



Live-blogging the leaders debate

Ontario leaders Dalton McGuinty, John Tory and Howard Hampton [squared off Thursday night in a live 90-minute televised debate](#). Broken promises? Funding faith-based schools?

Full Comment gathered a [team of commentators](#) — Adam Giambrone, Guy Giorno, Akaash Maharaj and John Moore— to post their impressions of the debate as the evening progresses. Here is a transcript from the debate.

8:03 p.m. John Moore: McGuinty wins by not going to the mat. He looked a little like the school bullying victim a couple of times. Tory was too well prepared with scripted remarks meaning that there was none of the spontaneity voters might have come looking for. Excellent closing though. Hampton is passionate although sometimes unpolished but this province maintains a tin ear for NDP talking points.

8:01 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: McGuinty held his own against the concerted attacks of Tory and Hampton, and Tory never provided a concise, well-articulated defence of his policy on schools. Indeed, Tory seemed intent on fleeing from his own policy on provincial funding of religious schools. He is unlikely to inspire public confidence in a position if he himself appears to doubt it.

8:01 p.m. Guy Giorno: The winner? He who connected best with viewers at home. The voters will decide who that was.

7:58 p.m. Adam Giambrone: Closing statements were decently handled by all. One minute is not a lot of time to squeeze much in.

7:57 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: In retrospect, McGuinty's decision to open by confronting the issue of the tax rise was a good one. It allowed him to go on the offensive and to talk about other matters.

7:56 p.m. Guy Giorno: 20 days ago, I thought private health clinics would be Liberals' biggest attack on PCs. Now it's an afterthought, taking backseat to attack on inclusive school funding.

7:55 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: Tory says we need leadership at the Premiers' Council, but does not say towards what end. Leadership needs purpose.

7:54 p.m. Guy Giorno: Talking about MPPs' pay is not a winner, Dalton. 25% less than people that the public believes are also overpaid?

7:54 p.m. John Moore: Hey Tory: just because faith based education is your Achilles heel doesn't mean you can invoke Reagan's "There you go again" when someone raised it.

7:53 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: Both Tory and Hampton are making a mistake with the "sky is falling" approach. It makes McGuinty look like the sole champion for and of Ontario.

7:51 p.m. Adam Giambrone: Hampton was right to focus on the positive before going after the McGuinty record. First of all, Ontario is a great place to live and work, but just as importantly, people hate having their homes insulted. Tory didn't get that.

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7:49 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: Through his silence in the face of McGuinty's accusation, Tory appears to concede that his party is opposed to measuring the very wait times about which he is so exorcised. Ouch.

7:47 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: "Your slush fund." "The secret telephone number." Tory's use of these phrases seem cheap and canned, and rather diminish him.

7:46 p.m. Guy Giorno: Why is Dalton smirking when he talks about health care?

7:46 p.m. John Moore: Tory introduces the slush fund, McGuinty rebuff's him and Tory counters "let's not get away from the issue of health care." You started it John.

7:46 p.m. Guy Giorno: On the bright side, Liberals have held the line on Ontarians without family doctors.

7:44 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: An open question to McGuinty on health care; it is his turn to salivate. McGuinty's reply with hard numbers on his record is very effective: It answers the question, it contrasts with the harbingers of doom from the other two.

7:44 p.m. Guy Giorno: Health care was, until 20 days ago, the number one issue everyone talked about.

7:42 p.m. Adam Giambrone: Hampton's doing a great job of making the sheer size of the energy possibilities understandable. "Three Darlintons!" People will get that.

7:40 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: "The [coal fired power plant] you closed was opened by the Conservatives," said Tory to McGuinty. How is this a criticism?

7:39 p.m. Adam Giambrone: Howard is great on this issue. He's literally written the book on it. His reduction plan will sit well with environmental groups.

7:38 p.m. John Moore: My favorite case of wheel spinning poli-speak so far:

John Tory: "...just as importantly, well not as importantly but important at the same time..."

7:37 p.m. Guy Giorno: Nuclear. The new clean, green power.

7:37 p.m. Guy Giorno: For every dollar a family puts in, the public (which I guess is not made of families, Dalton) will put in four ...

