

## **Local businesses sweet on buck-an-hour minimum wage rollback**

'How bad is it? The impact has been huge' - Carlo Spadafora on Bill 148, Ontario's minimum wage law

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Carlo Spadafora is acting president of Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce. David Helwig/SooToday

Last week's cancellation of a planned \$1 increase to Ontario's minimum hourly wage is scoring big on the local business clap-o-meter.

Carlo Spadafora, acting president of the Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce, says the rollback announcement by Doug Ford Conservatives is being warmly applauded here, where he says the Liberal labour reforms in Bill 148 have been hitting businesses hard.

"Are all things bad about Bill 148?" Spadafora asked SooToday. "No. There's a lot of aspects of Bill 148 that were good aspects that continue to stay in place."

But the local Chamber is welcoming last week's Conservative announcement of a new *Making Ontario Open for Business Act*, repealing many of Bill 148's more onerous changes, including the controversial \$1 minimum wage hike planned for January 1.

At this point, the Chamber's evidence of deleterious effects of Bill 148 in the Sault is about as scientific as the studio-audience applause meters used on 1950s television game shows.

Spadadora acknowledges there's been no formal polling of local businesses.

But he says phone calls to the Sault Chamber offices and feedback obtained at networking events like last week's Take 5 at Low and Slow Smoked Fusion BBQ show the Liberal reforms are having an adverse effect here.

"Bill 148 was too much, too fast," the Chamber announced in a news release. "In consultation, our members have made clear the compounding effects of Bill 148, including the need to decrease product offerings and increase the price of products being sold, hire fewer employees, reduce services and hours of operation, cut back on employee benefits, increase their reliance on automation, and halt capital investment – all in an effort to stay afloat. This is not good for economic growth or for the workers Bill 148 was purported to aid."

"From the implementation of Bill 148, we became aware of the unintended consequences of this legislation and the impact on both employers and employees," Spadafora said.

"How bad is it?" Spadafora asks. "The impact has been huge for the business community, and unfortunately that has a trickle-down effect to the general population."

"I think the biggest issue for the business community is the process by which Bill 148 came into force."

"One of the reasons why Bill 148 has had such a negative impact was its hasty and unresponsive implementation," said the Chamber release. "This sweeping legislation was introduced less than 10 days after the release of the *Changing Workplaces Review*, a two-year study of provincial labour and employment standards legislation. Despite the considerable scale of this study, the government did not take the necessary time to consider its findings, test its recommendations, or conduct in-depth stakeholder consultations on its results before proceeding with legislation. Nor, was an economic impact analysis conducted and released by the province before the bill became law. In many cases, the government went beyond the recommendations of the *Changing Workplaces Review*, introducing amendments such as the most dramatic increase to the minimum wage we have seen anywhere in North America."

Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce is also welcoming Ford Nation's proposed dissolution of the Ontario College of Trades and changes to the journeyman-to-apprentice ratio.

"Since its inception in 2009, the Ontario College of Trades has faced criticism from industry, with concerns about fees, the compulsory membership structure, and the college's regulatory functions negatively impacting small- and medium-sized enterprises," the Chamber release said.

Other responses to last week's rollback of Bill 148 provisions:

*From the outset, we have been clear that our position was never to oppose a minimum wage increase – everyone deserves a decent wage. Our primary concern with Bill 148 was always the cumulative impact of its provisions, and the extraordinary pace at which they were implemented. It is encouraging to see a government that has understood and acted upon the major pain-points of our industry; namely, in the areas of full-time/part-time work, public holiday pay, scheduling and leaves. - Retail Council of Canada*

*Recent studies show that, since Bill 148 was enacted, Ontario manufacturers have experienced the highest unit labour cost of any province in Canada and is amongst the highest across North America; a seven percent increase in the rate of employee absenteeism causing increased lost production and a decline in output and profits; and decreased in labour flexibility manufacturers need to remain competitive within globally integrated supply chains. - Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters*

***The new Making Ontario Open for Business Act will remove the unnecessary and unfair regulations imposed by Bill 148, allowing construction employers to be more efficient and flexible. Ultimately, this will help the Ontario economy and encourage investment in our province. - Residential Construction Council of Ontario***

*On behalf of Ontario's 24 colleges, the College Employer Council welcomes the announcement by the government of Ontario that it will substantially repeal Bill 148.... If approved, these measures will give colleges more flexibility to manage the escalating cost pressures the sector continues to face.... A March 2018 report by PwC had estimated that Bill 148 would have cost Ontario colleges over \$300 million in 2024-25. - College Employer Council*

*ACSESS supports the Ford government's decision to repeal Bill 148, the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017, almost in its entirety. ACSESS is pleased to see this government taking a responsible approach in reforming the rushed Bill 148. - Association of Canadian Search, Employment & Staffing Services (ACSESS)*

*Doug Ford is taking his reign of error to brutal new lows as he attacks every worker in Ontario. No successful business person would ever argue the fact that workers themselves are the bedrock of any successful business or enterprise. To this government, workers are now nothing more than 'red tape' and a 'regulatory burden.' If this province is prospering, it's despite the best efforts of Doug Ford to drive it into the ground. Everything he touches turns to disaster. Look at his failed and farcical buck-a-beer and his bungling of the cannabis file. Ontario is open for business all right, just ask organized crime. - Smokey Thomas, president, Ontario Public Service Employees Union*

*If [Sault MPP] Ross Romano supports eliminating our right to 10 personal emergency leave days, we will not give him a single day off from our pressure. I encourage all supporters of workers' rights to email, call, and protest for our rights as working class citizens until we get the answers we deserve. - Holding Ross Romano Accountable Facebook page, created over the weekend*