

Government to perhaps address concerns over minimum wage: MPP

By Brock Weir

Challenges being faced by local businesses big and small following the Ontario Government's raising of the minimum wage are understood by the Province but Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard is mum on any measures that might be taken to help blunt its impact.

Speaking to The Auroran in a wide-ranging, two-part start-of-the-year interview ahead of this spring's Provincial election, Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard, who also serves as Ontario's Minister of the Environment and Climate Change says concerns have been heard.

What I have said to companies who have been in to talk to me is I continue to take their issues, their concerns forward to my Cabinet colleagues, to the Premier, so that the issues we face, especially [the issues] small businesses face here in Newmarket-Aurora are understood by governments and, as they move ahead, they make decisions [and] that we can perhaps address some of them, says Mr. Ballard.

Mr. Ballard, a first term MPP who was elected to his position while still serving as a member of Aurora Council, says during his time at the municipal level of government he heard residents speaking of the need for a fair wage, a living wage and the status quo wasn't meeting the cut, with some Aurorans working two to three jobs at a time just to get by.

It just wasn't enough for them to make ends meet and many of them are single parents, many of them single mums looking after kids and really, really struggling to get by, says Mr. Ballard. I recall about three years ago, I had the Fair Wage organization come to me [and] they were telling me the living wage in York Region and there have been significant increases in rental costs was something like \$17.45 an hour.

I know for a number of small businesses, and I have talked to a number of small businesses, from large businesses in my riding, and I understand while it presents some real, real challenges for them, I think it is very important that we try to help those folks who are struggling to get by in our community with some help to make ends meet.

In the end, Mr. Ballard days it is very important in our society to have a society that is, in itself, very fair. Recent changes to rules governing Ontario businesses are, he says, a step in the right direction.

The Province's economy is booming, he contends, with very low unemployment, and a business climate which has fostered the creation of over 800,000 jobs since 2009.

While he says Statistics Canada has the numbers to back up the argument of increased prosperity here in Ontario, not everyone has seen the benefits in their day-to-day lives.

I have met people who are doing really well and they are really excited about [about the economy], but I have also talked to people who aren't doing well and they wonder about their future, they wonder about the future of their children, says Mr. Ballard.

Changes we brought with the bill are a very strong step in the right direction helping these families, but I understand for some small businesses, especially the ones run by a mum and dad, can be struggling. Taking their issues forward, talking about those at Queen's Park, representing them, we need to build a fair and prosperous Ontario, an Ontario that everyone shares in and that is what we need to do in our riding.

Although Mr. Ballard says he can't talk about some of the measures the Government might be considering to mitigate some of the challenges being experienced by business, he says Steven Del Duca, the Minister of Economic Development is working with the Premier and other ministries, including finance, to do just that.

When you look at the United States, for example, going right back to the introduction of minimum wage, their own Department of Labor has determined minimum wage increases benefit all local businesses, he says. They increase the buying power of those folks who are benefits of the increase and I think when the dust settles we will be further ahead in our riding.