

Minimum wage will be tied to cost of living

By Bill Rea

Ontario's minimum wage will be tied to the rate of inflation from now on, and Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones is in support of the move.

The Stronger Workplaces for a Stronger Economy Act, 2014, passed third reading with all party support in the Ontario legislature last month. It supports Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, and is designed to further increase protections for vulnerable workers. The act will tie future minimum wage increases to the Consumer Price Index for Ontario, which will be announced by April of each year, and come into effect Oct. 1. As well, the act is aimed at ensuring Occupational Health and Safety Act coverage for unpaid co-op students and other unpaid learners will have protection, such as the right to know about workplace hazards and the right to refuse unsafe work. It will also eliminate the \$10,000 cap on the recovery of unpaid wages through Ministry of Labour orders to pay and increase the period of recovery to two years.

Protecting vulnerable workers and making the minimum wage fair is part of the government's economic plan for Ontario. The act builds on the 2014 increase to minimum wage from \$10.25 to \$11 per hour. This new legislation acts on the recommendations of Ontario's Minimum Wage Advisory Panel, which included business, labour, youth and anti-poverty representatives.

"Taking the politics out of setting the minimum wage provides fairness for workers and predictability for businesses," observed Labour Minister Kevin Flynn. "This legislation will also protect the most vulnerable workers and level the playing field for employers who play by the rules. These are the right steps to take; they will make Ontario a better place to work and run a business." Jones went along with the minister on that, agreeing with the benefits of tying the wage to the Consumer Price Index.

"It takes the politics out of it," she observed, adding the six months between the announcement of the new wage and its implementation will give employers the chance to prepare.

Jones commented that statistics indicate minimum wage is paid mainly to new people in the workforce, adding the reality is most people paid at that level are not trying to raise a family.

"The reality is you shouldn't be in the job year upon year and still be on minimum wage," she said, "and good employers understand that."