

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

On February 25, 2025, ISAC hosted an Election Forum on Income Security. The panelists included Aislinn Clancy (Green Party), John Fraser (Liberal Party), and Lise Vaugeois (NDP). A member of the Progressive Conservative Party was invited but did not respond to the invitation. The panel was moderated by Kat Eschner, TVO journalist. Most of the topics were sent to panelists ahead of time, though specific questions were not shared, and an audience question was shared.

The video of the Forum is posted to ISAC's website at the following address. It includes English subtitles that were generated by YouTube. <https://incomesecurity.org/watch-isacs-2025-election-forum-on-income-security-here/>



The transcript below is taken directly from the subtitles generated by YouTube. They have been reviewed with very light editing to remove "um"s and "uh"s, but with no removal of substantive information. To contact ISAC about this event or these transcripts, email info@isac.clcj.ca.

Claudia: Hello everyone, thanks for joining us. We're just making sure people can get into the room and then we will get started

Claudia: So welcome everyone to our Election Forum on income security. I'm Claudia Calabro the Communications Specialist and Organizer for the Income Security Advocacy Centre. We are a specialty Community Legal Clinic that focuses on protecting and advancing the rights of people living on low incomes particularly people on social assistance and low-wage workers and we do this through test case litigation, policy advocacy, community organizing and public education.

Now before we get into it I'd like to do just a very brief land acknowledgement. I'm delivering this presentation from Toronto, Treaty 13 territory which is also covered by Dish With One spoon Wampum Belt Covenant which was an agreement between the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabeg and other groups around the Great Lakes to share and care for the resources on this territory. As I continue to learn more about Treaty commitments I grow stronger in my own understanding that it's not enough to acknowledge the land on which I work but also acknowledge that colonialism has impacted and shaped the histories and current day experiences of First Peoples on this land. Because of targeted and sustained colonial policies legal systems and land dispossession Inuit, First Nations and Metis people in Ontario experience disproportionate levels of poverty. Social assistance is one such colonial program that disempowers its beneficiaries. The current system as it's set up is inherently degrading. It means a life of policing surveillance and deep poverty. It's on me as a descendant of recent immigrants and on all settlers and newcomers to not only acknowledge the land but also actively commit to undoing the harm that colonialism has brought. For me this means holding governments to account, pushing them further and supporting Indigenous Peoples on social assistance to be able to leave the condition of poverty and live life on their own terms.

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

Today we're talking about income security with candidates who are running in the provincial election which is happening in 48 hours election day! I just wanted to note that a candidate from the Progressive Conservative party was also invited but we did not hear back from them. ISAC is a nonpartisan organization which means we don't endorse any one candidate or party and the views shared by the candidates today are theirs and theirs alone. We are recording this session and we will try to make it available online ASAP. I just want to introduce our moderator quickly - our moderator today is Kat Eshner. We're so lucky to have Kat moderating today. Kat is a science and business journalist based in Toronto who writes and produces television on current affairs affordability issues and disinformation for TVO. Thanks so much Kat, over to you.

Kat: Thanks so much Claudia real pleasure to be here and just to start with I have to apologize I've come down with a bit of a cold so I may be a bit scratchy and cough-y during this this session but I assure you it won't come through the camera, you're you're safe. So I just to start with I just want to introduce our two panelists - oh hi John - our three panelists I see we've uh we've come up with our third so wonderful just half a second then

Kat: So sorry I'm just pulling up the rest of John's bio because I did a little tweaking. Great thanks so much. So Lise Vaugois is a member of the Ontario NDP and the MPP for Thunder Bay Superior North. Lise was elected as a Member of Provincial Parliament for the NDP in the riding of Thunder Bay Superior North in June of 2022. She has served as the critic for accessibility and persons with disabilities as well as the critic for seniors and for WSIB and Injured Workers. John Fraser of the Liberal Party of Ontario is also joining us. He is the MPP for Ottawa South. John was born and raised in Ottawa South and he has been an active volunteer for a number of local organizations and initiatives. He has served as the MPP for Ottawa South for the past 11 years and he has worked hard to deliver community based solutions to people who live and work in his riding. And last but very much not least we have Aislinn Clancy of the Green Party of Ontario, MPP for Kitchener Center and Deputy leader of the Green Party. Aislinn was born and raised in Waterloo region. Before she was elected MPP she was the city councillor for Ward 10 in Kitchener and a social worker in the Waterloo Catholic District School Board.

Kat: Thank you all so much for joining us we really appreciate your time especially so close to the upcoming election to talk about the important issues of income security. Let's get into it right away. I just want to note there will be two minutes for a response and you will be timed by the wonderful Claudia so try to keep to your time.

Kat: Our first questions will both focus on social assistance. To ground this part of the conversation I just want to note that the maximum basic amount so this is the maximum amount for all expenses a single adult can receive from the Ontario Disability Support Program is \$1,368 per month at current. Now the maximum amount for a single adult receiving Ontario Works to cover the same expenses is \$733 per month. Here's the first question and it has a bit of a preamble regarding ODSP rates: All three of your parties have committed to raising them but we know that most people on ODSP live well below the poverty line. What else specifically will your party do to support people with disabilities to live a life without poverty now Aislinn let's start with you.

