

# Balanced budget, better Internet on chambers' wish lists



*CHRIS THOMPSON, WINDSOR STAR*

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Published on: February 16, 2017 | Last Updated: February 16, 2017 6:02 PM EST



The Windsor-Essex Chamber of Commerce and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce have released their wish list for this spring's provincial budget.

Deficit reduction and expanding broadband access are two of the major provincewide requests, while the local chamber is looking for help with road construction.

“The government of Ontario must ensure that it addresses recommendations made by the chamber network to bolster business confidence that allows investment and jobs to flow into Ontario,” said Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce president and CEO Matt Marchand.

The first priority should be to eliminate the province’s deficit in 2017-18 since Ontario’s net debt of \$315 billion makes the province “heavily exposed to rising interest rates and economic slowdowns,” the chambers say.

A provincewide survey of chambers released last week entitled the Ontario Economic Report found that businesses are lacking confidence in the province and are holding onto their cash rather than expanding production or investing.

“This indicates that industry sees the Ontario economy as high risk,” said Marchand.

The chambers are also calling on the province to provide funding to bring expanded broadband access to remote areas.

“We still want that expanded broadband access for the rural areas of Essex County that we’re pushing for,” said Marchand.

“There are a lot of folks in the county that don’t have access to that kind of Internet and in today’s high-tech world, it’s pretty much a necessity.”

Marchand is also looking for \$30 million in funding for Windsor and LaSalle from the Connecting Links Road Program after both municipalities were denied funding last year.

But Marchand said the most important message for the province is to balance the budget.

“We have to get a balanced budget here,” said Marchand. “We’re getting to the point that we’re exposing ourselves to higher costs if and when interest rates rise.

“A rise in interest rates would really be catastrophic,” he added.

Marchand said that while the nearest Liberal MPP is in London, the chamber network helps to bring home important points to the government.

“We can bring forward concerns in different communities across Ontario with similar problems,” said Marchand.

“We’ve got a great network here in Ontario which gives us some extra oomph when it comes to budget issues across the province.”

The Wynne government has held budget consultation sessions across the province but a date for the budget has yet to be set.

## Windsor Flyers



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