

Jobs act passes

By Sarah Sobanski

Minimum wage will increase to \$14 Jan. 1.

The province's Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017, received Royal Assent Nov. 27. According to the announcement the act will also see minimum wage hit \$15 an hour Jan. 1, 2019, to "ensure more fairness for part-time and contract workers, and expand personal emergency leave."

Prince Edward-Hastings MPP Todd Smith said he's concerned for government agencies that will need more funding to support the wage increases, or cut services.

"Services will be cut as a result of this. Once the shoe drops, and Jan. 1st happens, and the minimum wage is implemented, we're going to start to hear from these government agencies saying, 'Well we're not able to provide that program any longer, or we're not able to provide this service any longer because we've had to adjust our salaries for the minimum wage increase' or else they're going to have to cut staff," said Smith, noting he's heard from Hastings County agencies such as food banks who are going to "feel the pinch" of the increases.

The announcement said immediate actions of the bill include protection against employee misclassification and changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act which "prevents employers from requiring a worker to wear footwear with an elevated heel, for example, high heels, at work, unless such footwear is required for the workers safety."

In an earlier announcement on the bill's passing, the Liberal Caucus quoted Hastings and Prince Edward Poverty Roundtable executive director Christine Durant who said she thought other parts of the act would also improve work environments for Ontarians.

"I think it's going to have a significant impact because short-term illnesses lead to job termination which weigh into poverty. Going to doctor's offices, having to pay that money, having to take the time off when you're sick. Bill [148] will substantially be a preventative measure to poverty," she said.

Smith suggested the minimum wage increase would have largest negative impact in the act because it was too fast. He noted small businesses would also struggle.

"We were always in favour of seeing a minimum wage increase however, we're concerned about how quick this increase is being implemented," said Smith. "This is an almost 40 per cent increase in less than 13 months when you factor in the \$15 increase for Jan. 1 of 2019."

He added, "Quite honestly, it's intended to help people but in many cases it's going to hurt the people that it's intended to help."