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

Aislinn: Yeah I think it's essential that we recognize the cost of shelter so I've been begging the PC government to recognize that the shelter allowance that somebody gets and the actual amount that shelter costs in where you live don't match up at all so there has to be a reckoning when it comes to shelter allowance so it makes that possible. Also I put forward a Keeping People Housed Act. So many folks on with disabilities and who are living on a low income, seniors and newcomers etc., are being forcibly displaced and illegally displaced because they're renters. So we need to build homes that are affordable, 250,000 affordable units rent geared to income, 61,000 supportive units. We know lots of folks with complex needs need those wraparound supports to make housing successful but we need to also protect people who are renting because some of them are just living you know a meal away from being homeless. So we see so many people shifting down the housing continuum and we need bold action to make sure that there's fairness for renters and that there's also a renewal of and commitment to bold action to ensure that we have affordable housing because that safety net is gone. And now that there's so much gentrification, increase in rental costs people are being displaced at an alarming rate. As a school social worker I've seen that when folks are worried about their housing. Nothing else goes - so they're not looking for able to work, look for work very easily, they're not able to learn and have their kids go to school. Their mental health deteriorates and that gets even worse if they've been displaced so we need to look at a whole wrap around approach and we also want to get the gouging out of our economy. The government is really in bed -- I'll say I know there's probably a better term but -- in cahoots I'll say with big oil and gas, with the big grocers, with the housing developers and corporate landlords and so they've been inactive in addressing this unfairness and this gouging to go from 5% to you know over 20% in profits is really on the backs of low- middle- income folks and it leaves people behind.

Kat: Thank you so much Aislinn. Lise, to you.

List: Sure so we want to start by doubling ODSP and doubling OW that's just a starting place but at least it moves us moves us forward gives people a little bit more opportunity we need rent control. We need to stop the abuse of above above guideline increases we've also got in Thunder Bay entire buildings that have gone over to short-term rentals and that's not okay that was affordable housing. Also we the NDP has a platform of actually building affordable housing. This hasn't been done since the 90s so we want to see more co-ops. We also want to see affordable financing so I had two projects here over the last few years that were not able to get financing for them. Provincial government wasn't willing to support it but they were community-based projects and had there been affordable financing they would have been built already. We would have more affordable housing right now. The other thing about ODSP and OW is you know there are over 700 regulations for ODSP and amongst those regulations are restrictions on you know if you live with somebody. People on social assistance are the only people not allowed to pool their resources. I think that's disgusting. The levels are disgusting and what people don't always realize is that every every penny that goes into ODSP or OW comes back into the community. So you know there will always be people that have an attitude as Doug Ford does, saying that you know people on ODSP should get off their butts and stop watching reruns of The Flintstones, well that was you know truly disgusting thing to say, which also says he doesn't actually know what it means - disability - a lot, right? So people are

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

dealing with a disability which is already more expensive than it's than not having a disability, and then may or may not be able to work, and then there their limits on the amount that they can earn and then there's the these horrible limits on how many assets you can have so that you actually have to be dead poor before you can even qualify for Ontario Disability or Ontario Works. And we know that people Ontario Works are often waiting to get approved for ODSP. Nobody should in this wealthy province nobody should be struggling the way people are struggling and not able to put a roof over their heads.

Kat: Thanks Lise, John to you.

John: Thanks very much and thanks very much for having me today. And hi hello Lise and Aislinn, I haven't seen you in a while I hope things are going great for you on the campaign campaign trail. Along with doubling the rates of ODSP, I think it's important that we you know that the supports that are there for people not just on ODSP but people on with low incomes and I think one of the things - housing - of course is a really important ingredient which is building more purpose-built supportive and affordable rentals for people. But right now we need to return to real rent control so all those buildings built post 2018 - there's no throttle on that. That's not a reasonable thing. We're committed to doing that. The other piece is health and our leader just announced this this morning about the inclusion of - and I know other parties have talked about this as well - mental health and addiction treatment under OHIP and so if you have money you have access or better access to the mental health care that you need, if you don't it's pretty hard to get. And this is often what traps people in poverty, not just poor physical health and having a family doctor, but also poor mental health as well, access to education right, so we still have challenges around people with disabilities being able to access what they need at the primary and secondary levels. We don't have enough executive assistant or execu- sorry educational assistants, and college and colleges and universities are under increasing pressure right now and that's creating a lot of pressure on ensuring that there are accommodations made for people and access for people who have disabilities to be able to realize their full potential. So the last thing I'd like to add on on a personal level and I know that our party is committed to taking a look at it again: Universal Basic Income is going to become a reality at some point because of the way that our economy is and it was very- it was bad when the pilot was ended, not just because we didn't get the information but because of how those people were treated. So that's my belief. I think it's something that crosses party lines. All four, all four parties think, people in all four parties say like we need to look at this because it's where our economy is going and it's in some ways a more effective and efficient way of supporting people's incomes, supporting people's livelihood. Thank you.

Kat: Thank you. Next question is on Ontario Works. As I mentioned, \$733 per month is the maximum basic amount for Ontario Works single Ontario Works recipient. These rates have been unchanged since 2018 although the cost of goods and services has increased on average 20% over the same time frame. Will your party raise Ontario Works rates and index them to inflation? And what else will you do to ensure that this program succeeds? John, you get the first crack at this one.

