

Jones had many concerns over Provincial budget

By Bill Rea

It shouldn't have come as much of a surprise, but Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones did not think much of the recent Provincial budget.

The budget was brought down late last month Finance Minister Charles Sousa, with the boast that it makes possible an unprecedented investment in infrastructure and acts on the government's commitment to finding innovative ways to grow the economy while maintaining the vital public services that families and communities rely on.

But it also came with a projected deficit of \$8.5 billion in 2015-16, with a promise of a balanced budget by 2017-18.

Jones was wondering how they're going to do that, especially with planned increases in spending.

"They don't communicate that in any transparent way," she said.

She was also concerned about the government's plans to sell off part of Hydro One, wondering how it was going to make up for the lost revenue. "You better use the asset sale to pay down the existing debt," she said.

Jones also pointed out there are few ways the government has of increasing revenues, and the most obvious one is raising taxes. As well, she pointed to the plan for a new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, which will require contributions from employers and workers of 1.9 per cent of salary.

"If you don't have a choice, then it's called a tax in my world," she commented.

Jones admitted there were few surprises for her in the budget, considering many of the items in it had already been leaked.

"It didn't make it any easier to listen to," she added.

Jones also observed that she and her Progressive Conservative colleagues had five items they had previously asked be included in the budget, and none of them were.

"The Progressive Conservative caucus was looking for commitments in five areas that we believe will make Ontario a better place to live and work," she observed. "Instead the government chose to ignore our calls for action to fix our province."

The items they were seeking included an announcement that the pension plan will not be pursued as it places an enormous burden on businesses and will kill jobs in the province; a commitment that a carbon tax not be adopted as it is a cost that Ontario residents and businesses cannot afford; a plan to fix homecare by streamlining the system to reduce the number of agencies patients must deal with and by tying Community Care Access Centre funding to outcomes and clearly defined results; a commitment to reduce energy prices; and a credible and detailed plan to balance the budget by 2017-2018.

"After spending on education and health care, paying interest on the debt is the third highest spending line in our province," she observed. "We needed to see a detailed plan in this budget to tackle this issue. Unfortunately we didn't."