7:35 p.m. Guy Giorno: Student grants. That's a real-person word. Does OSAP still offer what it calls "non repayable loans"?

7:33 p.m. Guy Giorno: Hey, Tory was in my riding!

7:31 p.m. Adam Giambrone: Hampton has almost thought to call McGuinty on his "more to be done" strategy, pointing out that he knows what needs to be done, but we've missed a few things.

7:30 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: McGuinty stating exactly what his government has done to make law enforcement tougher is a good contrast to Tory's bald assertion that he will be "tougher".

7:30 p.m. John Moore: 7:30 and some dim bulb at Global just knocked the debate off the air.

7:29 p.m. Guy Giorno: John is actually doing well on the crime issue. Howie too. This is a gut issue that Dalton cannot answer with figures.

7:27 p.m. Guy Giorno: Crime stats. Fact is, politicians can cite them all they want ... People know what's happening

7:27 p.m. John Moore: That's the problem with Tory tonite: whenever he's on a roll he sounds like he's playing a track from the CD compilation of his commercials.

7:26 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: Tory's phrase about going to funerals is hard-hitting, though recycled from his own commercials.

7:25 p.m. Guy Giorno: Guns and Gangs Strategy. Another buzzword. People have as much faith in strategies as they do in studies, task forces and committees.

7:23 p.m. Adam Giambrone: On the question of fairness in health care, McGuinty must have worried about whiplash from looking left and right, back and forth. Very much on the defensive.

7:22 Akaash Maharaj: Tory opening by complimenting McGuinty is a statesmanlike touch, but he tramples it with the hyperbole ("catastrophic") of the very next sentence.

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7:22 p.m. Guy Giorno: From \$3 billion from taxes we added another \$6 billion ... Uh, where did the \$6 billion come from if not taxpayers?

7:20 p.m. John Moore: 7:20 and Dalton invokes cancer, newborns and the elderly.

7:18 p.m. Adam Giambrone: Bombardier in Thunder Bay? Mr. McGuinty, how about supporting jobs in the North by requiring Ontario tax dollars to be invested there by buying Ontario-produced goods?

7:17 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: The questioner is from Northern Ontario, and wants to ask about the growing gap between rich and poor. wonder if Hampton is salivating yet.

7:16 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: Hampton keeps saying "not true" to McGuinty, even though McGuinty has not yet made a declaration of any kind.

7:15 p.m. Adam Giambrone: It is a little weird that McGuinty is going as far back as the last NDP government. That was over 12 years ago. Hardly a stinging argument talking about the current economy.

7:14 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: Tory has now uttered his second joke of the debate. He seems surprisingly at ease.

7:14 p.m. John Moore: Tory sounds like he's trying to insert lines into the debate for use later in commercials.

7:14 p.m. Guy Giorno: Talk about economy needs to be connected to people and their jobs and their families. Start macro, but bridge to micro, guys!

7:13 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: McGuinty citing current economic figures is a strong move. The province is in good shape, and it makes him look like the person offering hope rather than trading on misery.

7:09 p.m. John Moore: Finally...Tory wakes up and goes on the offensive. Very effective recitation of McGinty's flip flops and just the right amount of vaguely shrill indignation.

7:08 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: McGuinty using the word "liar" is a bit of a bold move: It dares Tory to take his argument to the logical conclusion, which he could not do.

7:08 p.m. Adam Giambrone: It was Guy's point, about McGuinty and Tory going after each other and letting Howard come up the middle as the reasonable one. It's a good point. It just happened again.

7:07 p.m. Adam Giambrone: I'd say the pressure seems to be getting a little under McGuinty's skin. Very much on the defensive.

7:07 p.m. Guy Giorno: He calls me a liar. No I didn't. Why would either one say that?

7:06 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: I am impressed that all three leaders were clear on their views on recall legislation.

7:06 p.m. Guy Giorno: I'll see your father and raise you my grandfather.

7:06 p.m. Guy Giorno: Howie is right on the tax hike: In 2003 Liberals said you cannot believe PC numbers then deliberately based their platform on PC numbers.

