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# PM hurt by McGuinty tax hike: Poll

Ontarians ready to punish Martin  
54% now less likely to vote Liberal

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Ontario's tax-hiking budget is clawing votes away from Prime Minister Paul Martin's Liberals at an alarming rate, according to a Toronto Star poll.

The EKOS Research poll conducted for the Star and La Presse shows that a whopping 54 per cent of respondents say they are less likely to vote Liberal in the June 28 federal election because of Premier Dalton McGuinty's first budget and track record of breaking election promises. The May 18 budget introduced health premiums of up to \$900 annually beginning July 1 for those with incomes of \$20,000 or more.

Overall, the poll shows Liberals have 38 per cent support among decided voters, with the Conservatives at 30.4, the NDP at 18 and the Bloc Québécois at 10.7. The poll of 1,306 Canadians was conducted last Tuesday and Wednesday and is considered accurate within 2.7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the poll's findings, according to EKOS president Frank Graves, is that Ontarians are ready to punish Martin for the McGuinty budget.

Yesterday, McGuinty said he called Martin before the budget to tell him of the plan to introduce health premiums.

"I gave the Prime Minister a heads-up, no doubt about it, with respect to the challenge that the budget would present and the fact that it would contain a health-care premium," McGuinty told reporters at the conclusion of a weekend summit of provincial health and finance ministers aimed at sharing plans to improve the system.

McGuinty said he did not ask the Prime Minister for a cash injection to stave off the highly controversial tax hike, which breaks a key Liberal election promise in the province and is coming back to haunt federal candidates who hit the campaign trail eight days ago.

"I did not spend any more on the matter of our budget than possibly 20 seconds, simply giving the Prime Minister a courtesy heads up. It was not with a view to eliciting any sort of reaction or advice, it was just to let him know that I'd made a very difficult decision."

McGuinty said despite his own record of breaking election promises, he is confident Martin, 65, will be able to keep his promises, including \$9 billion in new health-care spending and more cash for cities.

The Premier said the circumstances are entirely different.

"I support the federal government and Liberal party of Mr. Martin," McGuinty said.

"I have every confidence that Mr. Martin is going to keep his promises because he is not hiding a \$6 billion deficit like Mr. Eves did here," he said, referring to former Conservative premier Ernie Eves.

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The EKOS poll shows Ontario voters are less likely to vote Liberal as a result of the provincial budget and broken election promises, while 12 per cent said the budget would not influence their vote and 32 per cent said the budget will not turn them off the federal Liberals.

The public reaction to the tax hike is beyond what the provincial Liberals had anticipated, as MPPs from across the province fielded angry calls and e-mails of complaint in recent days and the poll suggests its impact might be felt for weeks to come.

McGuinty continued to vigorously defend the tax hike yesterday, saying he sacrificed short-term political gain in order to put the best interests of the province first.

"I believe that Ontarians, once they know better what we are going to do in our budget, those absolutely necessary investments in health care and education and once they know the reasons why I made this decision, they are going to approve of this budget."

He said offering meningitis and chicken pox vaccinations will save Ontario families \$500 per child and the health premiums will help fund better nursing home care for the elderly.

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