

Windsor Chamber releases budget wish list: delayed TPP, lower taxes and solving the skills gap



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Matt Marchand is photographed at the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce offices in Windsor on Monday, December 15, 2014. *TYLER BROWNBRIDGE / WINDSOR STAR*

The local Chamber of Commerce is rolling out its wish list a week before the federal government is set to deliver its budget.

It's a chance for Windsor to remind the government it's hoping to see a focus on manufacturing and jobs, said Matt Marchand, president and CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce.

The wish list coincides with the release of a report from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce with 12 recommendations from businesses across the province.

Here are some of Marchand's hopes for the budget:

Leveraging the Pacific trade deal into a manufacturing strategy

The chamber has already called on the federal government to hold off ratifying the Trans Pacific Partnership, an international trade deal involving 12 countries, until after the U.S. election.

Now is the right time to leverage that deal into a "targeted and coherent strategy" for the manufacturing sector, Marchand said.

Businesses are divided over the deal, with about 40 per cent saying they feel it will have a positive impact on Canada, according to the chamber's report.

Make economic development funds more equal

Money isn't distributed fairly for economic development across the country, according to a report by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

The Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario got \$17.61 per capita, while in Quebec the comparable agency got \$37.16 per capita.

Marchand said he's hoping to see the federal government work more closely with the government of Ontario to address differences with respect to economic development.

Improve the skills gap

Windsor loses around \$600 million every year from businesses who can't find workers to fill their open jobs, according to a previous Chamber report.

Sometimes companies can't bid on big projects because they don't have enough employees to do the work. Sometimes it means the company can't expand as much as it would like.

Marchand said he wants to see the federal budget tackle the skills gap.

Part of that would come from making the temporary foreign worker program more flexible, according to the chamber's report.

Expand access to broadband Internet

Some farms in Essex County don't even have Internet access, Marchand said. That can make it much harder to get work done or improve productivity.

About half of companies said Internet speed or connection hindered their ability to do business, according to a Leger poll.

Marchand is hoping to see an expansion of broadband Internet services to regions with businesses that could benefit.

Lower small business tax rates and keep the province competitive

Marchand said he's hoping to see the government keep its promise to reduce the small business tax rate from 11 per cent to nine per cent.

The report also proposes better tax incentives for venture capital and angel investors, to help spur innovation.