

Legislative Watch

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Many OCC priorities reflected in Provincial Budget

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce was pleased to provide members with information on this week's Provincial Budget, cautiously giving Premier McGuinty a qualified grade of a B-plus. We say 'qualified', as the grade is based on two key issues – the first is that it reflected many priority issues of the OCC and its members (as reflected through resolutions and surveys), such as the intention to create a Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, and to (eventually) phase out the job-killing capital tax. The other issue is discipline – discipline of this government to follow through on the many priorities as stated in its first budget.

Following are a few more points on what we saw last Thursday: 1. Increase in funding for skilled trades, including an apprenticeship tax credit – something the OCC membership has long asked for; 2. A concentration of government spending on two priorities – instead of across the board spending increases – something the OCC membership has long asked for; 3. A new small business agency that will help cut red tape for our members - something the OCC membership has long asked for; 4. Gas tax money designated for municipal infrastructure, along with a commitment of the government to reinvest in transportation infrastructure (ie border crossings) something the OCC membership has long asked for.

On the controversial issue of the new Health Premium, a tax by any other name, OCC President Len Crispino said in a speech this week to the Greater Ottawa Chamber of Commerce that: *“...Now, one area where the government did not consult...the new Ontario Health Premium. This is the new tax on individuals and families – with revenue earmarked to improve our healthcare system. I have to admit that I'm of two minds on this issue. Obviously, my first reaction was that this is just another new tax – a new source of revenue for a cash-strapped government seeking the easy way out. It certainly would have been an easy topic to get headlines on. But on reflection I reconsidered my first response. We know that health care is the number one priority for Ontarians. Through surveys, we have found that it is also the number one priority of chamber members. Healthcare funding is more than a simple social program in this country – it is an incentive for business – it is a stimulus for investment and growth in this country...that is how our members see it – the business owners see it - and investors see it. But the needs of this system have outpaced economic growth – in fact, health program costs now run at forty-five per cent of total government program spending. That is a truly astounding figure. Almost half of the money that the government spends on its various programs – goes directly into maintaining the health and well-being of Ontarians. I believe – and more importantly – our members believe that to be an investment in our economy. The OCC remains committed to the idea that the best way to increase government revenue – is by stimulating the economy – by cutting taxes – by having a highly trained, world class workforce, and through responsible fiscal planning...But at the end of the day, this new health levy is something we can tolerate – provided the government keeps its word and doesn't fall into the tax-and-spend trap. The greatest achievement for the Ontario Chamber in this budget was the willingness this government showed to work with the business community. By listening to our ideas – and seeing us as part of the*

solution – they have given me hope that future budgets will reflect your needs as leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators. For that I applaud them.”

For more information on the OCC budget background, the Provincial Budget or for the full text of Len Crispino’s speech, visit the OCC website at www.occ.on.ca.

Detroit and Buffalo Economic Recovery Tours a Success

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Ministries of Tourism and Economic Development and Trade, completed its first two Economic Opportunity Tours to US border cities this week, and by all accounts were a resounding success. Delegates from the OCC, its membership and government travelled to Detroit and then Buffalo to both promote Ontario’s economic opportunities and tourism, as well to learn more about the issues that may impact the Ontario and US economies (such as border issues). In Detroit, OCC delegates had the opportunity to attend a Detroit Economic Club luncheon featuring Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty as keynote speaker, following roundtable discussions with Michigan business leaders. In Buffalo, the delegates held a roundtable discussion the Buffalo Niagara Partnership on the topic of opportunities and impediments affecting the issue of open access at our border crossings.

The US Department of Homeland Security arranged a tour of the US Border crossing at Buffalo, providing an educational and unique insight into the daily work that goes into ensuring our mutual trade is safe, secure and unhindered. Delegates also participated in a breakfast wherein Ontario Tourism Minister Jim Bradley was featured as keynote speaker, along with Brian Ackley, Deputy Commissioner-Marketing, Advertising and Tourism for Empire State Development.

Additional tours are being planned over the next coming months in Albany, Rochester, Dayton/Columbus and Cleveland. If you require additional information or are interested in taking part, or being profiled, in one of the stops, please contact Stuart Johnston at stuartjohnston@occ.on.ca or by telephone at (416) 482-5222, extension 232, for further information.

Required Pre-Notification for Border Crossings: While in Buffalo, the OCC was informed that the US Department of Homeland Security will be issuing in late June a Federal Register Notice requiring that all carriers and shippers give advance pre-notification of their intent to cross the border at least one hour ahead of time for those not registered with FAST (Free And Secure Trade) and a half hour ahead of time for FAST participants. The required pre-registration can be conducted through four systems: Pre Arrival Processing System (PAPS), Borders Release Advanced Selectivity System (BRASS), QPWP and Customs Automated Forms Entry System (CAFES). Any truck arriving at the border that has not pre-registered will not be permitted to cross. This requirement will come into effect 90 days after the Federal Register Notice has been released. The OCC will continue to provide updates as more information becomes available. For further information on the above pre-registration systems please visit www.cbp.gov.

AGM & Convention Photo Display

Photos from the recent Thunder Bay convention are now posted on the OCC website at <http://www.occ.on.ca/members/2agm.asp>. Lots of great memories from a very success event.

Ontario Business Advisory Council (OBAC)

Following successful meeting in March and April with Finance Minister Sorbara and Premier McGuinty, OBAC members met last week with U.S. Ambassador to Canada, Paul Cellucci. A very fruitful discussion was held on the opportunities and challenges facing our two countries...especially as both are in federal election years!

In June, we have two OBAC meetings scheduled: New Brunswick Premier Bernard Lord on the 1st; and, Ontario's Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal David Caplan on the 14th.

Outstanding Business Achievement Awards

Tickets are now on sale for the 22nd Annual Awards Dinner. Download the advanced ticket order form at <http://occ.on.ca/2obaa.asp>. This year's event is being held on Wednesday, November 10th at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre.

Final details are being put together for the awards categories themselves. Information will be circulated to all Chambers and Boards shortly so that you can nominate your local businesses!

A Search for All Talented Young Entrepreneurs!

The Business Development Bank of Canada wants all OCC members to know about their 17th BDC Young Entrepreneur Awards. If you know of an entrepreneur between 19 and 35 years of age who has been successfully running a business for at least two years, they invite you to nominate! Winners will represent their province or territory at the 2004 Young Entrepreneur Awards ceremony, which will be held in London, Ontario on October 19, 2004 as one of the highlights of the 25th anniversary of Small Business Week.

For full details and to get a nomination form, visit <http://www.bdc.ca/yea> or call 1 888 INFO-BDC (463-6232). Don't delay...the deadline for nominations is May 28, 2004!

Upcoming Events

Listed below are some upcoming events that may be of interest to Chambers and Boards:

- Victoria Day, OCC Offices Closed, May 24, 2004
- Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, May 26, 2004
- Ontario Business Advisory Council with New Brunswick Premier Bernard Lord, June 1, 2004
- Ontario Business Advisory Council with Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, The Hon. David Caplan, June 14, 2004
- Ontario Economic Summit (OES), October 6 & 7, Niagara-on-the-Lake