

Oshawa Chamber Policy Work Recognized

Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce delegates Kevin Mara, Vice President and Chamber CEO Bob Malcolmson learned first hand at the 95th Annual General Meeting of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce in London that the Ontario business community has made an impact by working together.

Recently, the Spring budget delivered a major victory for Chambers across this province and a major step forward in the business education tax issue. The provincial government removed a significant barrier to economic development with its announcement of the reduction in the Business Education Tax (BET) Rates by 2014.

During his remarks to the delegates, Len Crispino, President of the OCC stated “business didn’t achieve complete parity – yet. As you know – victory is often incremental”. Adding “today we can celebrate this first significant step forward – the first reduction in B-E-T since education funding was taken over by the province in 1998”.

It’s important to remember this victory for business did not come at the expense of residential taxpayers as some would have you believe. Residential rate payers will not make up the revenue from the reduced BET – the province will make up the difference with direct transfers to the school boards. These are funded by general revenues – not by property tax.

Crispino, told the delegates “the Chamber work paid off. It provided real solutions and presented a united front”. During his remarks Crispino personally thanked the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce and its CEO Bob Malcolmson along with the Toronto Board of Trade for its involvement in bringing this policy to the table.

At the 2002 AGM the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce called for a review of the governments eight year plan, with the intent of putting in place at the end of the remaining three years, a common province-wide education tax rate for commercial and industrial property classes, as it has for residential and multi-residential properties.

To strengthen the province’s competitiveness and build a stronger, more productive economy Ontario’s business community has clearly identified what needs to be done.

“Our direction is clear,” said Len Crispino, “Ontario’s share of global trade and investment is slipping and we must work together with government to provide real, workable solutions.”

A total of 39 priority areas were identified after intense debate among representatives from communities throughout the province.

“The lack of integrated and long-term transportation planning and investment was clearly identified by Chamber representatives from across the province as the number one issue curbing Ontario’s competitiveness today,” says Kevin Mara, Vice President of the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce. “We’ll work with our counterparts throughout the province to press for improvements to the environmental process for Infrastructure Projects including Highways like the 407”.

The negative economic and capital investment impact, to Ontario, of not proceeding to complete Highway 407 eastward from Brock Rd. in Pickering to Clarington and the inadequate level of 400 series highways on the east side of the GTA, is a long standing priority issues with the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce.

Other approved priorities:

- Calling on the provincial government to establish an independent minimum wage review board that conducts periodic reviews in conjunction with an economic impact assessment.
- Recommending a change in the way MPP salaries are determined by de-linking them from MP salaries and restoring them to the responsibility of Ontario's Integrity Commissioner.
- A long-term tax package strategy for Ontario.
- Encouraging the exploration of Energy From Waste alternatives as a way of generating electricity and reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill sites.
- Strategically investing in Ontario's agricultural community considering the importance of the industry to Ontario's economy.

This new policy agenda will set the course of the OCC's advocacy efforts for the coming year – forming a framework to guide the Chamber as it works with the provincial government to build and improve Ontario's economy.

"Recent events have demonstrated that business must be part of the solution," said Crispino. "The Chamber network, representing 57,000 businesses of every size and sector from across the province, provides government with the insight needed to identify real solutions – solutions that, like Corporate Tax Consolidation, will lead to a more competitive business environment and ultimately, higher productivity and job creation."

"We look forward to working hand-in-hand with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and other Chambers throughout the province knowing that businesses in Durham Region and the Greater Oshawa area will be the ultimate winners," stated Bob Malcolmson, CEO & General Manager of the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce.