



‘Common sense’ dictates that Mike Harris should not receive the Order of Ontario

A message from Parker Robinson, OTF President

Like many of you, you can imagine my shock when I learned that former Premier Mike Harris had been nominated for the province’s highest honour, the Order of Ontario.

The description for the Order provides clear insight why so many Ontarians are profoundly troubled by his nomination. It is “reserved for Ontarians ... whose excellence has left a lasting legacy in the province, Canada and beyond.” True, Mike Harris did leave a lasting legacy; however, it is questionable whether it was a positive one and certainly in relation to the Order of Ontario.

Let me underscore four specific reasons.

Publicly funded education: Premier Harris and his government had a deliberate plan to undermine publicly funded education in Ontario. His Minister of Education was taped arguing for the need to ‘create a crisis’ in public education. Bill 160 led to the largest mass protest in Ontario history by OTF and Affiliate members, i.e., Ontario’s educators. And they were supported by thousands of Ontario citizens.

Ontario Works: As part of his Common Sense Revolution, Premier Harris introduced the Ontario Works program which cut social welfare, assistance and support resulting in a disproportionately negative impact on our most vulnerable citizens.

Walkerton: The Harris government’s decision to privatize and deregulate water inspection, testing and monitoring contributed to seven deaths and hundreds ill in what became known as the Walkerton tainted water tragedy.

Ipperwash: Lastly, the report of the 2003 Ipperwash Inquiry into events surrounding the 1995 Ipperwash standoff, including the killing of demonstrator Dudley George, concluded that Mike Harris and his government bore considerable responsibility for escalating the crisis.

For these reasons, among others, “common sense” dictates that Mike Harris, a premier on whose watch Ontarians’ livelihoods were lessened, lives were lost, and public education targeted, does not deserve recognition with the province’s highest honour.

The deadline for nominations is March 31. Following this, an advisory council will review the nominations and recommend candidates to the Lieutenant Governor for appointment to the Order of Ontario.

There's still time to express your opposition. Please sign the petition: <https://bit.ly/2YjFkrj>. OTF encourages all members of the education community to share their viewpoint on this nomination.