7:05 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: "I grew up in a family with ten kids." We have gone from one, to four, to ten children in the rhetorical bidding. I hope their wives can keep up.

7:05 p.m. Guy Giorno: I am waiting to see how 10 kids and Dalton Sr. relates to promises breaking ... Oh, that's how

7:05 p.m. John Moore: Battle of the humble beginnings. But John Tory's story about his grandfather works. Talking about handshakes meaning something is significant to those of us who are old school.

7:03 p.m. Adam Giambrone: Not a lot of surprises so far: broken promises, religious funding for schools, funding for cities.

7:04 p.m. Guy Giorno: Upload, upload, upload. My jargon meter just exploded.

7:03 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: "My record speaks for itself," from McGuinty, followed by a question on broken promises. Ouch.

7:03 p.m. Guy Giorno: Talk over each other and pave way for Howie to cut through the clutter as the reasonable one.

7:02 p.m. Adam Giambrone: Tory did well to turn the argument back on Dalton and say that he can't just keep blaming his predecessor.

7:02 p.m. Guy Giorno: Talk over each other and no one at home will hear you.

7:01 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: McGuinty's is remaining doggedly "on message". He is batting aside the questions put to him with surprising ease, but Tory is doing his bit to steer him back.

7:00 p.m. John Moore: "We'd love to do everything you want...and magically". I realize I am a grammatical pedant but that phrase makes me giggle.

6:59 p.m. Adam Giambrone: Good to hear that at least Tory would upload before the next municipal budget. McGuinty is following his theme that you just can't do everything.

6:59 p.m. Guy Giorno: Makes sense, given that one trails his party in popularity and the other leads it

6:58 Akaash Maharaj: Tory says "I will" whereas McGuinty says "we have" or "we will". I wonder if this reflects intentional strategies on either of their parts.

6:58 Guy Giorno: More jargon ... I'll bet anyone that 80% of viewers don't understand "uploading"

6:57 p.m. Guy Giorno: Uploading ... Can't one find a more layperson-friendly term? Don't use technical language to describe a virtue!

6:56 p.m. John Moore: Dalton is holding his own. He's under attack by two guys and while not exactly winning he isn't sweating.

6:56 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: Steve Paikin is unflappable.

6:56 p.m. Adam Giambrone: There has been good commitment to capital funding for transit funding. It's operating funding to RUN the system that we need firm commitments to.

6:56 p.m. Guy Giorno: numbers ... Millions and hundreds of millions ... All numbers seem big to ordinary people ... The specific figures get lost

6:55 p.m. Guy Giorno: "Upload" ... "large urban centres" (not cities) ... Operating vs. Capital ... Too much jargon from everyone.

6:54 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: Hampton is having the greatest success in putting his points forward without interruption from the other two.

6:53 p.m. John Moore: I'm good.

6:52 p.m. Adam Giambrone: Transit! I know something about this one.

50% ongoing operating funding really is crucial if we're going to continue to serve people with reliable transit.

6:49 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: McGuinty sees Hampton's one son, and raises him four children.

6:49 p.m. Guy Giorno: Hampton's question about the mother (what will you tell her?) is excellent.

6:49 p.m. John Moore: Tory channels Ignatieff "You didn't get it done". That kind of sloganeering works.

6:49 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: "You didn't keep your word": Tory took some time to utter the obvious phrase, but I expect we will hear it quite a bit.

6:49 p.m. Guy Giorno: \$500 million from public education is a non sequitur, but credit Dalton for bridging back to his message.

6:47 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: Hampton mentioning his own son is a good way to personalize the issue, and rise above McGuinty and Tory's duelling numbers.

6:47 p.m. Adam Giambrone: So far, McGuinty has a bit of a weird approach: creating his own self-criticism in order to refute it and "explain" why this or that couldn't be done.

6:47 p.m. John Moore: Tory lands a good one complaining about split grades. Dalton responds that the facts are available on the net. Tory responds with anecdotal information. Not very slick.

6:47 p.m. Guy Giorno: Wow. Same number of split grades as before. Great record, Dalton.

6:44 p.m. Adam Giambrone: Ooh! Steve stole Hampton's line about chocolate bars!

