

Low wage earners praise minimum wage hike while businesses express concern

'More money in pockets of low-income earners is a good thing. It's good for business'

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Lower wage earners in Windsor are excited by the minimum wage boost announced by Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, but some Windsor businesses are concerned what it might do to their bottom line.

"We have (more than) 300 man hours here a week and just to incorporate these new raises we'd have to increase our profits by \$50,000 just to cover these wages," said Bradley March of Schwabs and Primo's in Windsor. "Where do you go from there? It's on the consumer again. You have to raise everything across the board just to pay for these wages."

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March agreed it was high time the government updated legislation governing workers, but expressed concern a higher minimum wage could have an impact during lean economic times.

"It's big," he said. "It's going to be hard to overcome, especially at slow times."

Wynne announced the plan Tuesday morning to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by Jan. 1, 2019. It is currently \$11.40. The increase would be phased in over 18 months, rising to \$14 an hour on Jan. 1, 2018, and then to \$15 the following January.

Current wages just not enough

Jessica St. Denis is a single mother making \$12.75 an hour as a maid at the Cadillac Inn.

"It's just enough but not quite enough to do the extras," she said.

Wynne's proposed hike would make a marked and immediate difference to her family.

"That just puts extra shoes on my kid's feet," she laughed. "I've got three of them and it's pretty crazy with them and the expenses at school."

Her co-worker Shawna Metivier agreed a few extra dollars would go a long way.

"The cost of living is definitely expensive, especially when you have kids," she said.

Matt Marchand, the president and CEO of the Windsor and Essex Chamber of Commerce, agreed that a higher minimum wage is needed to curb poverty in the area. He said the chamber has been a supporter of a living wage campaign to boost wages.

"Not every chamber member can do it, but we've encouraged those that can do it to certainly participate," he said.

Simon Black, a professor of labour studies at Brock University, said a minimum wage hike will be a boon for business because low income earners have little discretionary income and will spend any increase.

"This is a real victory," he said. "More money in the pockets of low-income earners is a good thing. It's good for business."

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