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Jones wants Wynne government to end college strike

By Mike Pickford

As the Ontario college faculty strike stretches on into a fourth week, Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones has called on the Liberal government to do more to get post-secondary educators back to work.

Since more than 12,000 college professors, instructors, counsellors and librarians went on strike on Oct. 15, approximately half a million full-time and part-time students from 24 colleges across Ontario have been left in limbo, wondering when they will be able to resume their college career.

Of those, roughly 800 students have been affected in Orangeville with educators from both Humber and Georgian colleges participating in the strike. Speaking at Queen's Park last week, Ms. Jones noted the strike was having a significant impact on students in her riding.

?It's been (four) weeks now where students have been out of the classroom and away from their teachers and peers. I've received many calls and emails from students and parents in Dufferin-Caledon who are concerned about the impact it's having on their education,? Ms. Jones said. ?A long strike will leave our students behind.?

Talks between the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPS UE), which represents the striking workers, and the College Employer Council (CEC), which represents the Ontario colleges, broke down on Monday after the CEC called on the Ontario Labour Relations Board to schedule a vote on a previously submitted offer. OPSUE recommended that its members reject that latest contract offer on Tuesday.

According to the union, the issue does not centre around money. Instead, their main point of contention lies with the level of input college professors currently have into the way courses are taught and evaluated. Instructors are also upset that their curriculums, mostly developed by themselves, are considered property of the institution in which they teach rather than their own.

Ms. Jones has called on both sides to stop with the politicking and instead focus on those hit hardest through this strike.

?Students and parents work hard to get their children to college. They've already paid their tuition. They're paying rent. Depending on the length of the strike, it may delay students in starting summer jobs, further hurting their ability to continue going to school,? Ms. Jones said. ?The minister (Mitzie Hunter) needs to articulate exactly what she's going to do to ensure our students get the education they deserve.?

She concluded, ?Let's put our students first.?