



August 2017

We are well into summer and unfortunately the weather has not gotten a whole lot better. Still way too much rain for the land to bear—and even too much for the lakes and rivers. It has certainly been a tough season for everyone, and visibly so for the farmers who have been trying valiantly to find enough good days to get the haying done.

I've spent much of July travelling on a legislative committee holding public hearings on Bill 148 which proposes changes to the Employment Standards Act and the Labour Relations Act. The most contentious part of this bill is clearly the rapid change proposed to the minimum wage in Ontario. If passed, it would increase by over 20 percent on January 1st, 2018 and by 31 percent as of January 1st, 2019. As would be expected, advocates for an increased minimum wage made their views known in committee. In fact, many felt that the change should come even sooner. They certainly believe that these changes will benefit those they advocate for. Deputations from small businesses across Ontario, and those organizations representing small business, had a much different view. They expressed serious concerns regarding the proposed changes. They used the word "fear" and believe these changes could lead to hurting the most vulnerable instead of helping them. They indicated that the changes would force them to decrease the number of employees, reduce the hours of work, and require them to raise prices significantly.

We in the PC Party have said right from the moment the Bill was introduced, that before changes of such magnitude are made, a comprehensive economic impact study should be completed. This would provide the opportunity to properly analyze how this would affect not only those individuals which the changes are supposed to help, but also the small businesses that would be primarily footing the bill. We heard from businesses all across Ontario—businesses like Calabogie Peaks—who explained that their business competes with ski hills mostly on the Quebec-side of the border. Owner Paul Murphy stated that the legislation would have a dramatic effect on their ability to compete. Additionally, Galen Weston, CEO of food giant Loblaw's, said this would be a \$190 million hit to his company. Can you hear the sound of grocery prices rising?

Under increasing pressure from business analysts, Premier Wynne has said that she will help businesses through the transition, but gave no details of what that help may be. If she had done what she needed to do in the first place and conducted an economic impact study, we would have had a much better idea of what that impact will be. We will have to wait until September to find out what changes the Liberals may bring forward.

It has happened again: the anti-logging alarmists are rearing their ugly heads, calling for an end to logging in Algonquin Park. The British Columbia-based Wilderness Committee recently started petitioning the Province. This battle has been going on for decades. And everyone knows that the forest-management plan in Algonquin Park is world class in nature. My Father fought the anti-logging lobby some 40 years ago and I can assure you that I will do the same. Logging in Algonquin Park is not only done to the highest standards, but it is also done in a way that is least disruptive to other activities in the park. It is a major economic driver in our region. We will not allow the claims of some groups in British Columbia to go unchallenged. I commend the County of Renfrew for once again standing up, as they always have, to defend the practice of harvesting timber from Algonquin Park. The well-managed harvesting of timber makes Algonquin a better park, provides jobs for our men and women, and adds millions of dollars to the local economy. It is vital, sustainable and worth fighting for.