

## Jones not planning to support budget

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By Bill Rea

Liberals are saying lots of positive things about the Provincial budget that was brought down last Thursday by Finance Minister Charles Sousa, but Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones isn't showing the same enthusiasm.

"I think it's terrible," she declared the following day.

The budget promotes a number of programs for young people, including a Youth Jobs Strategy of \$295 million over two years to create jobs and mentorship opportunities; creating jobs through investments in infrastructure for public transit, roads, bridges, hospitals and schools; reducing auto insurance rates by 15 per cent on average for nine million drivers; helping 46,000 more people receive home and community care quickly; providing tax relief to small businesses to create more jobs by increasing their Employer Health Tax exemption from \$400,000 to \$450,000 of payroll; and taking steps to transform social assistance.

"The new government is committed to helping all the people of Ontario and to eliminating the deficit by 2017-18," Sousa commented. "By beating our fiscal targets, we can continue to invest in the things that matter most to people every day. We are protecting health care and education. We are creating job opportunities for youth. Our balanced approach to strengthening the economy will help create jobs and build a prosperous and fair Ontario for all."

On the other hand, there are concerns over the size of the Provincial deficit, which is reportedly to grow to \$11.7 billion next year. The interest costs on the debt is slated to increase from \$10.4 billion this year to \$12.2 billion in 2015-16.

"I would say this meets the requests that the NDP put forward," Sousa was quoted as saying in Friday's Toronto Sun.

But Jones harkened to the Liberal government that she said wasted millions on things like eHealth and Ornge, not to mention \$865 million it has cost to cancel to gas plants to win an extra couple of seats in the last election, "and even that isn't a final figure," she declared.

She said eHealth and Ornge could be dismissed as cases of poor oversight, but the gas plant issue "is a whole different level."

"It's so frustrating," she added. "They have admitted, 'Yes, it was a political decision.'"

Despite that, Jones charged the budget includes nearly \$1 billion to answer NDP demands, and Ontarians can't afford that.

"It drives me crazy," she remarked.

Jones also said the Progressive Conservative Caucus at Queen's Park remains committed to not supporting the budget, charging the government "has utterly lost the moral authority to lead this province."

"It is clear that Premier (Kathleen) Wynne and her Liberal government are so desperate to hold on to power that they are willing to submit what is basically a budget dictated by the NDP," she added.

"The only thing that is Liberal about this budget is who delivered it," Jones observed. "It's got NDP written all over it. It's like they're ghost writers."

Jones also seemed mystified that the NDP could prop up the minority Liberal government, but she said she expects that is what will happen in light of the budget.

"I believe they will do what they did last budget," she remarked. "Basically sit on their hands."

"I was not elected to Queen's Park to sit on my hands," she added.

Local representatives from other parties were a little more positive in their responses.

"We're very happy that Kathleen Wynne seems to be working with the NDP and allow the NDP some influence over the budget," commented Karen Gventer, NDP candidate in Dufferin-Caledon in the 2011 election.

She added she was a little concerned that the budget didn't contain cost-saving measures the party had proposed, such as caps for the salaries of hospital CEOs.

"It means the budget really isn't as balanced as it could be, and as balanced as the NDP would like," she said.

"I appreciate that the Liberals are attempting to cooperate with the NDP to avoid an election less than two years after then last provincial election," commented Paula Conning, who is slated to carry the Green Party colours in the next election in this riding.

"However, with the Conservatives refusing to participate, the taxpayers of Ontario are burdened with yet another overspending plan that neglects the major restructuring that is required to maintain strong and effective front line services while reducing waste."

Conning cited the example that Wynne commented as far back as 2007 that it's unfair and fiscally wasteful to have parallel Catholic and public school systems. "Yet now that she is in a leadership position, she isn't making the changes she knows are necessary," Conning observed.

Lori Holloway, who was the Liberal candidate in Dufferin-Caledon in 2011, was unavailable for comment.