

# Ontario Election - Party Positions on Aviation Fuel Taxes

By Kevin Psutka, COPA president and CEO

In the May 29 edition of eFlight I highlighted our effort to seek party positions on the Liberal government's misguided decision, announced in the ill-fated budget, to increase the tax on aviation fuel and using it to finance non-aviation ventures <http://www.multibriefs.com/briefs/COPA/eFlighttaxes.pdf> .

We wanted to let our members know if the Liberals have reconsidered their position, in light of the letter sent to the Premier <http://www.copanational.org/files/Fuel%20Tax%20Letter.pdf> following the budget release and the subsequent call for an election, and if the two main contenders, the PCs and the NDP, have a position on this issue so that members can base their vote decision in part on how each party intends to treat our sector of aviation. Each of the party leaders was provided with a copy of our letter to the Premier.

As of June 3, the following information has been provided, either directly to COPA HQ or via members who contacted their local candidates:

## From the Liberal Party headquarters on May 26:

“On behalf of the Ontario Liberal Party, I would like to take this opportunity to confirm receipt of the letter submitted by your organization on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014. We are currently working on a response and will endeavour to provide your organization with a formal response in the coming days.”

## From the constituency office of the PC leader, Tim Hudak:

“Thank you for your email to Tim Hudak. Please be advised that you have contacted the constituency office, which is a non-partisan office. We are not permitted to respond to election or campaign enquiries. Please direct your enquiries to the appropriate campaign office for a response. If you are not aware of who your local candidates are, please contact Elections Ontario at 1-800-677-8683 for more information.

During the campaign period, Mr. Hudak is not able to review and respond to enquiries. Should he be successful in his re-election, he would be pleased to respond to your enquiry.”

## COPA's response:

“Nicole:

Thank you for your prompt response. Before I include it in my eFlight article to members to help them decide on which party to vote for in the election, I want to ensure I understand your advice.

I asked the leader of the party for his position on one of the budget items that the Premier put forward; the increase on tax for aviation fuel. I sent the question to the address that is provided for Mr. Hudak. While I understand that this is a busy time for him and I should not expect a direct response from him, the matter should be directed to someone who could respond on his behalf.

Your response said that the constituency office is non-partisan. The definition of non-partisan, according to Webster dictionary, is "not supporting one political party or group over another" so are you saying that Mr. Hudak's constituency office is not working in support of the Progressive Conservative party? That seems very strange indeed. I would have assumed that Mr. Hudak's constituency office would be in support of the party. If you are saying that the constituency office is not able to respond on issues because it is staffed by administrative personnel, that is understandable but the matter should then be forwarded to someone on Mr. Hudak's staff who can deal with the matter.

You advised me to seek an answer from local candidates. I am not an individual who is considering who to vote for. I am enquiring on behalf of thousands of voters to ask what the party will do if it comes to power.

I would like to emphasize that, like other PC platform issues, when an issue is brought before the leader there should be a response that can be used by all candidates going forward. The fuel tax issue is high profile in that it was emphasized in the budget. I believe that there should be a party position on this issue, not one for individual candidates because it is a general issue, not a local issue.

You also advised me that my question about his position on this issue will be answered if he is elected. You are essentially saying, vote for the PCs and find out what their position is on this issue after the election. That does not make sense.

I would appreciate a response on this matter before next Tuesday when I will be finalizing my article that will be reviewed by thousands of voters. I have copied COPA's Ontario Directors for their information so that they can advise members in their area of the PC position and your clarification of how election issues are handled.”

**From the campaign team for Lisa Thompson (PC candidate for Huron-Bruce):**

“The PC Party is committed to distributing gas tax revenue more fairly so that every community gets a share. Your idea is not specifically mentioned in the Million Jobs Plan, but it is something that COPA could pursue after the election.

The PC Party also feels that government should sell off its extra land and unused buildings and use the money we raise to solve urban and rural Ontario’s pressing transportation needs through an Ontario Transportation Trust. We will improve infrastructure without raising taxes, by making transit the top priority in the province’s existing annual \$12-billion capital budget.”

**From candidates in the Scarborough Centre riding (relayed by a COPA member):**

**Liberal** - If elected we would introduce the same budget.

**Conservative** - If elected we have no plans to introduce an increased tax on aviation fuel.

**NDP** - If elected we would review all taxes on fuels that benefit our transit and social programs.”

**The following conclusions can be drawn from this survey:**

The negative impact of taxation on aviation and the neglected airport infrastructure in Ontario are not priorities for any party. Furthermore:

1. The Liberals intend to reintroduce an increase in tax on aviation fuel to fund non-aviation projects.
2. The PCs want you to vote for them and then they will tell you what their position is on this issue.
3. The NDP want to direct all fuel taxes toward transit and social programs. There is no mention of aviation.

COPA will establish contacts with whoever wins the election to once again educate key political people, such as the Minister of Transportation, on the importance of improving our airport infrastructure. In the meantime during the closing days leading to the election, members are encouraged to engage their candidates, using points from COPA’s letter to the Premier, to get commitments that can be followed up after the election.