John: Okay well as I said we we committed to doubling the rates of ODSP. We haven't made a commitment yet to Ontario Works. I'll go back to my comments with universal basic income - I

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

think that's something that's a more direct way of supporting people. I'm a personal advocate for that, I think that's something that I believe in. I can't -- A time frame for the universal basic income? Or for any changes to Ontario Works? No I can't give -- no I can't give you a time frame right now and you know that's the thing that I'll be fighting for, that I'll be, you know, it's not enough. There's clearly unquestionably it's not enough money and what happens is then people come in-house and then it costs us more money to serve them, to help them, to house them, to keep them healthy.

Kat: Right. Thank you so much and do you have any would you like to add anything else about what you will be doing to ensure that this program succeeds? sort of a double question --

John: Just just it's what I've done throughout -- I've worked in office for, I've had the same community office 26 years it just happens to have my name on the door now, and so what we try to do is work and help people who, a lot of whom are on assistance or might be on assistance, so I just will continue to advocate that inside government. Myself personally as support for people with developmental disabilities, something that's very important to me and locally that's what we do, you know, we help people, we go by City councillors, we help people with housing, we help people with challenges around their, whether it's ODSP or OW, so that's -- I mean I have a record of committing to that over over 26 years locally. You can, we can argue about what success you had in the bigger picture but it's what I believe and and what I'm going to continue to work towards. Our job is to hear the voices that are hardest to hear. Thank you.

Kat: Thank you. Aislinn?

Aislinn: Yeah we are committed to doubling it. We also believe in stopping the clawbacks until we've reached that UBI. We know the clawbacks are bananas like nobody we - you know - people talk about paying taxes and they're so outraged - we would not charge low-income folks 50% tax. Ultimately that clawback is a disincentive to working and it's inhumane. People feel so unappreciated and outraged I mean the way that people can be audited when they barely have enough to survive. I had a gentleman come to me said they were clawing back money for something that was owed. He was on OW and he's like I'll never pay. I'll be dead before I pay this off. What point do we look at the situation with ultimate compassion? And we know that so many folks on Ontario Works are really folks facing disabilities but how many people come into my office and Lise's office and John's to say, I applied for ODSP and they turned me away. We have a default of denying people ODSP who legitimately have ODSP. Yet we underfund legal aid, like outrageously! To me the cut to Legal Aid that happened when the Ford government came into place was the most outrageous violation of people's rights that I've ever seen. We have people going to bat for themselves at court whether they're facing homelessness or denied ODSP. We need to increase the funding for Legal Aid so that people can get supported, but we need to get out of this practice of just default denying folks from ODSP. And also ultimately I have folks with cerebral palsy saying, I have to go through it again to prove that I still have cerebral palsy! Come on! Let's stop treating people on a low income in this way. It is rude, it shows a lack of caring and I'm outraged. OW needs to go up, it needs to go up now, because if we're charging people in tents \$10,000 for being homeless, that's ridiculous. If we're putting people in jail because they're living in a tent that's ridiculous, and it is fiscally

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

irresponsible. I have a business degree and a social work degree and I'll tell you it costs way more to put somebody in a hospital bed - \$30,000 a month - I mean I see all kinds of variation but it is astronomical to house somebody in a hospital because they are cold. And we know that emergency room rates increase significantly like 25% 30% because people are trying to stay warm. Let's move people out of emergency rooms into housing. Let's move people out of tents into supportive care instead of jailing them. It is more fiscally responsible, it is more caring and is the Ontario that I intend to represent. I have seen too many people face this and we need to stop the bean counting and just give people enough to survive and let them thrive.

Kat: Thank you Aislinn. Lise?

Lise: Yeah so we are seeing CEOs taking home 10 million dollars a year, that's disgusting, okay? So how can we be you know "bean counting" for people who have almost nothing to live on, so OW obviously has to be doubled. And I want to echo what Aislinn said because putting - - we've got a government talking about putting people in jail, right? We're going to clear the encampments! And so where are they going to go? Well it costs a lot of money to put people in jail and and far less to house them. It's really expensive to be poor. It costs. It's so hard to get anything done. You can spend your entire day crossing Thunder Bay to get one meal and then crossing to get back, and then trying to get to a doctor's appointment, and so on. It's extremely difficult and it puts people at such a disadvantage. And also that you know the surveillance, all of this creates shame in people that they do not deserve. I really-- because I think most of what needs to be said on this issue has already been been said, I think that we are quite in agreement on this, except that we need to recognize that poverty is structural, the way the economy is set up, the way that wealth is hived off and kept in very few hands. And that's been going on you know structurally for a long time, but very much over the last 30 years that we've seen public resources going to private profits and not going to support people who may not be able to work right now. That is criminal and you know people want, people need to be able to participate and they can't if they cannot, don't have food, and they can't keep a roof over their head. And I'm sure you're going to ask about the privatization of OW and ODSP so I'll leave that because that's another topic, but I really want to talk about it.

Kat: Thanks so much Lise.

Aislinn: And I just want to say we don't have jail beds! Like our jails are overflowing so we will be spending money to build new jails instead of spending money to build housing for people!

