

OPINION



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Minimum wage hike 1 step in poverty fight

ISSUE

1 in 10 Ontarians lives on annual \$20,500 full-time pre-tax salary.

Hard-working Ontarians have a right to make a decent wage. Unfortunately, at the current minimum wage rate of \$10.25 an hour, that's not always the case.

If you're a student living at home and with no major expenses, \$10.25 is more than sufficient. The situation has been escalating for some time. People who were once making \$20 or \$30 an hour have been forced to take far less as a result of major cuts in the manufacturing sector.

A single person living on his own in York Region would have a difficult time surviving on what amounts to little more than pre-tax income of \$20,000 a year.

Raising a family on two minimum-wage jobs can be done, but only with sacrifices. The sad part is this is a scenario playing out in communities across the province.

So, a hike to the minimum wage is in order. The campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage seeks a hike to \$14 an hour this year and held a day of action yesterday to get the message out.

After a three-year freeze at \$10.25 an hour, it's time to put more money into the pockets of the working class.

But expect repercussions. There are those people who will tell you a minimum wage hike will force companies to lay off staff rather than pay more.

Others will argue businesses will simply raise prices to offset the increase in wages, which will, in turn, hike the inflation rate and actually negate any kind of raise.

Many warn a slow economy is the worst time to make such a move because of the pressures already faced by businesses. In other words, wait for an economic upswing.

But maybe that extra pay can help turn around the economy.

Besides, in the business world, there is no good time to add costs. There are no easy answers.

But we can't have more than 530,000 Ontario workers toiling away at jobs that don't pay enough to get them above the poverty line, even if they manage to get full-time hours.

Consistent minimum wage hikes are part of the solution. Before the most recent round of hikes that got the rate to \$10.25, it was locked at \$6.85 for a shocking nine years.

It's good the rate has risen, but businesses would be better able to adjust to annual, pre-determined cost-of-living hikes rather than major increases that seem to come out of the blue.

That system would also be better for minimum wage earners, too, as they would know they're not falling further behind year after year.

But you still can't support a family properly on even \$14 an hour — it's still only \$28,000 a year, before taxes, based on 40 hours a week for 50 weeks.

So, even an annual wage increase on its own isn't enough.

More access to job training and income supplements would also help, but the answer can't lie just with the workers. More must be done by the province to encourage employers to offer better wages and, just as importantly, sufficient hours of work.

And there's a definite need for more affordable housing options.

As described in our On the Home Front series, the waiting list for rent-geared-to-income units in the region is about 9,500 families long, which translates into about 10 years.

Everyone deserves the opportunity to make a comfortable living, which doesn't include having to make choices such as paying for food or rent.

A hike in the minimum wage is a step in making that a reality.

BOTTOM LINE: Hard-working Ontarians should be able to expect to earn suitable wages.

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Ribfest welcome back

I wanted to express my thanks to whoever brought the ribfest to Stouffville last weekend for the first time.

What a wonderful event.

The food was outstanding, the entertainment great and the weather stayed warm during all three days.

It was fun to see the kids having a great time and, by the size of the turnout on Saturday in Memorial Park, the adults had fun, as well.

I hope we see this event back next year. Thank you.

DOROTHY MOORE
STOUFFVILLE

Small-town spirit alive in Stouffville

Only in Stouffville and other small town communities like ours would something like this happen.

Stouffville's Care and Share Thrift Shop, which, if you're not aware, sells used items that are donated.

On Friday, my wife and I arrived at the store at about 5:05 p.m. to find volunteer staffers Bob and Nancy locking the door.

They saw us and we were told they close at 5 p.m. I spoke up and said we were looking for an umbrella stroller.

At this point, we were invited in and told one had just arrived yesterday.

After the purchase was completed happily, we all got into conversation about who we knew in town and to whom we were related.

I just found it so pleasing that people could be friendly and helpful in this busy and troubled times we live in.

S. HENDERSON
STOUFFVILLE

Cyber safety series embraced in town

As many readers know,

the KnowledgeFlow Cyber-safety seminar series took place at the Whitchurch Stouffville Public Library between January and July of this year.

That's six months of game-changing education offered for free to the community.

In this span of time, we shared valuable knowledge about online safety for parents, anti-bullying tips for kids, cyberfraud information for seniors and important information for teachers.

Through this series we had tremendous community support and exposure through a variety of media outlets, including The Sun-Tribune.

Multiple audiences enjoyed an exclusive musical event, Stouffville's first CyberSafety Day on March 14, an award ceremony to recognize Mayor Wayne Emmerson's contribution, as well as numerous giveaways and opportunities for learning.

We wrapped up the series by recognizing Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner, Dr. Ann Cavoukian, as a Cyber-safety Champion for her STOP Bullying ...by design initiative and relentless

support of KnowledgeFlow's educational activities.

As a result of the commissioner's support, KnowledgeFlow.ca will share rich video and blog content for the next few months, to benefit Stouffville families and kids.

I want to give a big shout-out to the library for hosting and promoting these events every month.

I also want to want to acknowledge our exceptional sponsors in the community, the Whitchurch-Stouffville Chamber of Commerce, KidsCash.ca, Stouffville Hyundai and YorkWorks Employment Services for their tremendous support.

I started KnowledgeFlow.ca as a non-profit initiative with a strong community focus and have been humbled by the support I received from everyone.

The activities will continue and I hope these public learning opportunities have made a bit of a difference for your readers.

Thanks for letting me say thanks.

CLAUDIU POPA
FOUNDER
KNOWLEDGEFLOW.CA
STOUFFVILLE

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