

Open consulate in Windsor, U.S. urged

By Dave Hall, The Windsor Star June 1, 2012



The Windsor, Ont. skyline at dusk is seen in this June 2003 file photo.

Photograph by: Tim Fraser, The Windsor Star

Support for reopening a U.S. consulate in Windsor is gaining strength on both sides of the border.

Matt Marchand, president and CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, said that meetings with officials from the office of U.S. Rep. Gary Peters (D - Bloomfield Township) have been helpful in moving the issue forward.

"It's something they view as important considering the growth of trade, commerce and individual travel between the two countries," said Marchand.

The chamber has sent a letter to the U.S. Ambassador to Canada, David Jacobson, seeking support for reopening a consulate, which was closed in 1969 for budgetary reasons.

"The Canadian government has a Canadian Consulate in downtown Detroit, so the opportunity for synergies is substantial," the letter says. "Windsor is the only major city on the border that does not have a visa-issuing post within 125 (kilometres).

"It is worth noting that the nearest consulate is in Toronto, more than 400 (kilometres) away."

In a recent op-ed article written for the Detroit News, Peters also voiced support for the initiative.

"Last year, Canadian visitors spent more than \$24 billion in the United States, including \$336 million in Michigan," wrote Peters.

"At a time when these important tourism dollars are helping fuel our recovery and creating jobs, we need to make it easier for those living in Canada to visit Michigan to shop, go to a game, see a show or use the airport."

In 2008, the U.S. State Department indicated support for a U.S. Consulate in Windsor but it didn't happen for budgetary reasons.

According to Peters, the U.S. has eight diplomatic posts in Canada, seven of which issue visas.

Last year, they issued 160,000 temporary visitor visas to people living in Canada.

"A consulate in Windsor would mean new jobs and more economic investment in our communities so I am strongly encouraging President (Barack) Obama to work with Prime Minister (Stephen) Harper to make this happen."

U.S. embassy officials in Ottawa couldn't be reached for comment.