Lise: We have a new jail being built as we speak so unfortunately that that probably is the, you know, provincial government keeps talking about how much they're investing in prisons and not investing in people.

Kat: Great, thank you all so much. Let's let's keep it moving. This question has a bit of a long preamble for which I apologize, but it is relevant. Ontario is is currently undergoing a process to modernize social assistance, including OW and ODSP. As part of that process, Employment Services mainly meant to assist job seekers, have largely been contracted out to private third parties, known as service system managers. Recent evaluations of this transitions pilot phase found its performance-based funding model rewards employment placement and retention

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

resulting in these service system managers doing a much poorer job of serving social assistance - potentially much poorer job of serving social assistance - clients with barriers to employment, including persons with disabilities. In other words there are indications that the reforms are at present failing those job seekers who need assistance the most. Question: how will your party ensure that vulnerable people looking for job support will not fall through the cracks? And what will you do to ensure transparency and accountability of taxpayer funding for this newly privatized system? Lise, let's start with you.

Lise: I'll start because I'm already being pulled off to this other event that I have to attend, but yeah so in Thunder Bay, it's going to be owned by Circo. Circo owns Drive Test and it's a multinational conglomerate. So first of all now you've got to generate profits for this corporation. Profits do not belong -- belong - in providing services for Ontarians. I'm sorry - that from the outset, I think, is Criminal. Now how are we going to fix it when the contracts have already been put in place? That is a really serious problem. I know the person who's going to be running it here, she's a good person, she's optimistic, but how do you push back against something that is structurally designed to give performance bonuses based on moving people through the system regardless of whether it's good for them, and then squeezing out your profits at the other end? It's designed not to serve the interests of people I don't know how we're going to break it apart because it's already been set in motion but I strongly object to the whole way that it's been designed.

Kat: And what will you be doing to help vulnerable job seekers who may be falling through the cracks of this system that you're saying is very hard to change right now?

Lise: I think that the only thing that we can do is work on the local level and know the people who are doing the actual work and be working together with them. I know that people in -- I was at Biindigen Anishnabe yesterday. They're worried about it, they're worried about whether their jobs are going to disappear and they won't be able to help their own people navigate the system. So that's going to be my responsibility then to figure out how to support people in each local instance to navigate the system. And frankly if the system is failing people as much as I suspect it will, then we've got to get rid of it, but at this moment I think that we have to support on that individual community based basis.

Kat: Thanks Lise, I'll let you go so you can rush off to your event --

Lise: okay thank you sorry everybody.

John: Good to see you Lise.

Kat: John? Yeah no it's - you know, when we we measure things it has to be based on an outcome and that outcome should be the goal for that person, for them to achieve the thing, and so personally, I just - we're gonna be stuck with what we have here. Lise is right about working locally to do this because it should be community based and there are enough organizations that exist inside our community who have an interest in doing that, that you can that you don't have to go to for-profit corporation if they're just simply hiring the people who would have - it sounds like in Lise's community - who would have done it already. I'm not sure

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

that, I'm not sure that the profit piece of that is helpful in terms of you know the motivation to actually deliver on the outcome, right, and so I don't know what the, how they're really basing their evaluations, but if they're not based on people getting placed or on their way to getting placed, if it's just, if it's just a body count well that's not what it's supposed to be about, right. So I just believe that the way that you solve that problem is by not hiring a corporation that's just going to bring people in from other organizations and they're going to make a profit. I just think you have to work with the community partners who have an interest in doing that. You have to build a coalition, I've seen that work around things like addictions and mental health here in Ottawa. I just think it's a much more you know local. It's, there are local resources and local leaders and local champions and it's a government's responsibility and members responsibility to try to pull people together to build you know a coalition or common goals between providers. Sometimes providers, multiple providers, compete. We've all seen that, that's why governments try to go to one provider, so I just think the solution is that you have to work together with everybody. Again I've seen it around mental health and addictions here in this city and where people came together to reach a certain goal and all agreed how they were going to go forward without competing against each other which is sometimes the problem. There's two problems with kind of the way that we've been doing it before in some communities is we have multiple providers, they don't know what the other providers doing and they're competing against each other for scarce resources from government, so it's better just to get everybody to work together and provide the support and resources and also leverage whatever investment you can get from those community organizations because there's a lot of other investment that's -- I don't want to say it's free because people come and they volunteer and they play a part but there's resources to be leveraged, right? I must be over two minutes by now. It's all right I was trying to tactically slip in, but thank you so much! I should have my timer on here.

Kat: Aislinn I'll get to you in half a second - we still have half an hour on the call do you both have time to stay and answer some more questions? Unfortunately Lise had to go you're both good? Great thank you so much. So Aislinn –

Aislinn: yeah yeah I have until 1:15 I think.

John: Yeah I'm a hard stop at one.

