

# BUSINESS

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### Labour-business vow united front to tackle economic woes

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**Grace Macaluso**

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Representatives from Windsor’s business, academic and labour community pledged Thursday to work together to help rebuild the region’s economy.

“Labour and management are not each other’s adversary,” said labour lawyer George King. “They need to jointly challenge the real threats to their existence.”

King was among a roster of speakers at what was billed as the first-ever Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce Policy and Solutions Forum at the Caboto Club. The meeting consisted of panels addressing issues, including business-labour relations, high energy costs, tax base challenges and infrastructure. Although it took place amid the June 12 Ontario election, the event, organizers said, was an non-partisan effort aimed at developing solutions for the region’s economic future.



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Chambers across Ontario want to “take the politics out of public policy,” said Allan O’Dette, president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. “Leadership has to come from rooms like this. We’re all in this together.”

O’Dette said the future of Ontario’s economy lies with small business. “In our lifetime, there will be no big company coming to Ontario. We need to teach small firms how to export.”

While they agreed on the need for a national auto strategy, both King and Unifor’s Bill Murnighan differed on the role of unions.

“Labour and management have to work together to help employers find ways of lowering costs,” said King. “The defined benefits pension plan is the predominant issue at the bargaining table.”

King also said unions have to re-examine what they’re selling to prospective members. “Wages have flatlined.”

Murnighan pointed to studies showing that unions play a positive role in a company’s bottom line.

“Unionized auto assembly plants score high in productivity and quality surveys,” he said, noting that the Windsor Assembly Plant is the most productive of Chrysler Group’s North American facilities.

Labour costs are exaggerated, he said, adding that union all-in labour costs in auto production make up only four per cent, or \$1,700, of the final price of a vehicle.

“Unions killing off manufacturing jobs is a terrible myth,” said Murnighan. “There are other factors at work.”

[gmacaluso@windsorstar.com](mailto:gmacaluso@windsorstar.com)

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**Tags:** [george king](#), [Unifor](#), [Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce](#)

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