

MPs hold local pre-budget consultations



Essex MP Jeff Watson speaks to media in July 2013. (Dan Janisse / The Windsor Star)

[Dave Hall](#)

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Energy costs and the competitiveness of the Canadian automotive industry were among the key issues raised today by members of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce in a pre-budget session with a pair of Conservative MPs.

Government house leader Peter Van Loan (C — York Simcoe) and Essex MP Jeff Watson led the session, which was attended by about a dozen chamber members.

“It was a free wide-ranging discussion that touched on a number of issues the chamber has identified as being key to our members,” said Matt Marchand, chamber president and chief executive officer. “We also talked about both the local and Canadian economy, border-crossing issues and training initiatives to try and eliminate the skills gap in our community.

“There’s a desperate need to fill that skills gap, according to many of our members in the manufacturing sector, and it’s critical if we are to remain competitive.”

The pre-budget consultations are part of the government’s buildup to the next federal budget which Finance Minister Jim Flaherty is expected to deliver in February.

In the afternoon, Van Loan met with members of LaSalle’s business community.

“I think I’ve been generally hearing largely ensuring our focus on the economy, job creation and economic growth is the priority and a recognition as we have stated

repeatedly that the economic environment internationally, globally, remains very, very fragile,” said Van Loan.

“And therefore that focus on keeping spending under control and encouraging job creation and economic growth by keeping prices down remains and important economic priority.”

Van Loan is on a tour of Southwestern Ontario to solicit feedback on the budget.

“We’re on the right track as a government, that the economy is gradually getting better, but we continue to see that we are competing with other jurisdictions, particularly American jurisdictions, that have more advantages in certain areas and we’d better make sure we are as competitive as possible,” said Van Loan.

“That’s why they appreciate our focus on balancing the budget, that taxes will not go up in the future, things like our capital costs allowance which allow businesses to write off capital cost investments in two years. And encourages business investment.”

Van Loan said concerns were expressed about the future of Windsor’s Chrysler minivan plant.

“We as a government recognize the critical role that auto assembly plays in the Ontario economy,” he said. “Since we formed the government in 2006 we have demonstrated it with things like our support of the Toyota plant in Woodstock, consolidation that is ensuring that we have viable operations with GM in Oshawa and Ford in Oakville.

“We have to ensure that we stay competitive so that other jurisdictions don’t take those jobs away from us.”

- with files from Chris Thompson