Aislinn: So yeah so I've seen this firsthand. I worked at a high school where all the students were below the fifth percentile right and the way they got access to employment supports is now gone. So I had a gentleman who is a close dear friend of mine and you know he has autism and he's in his late 20s. He's very able in many ways but cognitively low and he back in the day he got services that were built for him, folks with disabilities ,so he needed more time. He had maybe the employer got some supports in the early days until he was off, you know, he was on his feet. He's since lost his job because they don't want to pay benefits and they don't want part-time workers and they kind of got rid of those part-time workers. Well now he doesn't have the same support to get a new job and I think unfortunately because it's about a short-term win, we don't necessarily see the value of folks with varying levels of disability and how there's such a long-term value of supporting folks to get employment. He would have been at that job till the day he died, he was so loyal, so good at it, so committed, never missed

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

a day of work. So it pains me to see that we're moving to a kind of McDonald's system of employment supports because as a social worker in mental health and now we're seeing in Employment Services they've funded basically the brief system - you get so many sessions and you have to move on, and really it leaves so many people out. So I think if you have any complexity to your needs, if you have any complexity to your disability, all of a sudden you don't fit the model anymore and we see that with mental health we see that with addictions we see that with now with employment where more and more people are getting abandoned by this government because they they want something that's quick and simple, and I think that's a real tragedy so I do want to separate these these privatizing --I think we've seen it with healthcare that we end up spending more tax dollars and getting a lot less. And I think that anytime somebody's taking the cut in the middle, we do end up seeing, we see it with privatized surgeries we pay more and we get less. Thank you.

Kat: Thank you Aislinn. Now we know that even Ontario workers who are not using Employment Ontario services are having a hard time right now and they may face, Ontario may face, job losses if tariffs are levied on Canadian goods and services in the near future. This is a big big issue right right now. What is your plan to ensure all Ontario workers have access to safe and fair employment? John?

John: Well I mean the only thing, we'll have to see what happens with the tariffs. I know that we will have to have a made-in-Ontario plan for supporting all those businesses and industries that'll be affected. That's what it's going to take, there's no there's no question about it. We have to keep -- it's not just about supporting those people to have -- supporting Ontarians to have an income, it's also supporting those organizations that help them generate that income to continue to function, to build other partnerships for trade around the world, to break down all the interprovincial barriers that we have right now in terms of -- you know, you can raise hogs here in Ontario, but you can't sell them in Quebec. You can sell them, you know, you can sell them south of the border. It's not just goods and services internally, it's people. So you know your the degree that you have or your professional status is not always recognized by the province that you're going to, whether you're a healthcare worker or you're or you're working, your profession is a trade, we have to break those things down and so you know we have to, if we don't, if we can't do that stuff internally, I don't know how we're going to be able to survive, you know, to actually build trade around the world if we can't do it inside our own borders. Thanks John. Aislinn? Yeah I think there's two items, we need to, we have the highest unemployment in Canada. That was before Trump even happened right. So this government likes to say jobs jobs jobs, but like we know that that's not really how things have panned out. We believe in good quality jobs and treating employment across the board equally so let's get make sure gig workers are covered under the Employment Standards Act. We believe that workers need moreso a minimum wage increase, but also protecting our small and medium businesses by lowering taxes for small medium businesses and raising that ceiling for when they pay the health benefits ultimately too. Our government needs to actually invest in Ontario. We have what is it 2.2 billion, John? On a luxury spa, a foreign spa - let me just add foreign spa - so you know we have an Austrian company, we just talked about a multinational corporation that is now doing our Employment Services. How come we aren't valuing our businesses and spending taxpayer dollars to grow and and support local businesses? I have a business degree and basically the number one rule is diversify! You know we've become

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

overdependence on the American companies and American economy for our economy and so we need to diversify. I'm glad we're doing it now. We need to improve our procurement system to ensure that we support local companies and we also need to invest in a green economy because we have invested so much in an oil and gas sector and extraction. We also need to look at sustainable ways that we can be resilient with our food by having a food belt and protecting our farm economy by having investments in renewables so that we can be independent with our energy as well. So there's lots of ways we can become more resilient and we need to look at how our dollars are spent to improve everybody's wellbeing.

Kat: Thank you, now a somewhat technical question: our workers compensation system is funded by rates charged to employers but the provincial government decides the level of benefits for Injured Workers. In 1998 the provincial government reduced the maximum level of workers compensation benefits from 90% of take-home pay to 85% of take-home pay because it said that the Workers Compensation Board was underfunded at that time. In 2018, so 20 years later, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, which is the Workplace Compensations Board descendant, announced it was fully funded. Four years later in 2022 the WSIB announced that it was overfunded and would pay \$1.5 billion back to employers. Two years later in 2024 the WSIB announced that it was overfunded and that it would pay an additional 2.5 billion to employers and that the average employer premium was the lowest in over 50 years. Now that the - here's the question - now that the WSIB has no unfunded liability and has access reserves, will your party restore workers compensation benefits to the pre-1998 level of 90% of take-home pay as well as looking at other long awaited benefit improvements? Aislinn?

Aislinn: Yeah so I wish Lise was here. She's such a pro. We will end the practice of deeming, whereby Workplace Safe- WSIB unfairly cuts benefits to injured workers. We would, we believe in classifying gig employees and giving them the full access to EI, CPP, and WSIB. It doesn't make sense that injured workers aren't being fairly compensated. I'm gonna leave it at that.

Kat: Thank you Aislinn. John - now that WSIB has no unfunded liability and has excess reserves will your party restore workers compensation benefits to the pre-1998 level of 90% of take-home pay and look at other long- awaited benefit improvements?