I agree with Akaash about the spiritedness. It's most important that the leaders speak to Ontarians, but it's just as important that the ideas be tested in a real debate. It helps to draw people in.

6:44 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: McGuinty has already raised the previous Conservative government record against Tory more frequently than Tory has raised McGuinty's own record against him.

6:44 p.m. Guy Giorno: Funding "formula." I always thought that was poor branding. Makes it sound mechanical, or technical. Not about kids.

6:44 p.m. John Moore: Except that Hampton speaks directly to the camera while McGinty and Tory seem to be yapping at each other.

6:44 p.m. Guy Giorno: Director seems to have used side camera each time Dalton was speaking direct to voters at home. Hmm ...

6:42 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: The format is much more spirited than usual. It makes for good television.

6:41 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: McGuinty is the first to quote actual statistics in support of a position. It lends credibility to his views, irrespective of the relevance of those numbers to his words.

6:41 p.m. John Moore: Interesting strategy for Hampton. He's making the religious debate seem like petty politics between Tory and McGinty while speaking to the larger problem of what doesn't work in the education.

6:40 p.m. Guy Giorno: Is somebody keeping count of Howard's "real issues"?

6:39 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: McGuinty's distinction between "traditional" and "new" faiths is surprising. Tory missed the chance to jump on him on this.

6:39 p.m. Guy Giorno: Fair enough, but I feel all three would benefit from this model: address your opponent then bridge and turn to the camera and speak to Ontarians.

6:39 p.m. Adam Giambrone: McGuinty is not wrong to speak directly to Tory on this, and attach it to him personally. It's been a big hit on Tory's credibility in the last while.

6:38 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: Howard Hampton begins with "I think the real issue is..." I suspect we will hear this a great deal, as he must try to shift the focus on to him and away from the two larger parties.

6:37 p.m. Guy Giorno: The 2 million children in publicly funded schools including hundreds of thousands in Catholic publicly-funded schools.

6:37 Guy Giorno: I would hope all the leaders are prepared for that issue!

6:36 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: Tory is obviously well prepared for questions on public funding of religious schools. I am surprised that he is not attempting to attack McGuinty for a double standard.

6:33 p.m. Adam Giambrone: The NDP video seems to play on the strength of the party as much as the leader. The Tories' opening seemed a bit too specific, could have benefitted from a more broad approach to the issues.

6:33 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: The change in format, beginning with pre-packaged commercials from each party instead of live spoken statements by each leader, is a little strange. The point of a debate is to hear directly from the leaders, not their advertising firms.

6:33 p.m. Guy Giorno: Gib from Brantford looked us in the eye.

6:32 p.m. Adam Giambrone: Dalton has started on the defensive. It's clear that he's prepared to face the barrage of attacks about not keeping his promises.

6:32 p.m. Guy Giorno: Dalton's mea culpa would be a lot better if he looked viewers in the eye and not off camera.

6:32 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: Dalton McGuinty begins by admitting that he broke a key promise in the last campaign. It is, to say the least, an unconventional approach!

6:31 p.m. Guy Giorno: Videos - perfect opportunity to speak into living rooms.

6:28 p.m. Akaash Maharaj: There is perhaps no better indicator of the importance of the debate than all three leaders' studied and constructed attempts to appear nonchalant on the eve of it.

5:58 p.m. Guy Giorno: Sure, it's fun to talk about knockout punches and sound bites and the media-crowned winner. But what's really important is the chance for each leader to speak, directly and without filter, to tens of thousands of voters (or more) watching at home. It will be tempting for the leaders to gesture, jab and hector one another in studio. But the real opportunity is to face the camera and speak into Ontario living rooms. So I won't be asking who "wins," so much as who "connects."

11:41 a.m. Akaash Maharaj: Guy's observation encapsulates what I suspect will be a key question of the debate: Will John Tory continue to try to play the role of the Liberal leader, or will he strike an unambiguously Conservative stance?

11:26 a.m. Guy Giorno: John Tory "played" the role of McGuinty during debate prep for Mike Harris in 1999. Now he debates him face-to-face. Should be an interesting evening!

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