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Labour and business forge partnership to spur economic growth

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Grace Macaluso

Apr 14, 2014 - 9:50 AM EDT

Last Updated: Apr 14, 2014 - 6:05 PM EDT



Representatives from business, labour and academia in Windsor and Essex County vowed Monday to forge a united front in the global competition for investment and good paying jobs.

“We can accomplish more by working together,” Matt Marchand, president and CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, said ahead of a news conference to announce the region’s first-ever business-labour economic policy and solutions forum.

“This is the coming together of business, labour and academia in a non-partisan way to bring ideas into the community,” said Marchand.

“Such an undertaking as far we can tell has not been attempted on this scale by a local chamber.”

The half-day forum, May 15 at the Caboto Club, will include panel sessions focusing on such issues as energy costs, taxes, infrastructure and labour-management relations. They will feature experts from several jurisdictions, including Windsor, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax and Grand Rapids, Mich.

“We’re going to talk about best practices from some cities that have gone through tough times; the things that they’ve done in order to have some measure of success in their communities when their economies were transitioning,” said Marchand.

Keynote speaker will be Frank Ingratta, former Ontario deputy minister of agriculture.

Allan Conway, dean of the Odette School of Business at the University of Windsor, said decision makers everywhere are “wrestling with the realities of a new world.”

One key challenge is Windsor and Essex County’s ability to stem the flow of young people to more prosperous jurisdictions.

“Regions will live or die on their ability to attract young people,” said Conway. “We’ll do our best in this forum to grapple with that particular issue; to make sure we keep and attract the best and brightest.”

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Dino Chiodo, president of Unifor Local 444, called the forum “an important step that should have been taken a long time ago.”

Unemployment, the scarcity of good paying jobs, economic uncertainty are widespread concerns that warrant a concerted response, said Chiodo. “We can find some commonalities with regards to sitting with business and talking about the importance of making a plan together, and with academia, making sure we keep talent here.”

Marchand said ideas from the conference will be incorporated into a report that will also be used to lobby politicians.

“We have to elections coming up — municipal and provincial. Part of the chamber’s mandate is to help change the debate going forward.”

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