John: I can't make that commitment to that, to the question that you just asked. I'm just being straight with you - I don't want to, I don't want to make a commitment that... but here's what I'll tell you, what I believe is that and what I've done is that, I believe that to return all that just to employers was wrong. I believe that the coverage for instance gig workers, more vulnerable workers, is something that we have to address and fix so I've had a private members bill that deals directly with that, that deals, it was about PSWs, developmental service workers, youth service workers, who are working in a non-provincial residential facility. They are not covered by OHIP. If you work in a -- same worker, two different spots, not covered. Covered in one spot, not covered in the other. And often these people are working two or three jobs. And WSIB is something that they need because it covers their total employment, all of their jobs, not just the job that they're in. So I've introduced the bill four or five times. I've debated it twice. I'm going to introduce it again in the next session, and if I have to debate it again I will. And I've

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

talked to Labour Ministers about this, is that, look, WSIB is not a partisan thing. It's something that actually conservative government started, right, because it's the right thing to do to protect workers. So I've had some assurances that they were going to move on this commitment and that was Ministers who are both Liberal and Conservative Ministers so I'm going to continue to fight for that. You know I do think the thing that we have to really focus on right now is ensuring that people are covered. These PSWs, development service workers, personal service workers, youth service workers, they, it's unfair that they're not covered and they're at risk. And there are people who aren't being covered who are just by virtue where they're working and that's not right. Gig workers as well too. We have to, we have to make sure that everybody who should be covered is covered.

Kat: Great thank you John. Now we have a question from the audience, so I did not write this one. There is a clear disparity in funding for organizations that specifically serve BIPOC disabled communities compared to non-BIPOC organizations. This results in BIPOC disabled people, disabled individuals, having to seek support from multiple organizations to meet their needs, creating additional barriers to accessing essential services. What is your party's plan to ensure equitable funding for organizations that serve BIPOC disabled individuals so they receive the same level of support as non-BIPOC organizations? Aislinn, do you want to take a crack at this one?

Aislinn: I mean I'll speak more as from my experience, I was a school social worker and I just, when I worked in Toronto we had TAIBU, we had community health centers that had an Afrocentric lens. I believe we need to raise the funding for all not-for-profits to be adequate. You know they've been, they asked for "five to survive" in Developmental Services - I know not-for-profits across the board are starving and I think we do need, whether it's youth services, services for folks with disabilities, addiction services, etc, have cultural lenses, well even long-term care and retirement homes. Whenever we can add in a cultural lens and ensure we have you know folks with lived experience as frontline workers, so we do have a lot in our platform to value the lived experience of folks with varying levels and experiences of oppression, but yeah I do, I would like to, I will push for adequate funding across the board because I think even workers with in the not-for-profit sector get 25 to 30% less than if they work in a school or a hospital. And so we need to value those folks and have them stay because we're having a real HR crisis in some of those caring professions and those low income professions. But we also have to encourage a a cultural lens, so I'll be pushing for the organizations in my community that have that lens, the Afrocentric lens, or lens of folks with disabilities or seniors or Indigenous communities. So we do have a section of our platform that focuses on how we can ensure there's proper inclusion and we're we're dismantling colonialism and systemic racism, anti-Black racism, and for racialized people across the province.

Kat: Thanks Aislinn. John?

John: Thank you very much. Yeah no I agree with Aislinn and the thing I want to sort of back up a little bit and say is that if you take a look at people's access to, people with disabilities, their access to the services that they need, it starts earlier in terms of actually having people who, people recognize have a same life experiences having access to things like getting a

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

degree in psychology or in social work, right? So there are some - and it's been raised here specifically in Ottawa - some inequities in terms of how the population is reflected in those professions, so I think, you know, I think that's an important place to start. I just believe throughout a system that serves people, whether that be the healthcare system, whether that be a disability support system, whether that be an educational system, people have to have people with the same lived experience, but also see themselves reflected. And that it goes right across the board to boards and commissions so it's something that throughout my career I've tried to support as an MPP and as a, as working in a community office, so I'm going to continue to do that.

Kat: Thank you so much. Our next question is regarding a recent development. A series of Bills were introduced towards the end of 2024, which were described as helping to solve the homeless crisis and quote "restore public order" end quote. This includes the Safer Streets Stronger Communities Act 2024 which received Royal Assent in December 2024. Among other things, that Act ends funding for safe consumption sites across the province in March 2025 and places restrictions on the opening of new sites effectively ending widespread access to harm reduction services. Ending access to harm reduction and overdose prevention services in the middle of a toxic drug crisis, which claims the lives of several Ontarians daily, will result in more avoidable deaths and increased medical and mental health crises among the most vulnerable in our province. Bills 238 and 242 which followed the Act would further criminalize houseless people. Question: Will your party support wide spread harm reduction services and repeal legislation such as Bill 242 that may lay the groundwork for forced incarceration and further criminalization of houseless and Street involved people? John, let's start with you.

