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The missing PC platform

EDITORIAL

THE NATIONAL POST had an article more than a month ago predicting that Progressive Conservative Leader Doug Ford wouldn't repeat a mistake made by his predecessor last November.

Some readers may recall that last November the former PC leader, Patrick Brown, unveiled his 78-page 2018 Election Platform, dubbed The People's Guarantee, which included key guarantees such as specific cuts in some income tax rates for middle- and low-income Ontarians, a 12% cut in hydro bills, child care rebates, a $1.9-billion boost in spending on mental health care and a Trust, Integrity and Accountability Act.

But in February, following Mr. Brown's departure as leader, the three main candidates to succeed him gave only qualified support for the platform, Mr. Ford predicting that he would change about 10 per cent of it.

Critics within the party said at the time that the People's Guarantee contained a $4-billion spending hole, would continue the Wynne government's tradition of deficits, and prolong the electricity price crisis.

The National Post article, published April 3, quoted ?a senior Ford adviser? as advising that the Ford-led PCs had decided against ?unveiling a single, all-encompassing policy blueprint to replace the one put out by former leader Patrick Brown.?

Instead, the article said, ?the party will release individual planks throughout the campaign for the June 7 election, culminating with an overview announcement of its policies.?

That wasn't what Mr. Ford said at the start of the campaign, instead promising a ?solid platform that is fully costed.?

But thus far the Post article seems to be bang-on, and anyone checking the party website (www.ontariopc.ca) will see only a list of promises, most of which have a price tag but none of which outlines how the promises of big tax cuts and elimination of Mr. Brown's commitment to a carbon tax will be kept without ballooning the deficits or cutting services.

A week after the Post article was published, The Globe and Mail carried an opinion piece by Christine Van Geyn, Ontario director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. Although the article was headed ?Why Doug Ford should release a costed election platform,? in it the author explained why he likely won't.

?Costed platforms matter. And they matter because voters ought to know the price tag attached to the X they mark on their ballot,? she wrote. ?They deserve to know if their taxes will be going up or down, if the services they support will receive funding and if their grandchildren will be shouldering more debt. But sadly, for politicians, costed platforms have become an exercise in election gimmickry.?

She cited as an example Dalton McGuinty's Liberal platform in 2003. ?His platform was verified by a forensic accountant and two bank economists, unlike (he bragged) the platform of the then-governing PC Party. The Liberal platform costing included a $2.2-billion deficit, without any tax hikes. However, once Mr. McGuinty was elected, some of his first acts as premier were running a $5.6-billion deficit and raising taxes by implementing the Ontario Health Premium.?

The Ontario PCs are unlikely to make the same mistake, preferring the option of a landslide victory built on voters' desire for a change and hostility toward the Liberals' mistakes, the main ones being in the field of electricity ? a far-too-costly green energy program and the partial privatization of Hydro One.

In the circumstances, there's no need for the Liberals and New Democrats to be bickering over whether they should ever form a coalition government.

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Barring a major miscue by Ford, the NDP will likely win no more than 20 of the 124 seats and the Liberals barely enough to keep official party status.