I am honoured to have had

the opportunity to speak with a number of people across Kitchener Centre over the last four years, as the Member of Provincial Parliament, as well as throughout this current election who trusted me to use my position of influence to push my party to do better – to recognize the urgency with which these changes are needed. This was why I released a plan for Kitchener Centre entitled “[Investing in Community: Our Plan to End Poverty](#)” that brought together my continued fight for an immediate increase to \$2000/month for ODSP recipients alongside committing to keep fighting for a guaranteed liveable basic income, investments in universal mental health and addictions care as well as green jobs and a just transition for all that ensure that re-training opportunities are also central to our ONDP plan. I also released “[Post-secondary Education: Our Plan for the Sector](#)” which integrated barrier-free education alongside strong poverty reduction strategies – including calling for an end to precarious employment within the sector, policies that provide support to people with disabilities, and most importantly a vision for the sector that leaves nobody behind. I am committed to ensuring that direct connections are made between the poverty reduction strategies and access to post-secondary education in Kitchener Centre and across Ontario.

This is why I am excited that the ONDP is committed to expanding Ontario’s health care coverage so that mental health, dental, and pharmacare are all brought under OHIP. We will overhaul the broken Assistive Devices Program, beginning with staffing up so that claims are processed in a timely manner.

We will also implement all recommendations from the Onley report to ensure Ontario is on the path to being fully accessible in line with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

2. “Ontario has among the lowest funding levels per post-secondary student in Canada. As of 2018, the province’s funding for each university student was [37 per cent lower](#) than the average for the rest of Canada.” ***If elected, what policies will your party put in place to ensure access and affordability for Ontario students?***

New Democrats believe that cost should not be a barrier to people attending college or university. That’s why we will reverse Doug Ford’s cuts to OSAP and work towards making sure all students graduate debt-free by converting loans to grants. We will also retroactively wipe out student loan interest owed or paid to the province by any student or past student who still holds a provincial loan, so that students can leave university without the anxiety of student debt.

I will also work with my NDP colleagues to ensure that the party achieves our commitment to address the longstanding underfunding of post-secondary institutions in Ontario by undertaking a collaborative audit of the college and university sector. This will allow the Ontario NDP to make strategic investments within the post-secondary

sector that will help make sure that post-secondary education is affordable for Ontario students.

It is also notable that when we under-fund the sector, critically important initiatives meant to keep post-secondary students safe will also be under-funded including sexual violence (SV) and gendered violence (GV) prevention supports on college and university campuses. The Ontario NDP is committed to investing in robust, culturally responsive supports for students, faculty and staff impacted by SV/ GV and I am committed to ensuring that we apply an intersectional lens to the investments, including advocating for strategic funding and support for anti-racist work on college and university campuses. This is why my tabling of [Bill 67, Racial Equity in the Education System Act](#), is so very critical – it provides a strategic framework to help guide these investments while ensuring that members of the post-secondary community have all of the tools they need to build inclusive classrooms, campuses, and communities.

Questions submitted by Wilfrid Laurier University Graduate Students' Association & Students' Union:

3. "Students are able to thrive during their academic journeys and contribute to their communities to the fullest of their ability if crucial basic needs such as housing are met. The availability and affordability of housing is a salient issue for all students, who often require **short-term, affordable units, that can in many cases accommodate family members, in close proximity to campus**. If elected, how will your party meet the housing needs of students to ensure this vulnerable group is able to succeed in their educational pursuits?"

In the midst of a housing crisis that is taking Ontario by storm, it is no surprise that more and more communities are fighting to ensure that concrete steps are taken to address the need for deeply affordable housing, not only in Kitchener- Waterloo but also across Ontario. Our fight for "missing middle" housing as well as deeply affordable housing is of critical importance. Housing needs for international students, students with families and short-term rentals that are aligned with the academic school year are all top of mind. This is, in part, why I tabled a motion calling for a [Rent Registry](#) in Ontario:

"165. Ms. Lindo — That, in the opinion of this House, the Ford Government should, as part of an effort to enhance transparency and accountability and to address the impact of renovations in the rental housing market, establish a rent registry maintained by the Landlord and Tenant Board and set out rules requiring that landlords file statements with the Board for inclusion in the registry, providing for consequences for failing to file the statement and governing the disclosure of information in the registry. Filed June 1, 2021.

It is increasingly difficult for all Ontarians to have a home they can afford, and students on tight budgets and in especially competitive housing markets face additional challenges. New Democrats have a robust and doable plan to address Ontario's housing crisis – you can [read our full housing platform here](#).