John: Yeah know I just, I think what the government did in terms of the closure of those harm reduction sites was a wrong thing to do. There's going to be a gap, it's going to create challenges, not challenges, people are going to follow the griefs. People are going to die. I know it's very hard to keep people, it's very hard to treat an addiction if the person's not alive and so harm reduction services, I'm very supportive of. Have been and worked to ensure that the safe consumption sites here in Ottawa both in government and inside government are here. I'm committed to making sure that those services are available to people, and I'd have to take a go back and take a look at the legislation and how to repeal either is it a repeal-able legislation or specific things in there that we need to take out from the legislation. And as well, it's like, what are the supports that we're giving? So there's a policy piece of that as well too, which is you know, ensuring that people have access to not just harm reduction, but the services that should naturally follow that.

Kat: Thank you. Aislinn?

Aislinn: Yeah, we've clearly stated that we support harm reduction and keeping CTS's open. John can correct me but I think we're the ones that have it in our platform and been explicit about that. I'm a social worker, I know that harm reduction saves lives. I mean we've had decades and decades and decades of research saying that clean needles prevent the spread of disease. I mean just last year I heard from public health nurses that there was an outbreak of AIDS in London so this puts a ridiculous demand on an already stressed out healthcare system. We have the City of Guelph spending \$500,000 of property tax dollars to ensure that

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

they have adequate support from paramedics to cope with the overdoses that they anticipate when the CTS's close at the end of March, so this is a horrible decision. I'm so proud that we have the HART Hub money in my riding but I know that those doors won't open and those services won't be available for many months. So they've stopped providing one set of assistance and saying that this is a better set of assistance but in that is a vacuum. So not only are they disregarding all the data and evidence that says harm reduction saves lives and helps. And in my community, the child care centres, the police, everybody saying it's a stabilizer, that they don't have needles in their yard because we have folks, peer support workers, that go around and clean it up. So all this kind of Doomsday narrative that the government does is really horrendous. I heard that they're actually sending private investigators to CTS's to take evidence so that they can continue to prop up this myth that it causes crime and it causes drug issues. You know what? Do your homework! These pharmaceutical companies that have made themselves incredibly rich, and the global players and bad actors, why are we not pointing the finger in the right direction instead of punching down at folks who are facing addiction? So I don't think it's an either or, I think it's a yes and, that we need all the help we can get and this whole, this government ought to do their homework and have a strategy for dealing with the opioid crisis instead of just cleaning streets and putting people in jail when we know that we will lose lives because people aren't having access to stigma-free support for their mental health and addiction. And that's what CTS is, it's the bottom rung on the ladder towards a more optimistic and a healthier future. Our healthcare system is going to fail under this weight of folks overdosing. There'll be families and trauma impacting our frontline workers. And I think it's going to cause a massive amount of disruption and heartache and pain and suffering and trauma for our downtowns that are already struggling.

Kat: Thank you so much Aislinn. Just two more questions. I appreciate both of you and your time. The first one, the upcoming Canada Disability Benefit has brought new hope to low-income Ontarians and Canadians with disabilities. The federal government promised to, beginning -- what this is, is the federal government promised to begin sending payments of a maximum of \$200 per month to eligible Canadians starting July 2025. Currently Ontario claws back OW and ODSP for several federal benefits including Employment Insurance and Canada Pension Plan Disability. These clawbacks deprive low-income Ontarians including persons with disabilities from availing themselves of a full range of Canadian income benefits. A clawback on the CDB will defeat its purpose and deprive Ontarians with disabilities of income security. Will your party commit to not clawing back social assistance for those who receive the Canada Disability Benefit once it is implemented? Aislinn, would you like to start?

Aislinn: Yes, I've talked to the Minister on several occasions. I'm part of the social policy committee and I'm asking, just be honest, yes or no, right? MP Mike Morris, our federal representative in Kitchener Centre, has been very active with this disability community to make sure that there's all kinds of amendments, to make sure it's you know, targeted to inflation and that it can increase, and it's really a barrier where here we are, keeping \$200 away from folks with disabilities, that isn't even the province's money - it's the federal government's money and all they need to do is make a commitment that they're not going to claw back. The clawbacks that folks would, people with disabilities have already is ridiculous. You know folks are getting clawed back because they got the dental benefit or the grocery money or things like this and

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

why are we not having governments talk to each other? So I will continue to push the minister to make that commitment to not claw it back, and I'll insist that the federal government and the provincial government talk to each other when they do these things so that we don't have to face this every single time the federal government does something good for folks living in poverty. And then we have a provincial government that is out to lunch about the realities folks face, and just do the right thing and let that money go to the people as intended.

Kat: Right so just to be clear, the Greens as a matter of policy will commit to not clawing back this...

Aislinn: Clawbacks are dumb, until we get to UBI.

Kat: Yes we've gotten to the calling people, things, dumb part of the conversation. John?

John: Yes, look it, yes it doesn't actually, like why are we, why did the government increase the clawback on employment income and somehow other income is different from that? It doesn't make any sense. It's you know, like we have to get to doubling ODSP or to a UBI, and then then you know, then when you look at that, you have to look at the resources that you have in government and how you might be able to help, say, other people who have a child with a developmental disability, which is you know something we haven't talked about yet, that I've had a lot of experience with, but yes I mean, it's just it just doesn't make any sense to say we've increased the clawback and I would have to say arguably, substantially. It could be better but it's you know I'm sure all the things that we're talking about would fit inside that clawback on a monthly basis, and so I think that that's wrong. And so yes. Right, so just to be clear, the Liberals would commit to not clawing back social assistance? Yes. I mean we have to get, like we're, you know, as it, as you know, if once we double ODSP, then you have to look at what are like, once ODSP is doubled, right, then you have to look at, right, all of your resources because there are people with needs as well too. Like people with adult children with development disabilities who don't have a place to make sure that their son or daughter will be safe, so those are the kind of decisions that you have to make. There's a balance that's there right now, that balance is totally out of whack, and so whatever happens after the next election, that's, you know, I'll, I will continue to advocate for those things I just said. Thank you, sorry. Thank you so much.

