

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Ontario's economic strength

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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Recent reports highlight Ontario's economic growth is strong and sustained and we have led the G7 in growth for the last three years. Since this time last year, Ontario has created 75,100 new jobs. Since June 2016, we've seen a rise in employment in manufacturing of 27,700 jobs. Once again, Ontario is below the national average for unemployment, as we have been for the last 27 months. Since the worst of the recession in 2008 (the Great Recession!), Ontario has added over 700,000 net new jobs, most of which are full-time, private sector jobs that pay an above-average wage.

Ontario's economy continues to grow because of our competitive business environment, our highly skilled workforce, our low corporate tax rate, and significant investments in infrastructure ? it's not just government saying this, economists are as well. These numbers are good news for residents in Newmarket-Aurora. And while we need to ensure everyone in this riding, and across Ontario, benefit equally from a strengthening economy, it is good news that our continued growth in the province continues to attract new investments in the region.

Blitzing the Moraine

Last week I was happy to be standing on the Oak Ridges Moraine in beautiful weather, surrounded by supporters of this critical, geographic feature to announce funding through the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The Trillium Foundation is an arms-length organization funded by the government of Ontario to help not-for-profit and charity groups develop as organizations and develop and expand important programs and services.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust received a \$207,600 grant over 35 months to deliver and expand on its Citizen Science Bioblitz project. This project encourages people to support a healthy and sustainable environment and is helping people connect with the environment and understand their impact on it.

The Oak Ridges Moraine's most important function is sustaining the health of the many watersheds and the diversity of species that live within them.

Sixty per cent of the Moraine is in the Greater Toronto Area, (Peel, York and Durham Regions). To date, the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust protects 47 properties totalling over 3,700 acres ensuring that these lands continue to contribute to the ecological integrity of the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine.

The moraine programs are designed to improve the ecological integrity of lands that are owned by the Oak Ridges Moraine by tree planting, riparian area restoration, meadow maintenance, and specific projects to improve habitat for species at risk in Ontario.

Protection is less expensive than restoration.

As a life-long resident of York Region, I was taught the importance of the Oak Ridges Moraine in high school geography classes, and learned first-hand growing up on the moraine. I hear time and again that preserving the Oak Ridges Moraine is high on the priority list for those living in Newmarket-Aurora, and it is high on my list as your Member of Provincial Parliament.

Supporting the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust is one important way we all can preserve this important natural feature of our community.

Youth Entrepreneurship Day

Ontario is continuing to provide young entrepreneurs across the province with the opportunity to start a business and gain valuable career skills and support with the fourth annual Summer Company-Staples Youth Entrepreneurship Day.

This event gives students the opportunity to introduce their summer businesses at different Staples locations across the province, including here in Newmarket-Aurora. This program helps young entrepreneurs gain valuable business experience, receive real-time feedback and allows them to promote their products and services to customers.

This program is Ontario's flagship entrepreneurial program for students ages 15-29. It gives students grants of up to \$3,000 to help turn their ideas into a business. The province believes in supporting the next generation of job creators, it is part of our plan to create jobs, grow our economy and help people in their everyday lives.

Fair Workplaces and Better Jobs Public Consultations

There is still time to have your voice heard on the Fair Workplaces and Better Jobs plan.

The province is creating more opportunity and security for workers through its plan for Fair Workplaces and Better Jobs. The plan includes hiking the minimum wage, ensuring part-time workers are paid the same hourly wage as full-time workers doing the same job, introducing paid sick days for every worker, enabling at least three weeks' vacation after five years with the same employer and stepping up enforcement of employment laws.

The province is wrapping up a two-week consultation on the province's proposed Bill 148, also known as the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017. Protecting workers and supporting business is part of our plan to create jobs, grow our economy and build Ontario up.

Those wishing to submit their recommendations can submit them to: The Clerk of the Committee at Room 1405, Whitney Block, Queen's Park, Toronto, ON M7A 1A2 by July 21, 2017.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.