

Local Green candidate Laura Campbell shares firsthand why small business needs more COVID-19 support

By Rob Paul

On Monday, Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner and Dufferin-Caledon candidate Laura Campbell, who is also a small business owner in the area, spoke out about the need for more support in the way of grants from the provincial government for small businesses impacted by the pandemic.

"Small businesses in Ontario are struggling," said Schreiner. "Today is the first step of reopening and while it's going to be welcome news for many small businesses, the reality is that many are still struggling, and many will be operating at 50 per cent capacity. Which means they will still, in many cases, be operating at a loss."

According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB), only 28 per cent of Ontario small businesses are operating at normal revenues and 19 per cent are actively considering bankruptcy. The average COVID-19 debt for small businesses across the province is over \$190,000.

"When Premier Ford announced the most recent round of health measures on January 3, I called for immediate support to help small businesses that would be required to close their doors in the name of public health and safety, which most small business owners I've spoken to support," said Schreiner. "The bottom line is small businesses shouldn't be penalized for doing the right thing. All the Premier offered was empty platitudes and a little bit of support that might be delivered a month later. I can tell you as a long-time small business owner that cashflow is critical to being able to pay bills and being able to maintain staying open. Doug Ford continues to delay and be dollars short in delivering the support that small businesses need."

"That's why the Ontario Greens are calling on the government to immediately expand eligibility for the new Ontario COVID-19 Small Business Relief Grant to all impacted businesses, even if they're not fully closed, and to add another round of funding for February given that many sectors will still be operating at below 100 per cent capacity. Increasing the amount of available funds and expanding the Staycation Tax Credit to include indoor dining at restaurants and adding additional sector specific support for businesses that have been hardest hit, such as gyms and restaurants, which have been closed for over 400 days. There will not be an economic recovery without small businesses and Premier has left many small businesses out to dry throughout the pandemic. That's why the Ontario Greens will continue to fight for supports for small businesses, which provide the vibrancy in our downtowns and main streets across the province. We need to ensure that small businesses can survive so our communities can thrive."

Campbell is the co-owner of Pia's on Broadway in Orangeville and has dealt firsthand with the impacts of the pandemic on small business owners and she doesn't think there's a plausible way for businesses to continue on without more support.

"I've been in business here since 2009, so we're very well established here in the community and our community has supported us so much while we've been takeout only for a long time," said Campbell. "We fully acknowledge that we had to close our dining room as Omicron raged through our neighbourhood as much as across the province. The issue really is the support that Doug Ford has announced is almost too little, too late. So many businesses are already so behind, and they really needed the holiday period, including into early January, to make up the losses that they've experienced throughout the pandemic. It really did start to feel like things were starting to go back to normal."

"There was a small catchup period, but that was quickly snuffed out. As the cost of goods that we're purchasing to run restaurant in particular go up and up, the impact of the small business support grant that is coming is going to be much less. This includes the fact that a lot of small businesses have almost familiar relationships with their staff and layoffs are almost impossible. It makes it really difficult to adjust because small businesses want to keep folks on payroll. There's a lot of challenges and there's been difficulties pivoting. It's been incredibly challenging across the hard-hit sectors and that's what I've been hearing from my community. You see the community support and the rallying happening, but the Ford Government needs to acknowledge the support coming isn't going

to be enough for many businesses.?

When asked about businesses bouncing back when the pandemic does slow down, Campbell explained that small businesses are already so far behind, and COVID-19 is so unpredictable that the only hope for a bounce back is more help from the government.

?No, I don't think so,? she said. ?In particular because amongst the public there are a lot of folks who are very much recognizing that the virus is airborne and the risk is still there and that regardless of their vaccination status, because of the way in which our healthcare system is so burdened right now, if we have another wave it could impact all kinds of people?vulnerable folks who have medical conditions could be at a real risk. The last time we reopened our dining room, we didn't see people rushing back, so a lot of businesses are still having to really get creative in how they're paying their bills and how they're making ends meet.

?The other part of that too is now we're living through the economic consequences of the last two years, whether it's inflation or low consumer confidence because perhaps there will be another variant or another wave. People are in debt and so it's unsure whether or not this bounce back will be the answer because across the province our citizens have very different conceptions of personal safety and whether or not they can afford to go on living life the way they did before the pandemic began. This is why Ontario brains continue to call for other income supplements and supports, so that people can continue living life in a way where they can make ends meet.?