Here are a few highlights:

- Bring back real rent control: We'll ensure you pay what the last tenant paid, eliminating the financial incentive for landlords to squeeze out tenants to raise the rent
 - Build affordable homes: We have a plan to build 1.5 million homes province-wide over the next decade to ease the housing crunch, and we'll establish a new public housing agency, Housing Ontario, to finance and build 250,000 affordable and non-market homes.
 - End exclusionary zoning: We'll change zoning rules to enable the construction of more affordable "missing middle" housing, like duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes in existing communities where people want to live.
 - Creating a portable housing benefit: We'll save 311,000 households an average of \$300/month on rent (\$3,600 a year), providing direct financial support.
4. "Since the onset of the pandemic, student employment is at a record low and youth have not fully recovered from the impact of lost time, wages, and experience. Opportunities are emerging but may not be achievable for many students who by 2022 have lacked skills and opportunities due to the impact of the pandemic. **If elected, how will your party support students and new graduates to ensure that they achieve the experience and skills necessary to strengthen the province's economic development?"**

New Democrats will invest to create thousands of new, paid co-op and internship opportunities so that post-secondary students and graduates can get real-life work experience. We will double Ontario's Career Ready Program (from 2020 levels) so that our colleges and universities can create additional work-integrated learning opportunities. And, through our Youth Climate Corps in our Green New Democratic Deal, we will provide young people with opportunities to get hands-on experience restoring and enhancing Ontario's natural landscape, while gaining knowledge, skills, a fair wage, and a fee credit towards post-secondary education.

Questions submitted by Conestoga Students Inc.:

5. International student tuition continues to make up an ever-greater portion of Ontario post-secondary institutional revenue. Unlike domestic students, for whom tuition increases are limited to a max of 5% per year based on their program, [the Ontario government permits an increase to international student tuition of up to 20%](#). This discrepancy has created a distorted incentive for post-secondary institutions to target international students in [harmful, and exploitative ways](#).

What types of programs and policies will your party implement to address the targeting and exploitation of international students, and what kind of programs and supports would your party consider to assist international students once they arrive in Ontario?

Prior to being elected in my capacity as Director, Diversity and Equity at Wilfrid Laurier University, I worked closely with Laurier International to support international students. The exploitation of international students was and remains a disturbing trend in the sector – one that is only exacerbated by the under-funding of operational grants for the sector. While elected, I pushed back against the Ford Government's attack on settlement services, and I know that when these services are not provided in community, many post-secondary institutions struggle as the need to provide these settlement resources are then downloaded on them. We must push for operational funding in the sector that also includes culturally responsive supports including, but not limited to, ensuring that the areas of the institution that care for international students' wellbeing are provided with what they need to ensure that students thrive.

I know that international students have particular high rates of dealing with sexual violence on campuses, and that their lack of access to healthcare services that they can afford has also impacted their experiences on college and university campuses. While elected, I pushed to have OHIP coverage for international students and other newcomers both prior to and during the pandemic.

Nobody should ignore the fact that international students are being asked to bear massive and ever-increasing tuition costs to attend post-secondary institutions in Ontario. The increasing reliance on higher and higher tuition fees from international students is troubling and we are proud to support the advocates locally and provincially who are fighting for international students to have tuition increases capped and services funded that ensure that they can successfully complete their post-secondary journey in Ontario.

The audit of the sector will allow the Ontario NDP to make strategic investments that work for international students because it will not allow their experiences to inform the process and not be excluded from it. My colleagues and I look forward to helping our party develop the strategy needed to begin this audit.

6. The unavailability of affordable housing in communities with post-secondary institutions has continued to force students to become long-distance commuters, living far outside their campus communities. However, with transit being underfunded across Ontario, as well as the loss of private transit providers like Greyhound, the necessary transit infrastructure and service to carry students within and between non-GTA communities is non-existent. This lack of transit options leaves students with no easy way to get to their schools, their

workplaces, or their cultural communities. **How will your party work to *improve local public transit* and community interconnectivity for areas outside the GTA, such as Brantford, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Guelph?**

My first Private Members Bill was a call for the Ford Government to provide Ontario residents with their plan to bring two-way, all-day GO service to Kitchener in order to address the long commutes between Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto. Though they voted this down, the endorsements from local advocates for this service went to great lengths to explain that a robust public transit system results in a greater quality of life while driving a green economy.

New Democrats understand the importance of robust, accessible, and affordable public transit systems. Unfortunately, past governments have underfunded public transit for decades, leading to rate hikes and deteriorating service.

The Ontario NDP has a plan to fix this. We will restore provincial funding for municipal public transit and para-transit systems to 50% of their net operating costs. Working closely with municipal transit agencies, we will be able to use this investment to immediately improve service in communities across the province. This includes implementing a ten-minutes-or-better service guarantee on core routes across every major transit system in Ontario. This will also help to centre environmental considerations in local planning while supporting our Municipal partners, each of which has tabled motions committing to actively address the climate crisis.

We will also work with municipal and industry partners to develop an Inter-community Transportation Strategy to better connect communities across Ontario, invest in the electrification of transportation fleets, and finally bring two-way, all-day GO service to the Kitchener-Waterloo-Toronto corridor.

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