Kat: And one more question. This is a big one. Ontario's poverty reduction strategy is up for renewal this year - so it was the 2020 to 2025 strategy - is up for renewal. The current poverty reduction strategy do not have specific time bound targets for poverty reduction, and this plan has unfolded in the context of poverty rates in the province increasing, along with food bank usage and homelessness in Ontario. In your view what is missing from current efforts to reduce poverty in Ontario? And how will your party meaningfully and permanently reduce poverty in our province? John, let's start with you.

John: Well we just talked in terms of ODSP rates and doubling ODSP rates, but it also comes down to having people having access to healthcare they need, and mental healthcare that they need. We've made a commitment to do that. It's access to justice in terms of in terms of renting and rental housing, access to the tribunals, access to real rent control and bringing back in real

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

rank control. Those units built after 2018, you know... again you know we don't specifically mention Universal Basic Income in our platform, it is something we get as a party. It is something that we want to take to look at, and something that I personally think is where we're going to end up, where I think we should end up. And I'll continue to work towards that. You know, there are, you know, it's making sure that people have access to the education and the opportunities and post secondary opportunities. So there's a lot of things. It starts you know specifically with doubling of those, doubling those ODSP rates, and ensuring that people are treated fairly. And you know they're not in terms of rental housing. And then ensuring that you know, for instance, you know taking the provincial sales tax off of home heating and electricity. That's something that we're doing. So I think those things will help and but it's you know, it's more than just one thing. It's approach. It's an approach for equal access to those things that people need to be able to thrive. Thanks.

Kat: Thank you thank you John and thanks so much for your time. Aislinn you get the last word.

Aislinn: Oooh, haha.

John: It always ends up that way.

Aislinn: John won't let me I'm sure! Just kidding kidding just kidding just kidding. No we need, we have a structural, systemic, massive issue where young people can't get ahead, renters can't get ahead, and its income inequity at its finest. It's grown so much since the pandemic and it's entrenched in a lot of our economy. There is a lot of unfairness in the way our economy functions and I'll repeat again, this government is being investigated by the RCMP and that to me is exemplar - exemplifies the unfairness. It's like who has access, who has access to tax dollars, who has access to grow their business, and who has access to kind of circumvent the rules. So we have you know speculators making all their money off of housing, speculators making all their money off of farm land. Well that just undermines our housing and our farmland, and it keeps money out of our economy that ought to be there. So we hope to get speculators out of the housing market to restore fairness so that people who want to get a home for the first time. And we have lots of creative solutions. Go to gpo.ca to see all the ways in which we want to create that pathway for people. We know that when, once people get equity that it helps them grow in their wealth over time and have a brighter future where they can pay their own rent, instead of somebody else's and then some. So we need to get speculators out of the farming sector. We have a lot of food insecurity that we're going to just see more of, and we know Galen Weston doesn't need to make more money so we have some anti-gouging policies in our platform because we need to stop the gouging. But we want to make sure that kids are growing up healthy and happy. Our education system is starved and we have, we don't have supports for kids. 73,000 kids on the autism wait list! And then if you talk to folks in schools, we don't have the support staff there because of budget cuts. In my region alone we're short \$29 million in the education system. Same goes for colleges and universities. We're seeing a massive shortage and cuts to our colleges and universities. And these are all steps on the ladder that make, help, people move forward in their life, so let's stop the gouging. Let's make sure we fund our public healthcare and education systems, and ensure that there's a pathway forward for low-income folks and young people, and ultimately

Transcript of the 2025 ISAC Election Forum on Income Security

let's double OW and ODSP as a step toward the basic income, to ensure folks have a roof and food, because without that nothing else will happen.

Kat: Thank you Aislinn. I believe Claudia is going to play us out.

Claudia: Thank you both so much for your time.

John: Thanks a lot.

Aislinn: Bye Kat, thank you everybody, really appreciate it.

Claudia: So huge thanks to our panelists, Aislinn, John, and Lise. We wish you all well in the next 48 hours plus.

Aislinn: Vote, Vote!

Claudia: Yes, huge thanks to our moderator Kat, who you can find on bluesky. And thanks to everybody in the audience for paying attention and asking really great questions. We got a few we couldn't answer. We will send them to the panelists after this event.

Claudia: And for more info on where to vote and how to vote check the Elections Ontario website. And if you want to know more about ISAC, you can check out our website at incomesecurity.org, and we are on the all the various social medias. So thanks again everybody really, appreciate your time today, and take it easy!

Aislinn: Bye, good luck everyone, take care.

John: Take care.

Aislinn: Good luck John.

John: Bye Aislinn, see you soon.