

## Snyder urges Windsor-Detroit business leaders to fight against Moroun's proposal

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Gov. Rick Snyder, left, speaks with Matt Marchand, president and CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, at a town hall meeting Monday, Oct. 22, 2012, in Detroit sponsored by the Canada United States Business Association. Snyder encouraged business leaders to support the Detroit River International Crossing project. (DAN JANISSE/The Windsor Star)



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The push to build a \$1-billion downriver bridge triggered a war of words Monday as Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder came to Detroit as guest speaker for a prominent group of business leaders from both sides of the border.

Snyder and Canadian Consul General Roy Norton spoke and answered questions for nearly an hour during a town-hall style luncheon meeting of the Canada-U.S. Business Association held at the downtown Westin Book Cadillac Hotel.

The pair made a plea for help to defeat a ballot initiative known as “Proposal 6” brought forward by Ambassador Bridge owner Matty Moroun that would force a statewide vote for construction of any future international crossing.

The measure will be on the Nov. 6 ballot.

“This is a bridge where we are not using taxpayer dollars (in Michigan) and we want to vote on it?” Snyder said. “There is only one special interest fighting against (the new bridge) and that’s Matty Moroun and the Ambassador Bridge. They are the one entity that will continue to make a lot of money on this (if the proposal gets passed).”

Moroun generates \$60 million in annual toll revenues at his bridge and millions more in duty-free sales of gas and goods. He has spent at least \$10 million in an advertising blitz to get his proposal passed.

Snyder signed a binational agreement with Canadian Transportation Minister Denis Lebel in June to build the Detroit River International Crossing bridge that would link the industrial communities of Brighton Beach and Delray.

Under the deal, Canada will pay up to \$550 million to cover the state’s share of the project, which could reach \$2.5 billion once plazas and feeder roads in Detroit are included.

Snyder said he believes the agreement is in force regardless of the Proposition 6 vote, but fears if Moroun’s ballot proposal prevails it will give the bridge company a pretext to tie up the DRIC project for years in the courtroom.

“In Michigan and how it’s been recently, can you think of one good reason to delay thousands of jobs?” Snyder said. “This is critically important. Lets move forward on this bridge.”



Gov. Rick Snyder, left, and Canadian consulate general Roy Norton participate in a town hall meeting Monday, Oct. 22, 2012, in Detroit sponsored by the Canada United States Business

Association. He encouraged business leaders to support the Detroit River International Crossing project. (DAN JANISSE/The Windsor Star)

Snyder said the best way to consider the benefits of the DRIC bridge is to draw a circle on a map extending from Montreal to Chicago. That circle will encompass one-third of the North American economy, with Windsor-Detroit in the middle, he said.

“Let’s build on that,” said Snyder, noting five per cent of his state’s workforce is reliant on Canada-U.S. trade. “What you need is more crossings. This is not a project to slow down or stop. This is a fabulous project. It’s not just about a bridge, but international trade and trade jobs.

“Think how many more jobs we can add by having more crossings. Not just construction jobs, but long-term jobs. If you are not supportive of this project, then you are not supportive of 10,000 jobs coming to Michigan.”

Norton said the DRIC bridge is Canada’s “No. 1 infrastructure priority.”

The federal government has offered to front Michigan’s cost for the bridge project because it no longer wants to rely solely on Moroun’s 85-year-old bridge — North America’s busiest trade crossing handles \$500 million of goods on average each day, he said.

“We need to buy insurance and that’s why we are paying for this bridge,” said Norton, who estimated Canada will recoup its investment through tolls in about 50 years and once paid off the revenues will be split with Michigan for the remainder of its life span.

He called Moroun’s ad campaign full of “distortion and fabrications.” He said the bridge owner’s refrain that “Chinese steel will be used” on the DRIC bridge is wrong. “Only Canadian and U.S. steel” will be used on the project, he said.

Norton also said construction work on the Michigan side will be done with labour from that side of the border — not Canadians as Moroun claims — even though Canada is paying for the bulk of the project.

“Mr. Moroun knows that yet he persists in saying ‘there will be no work for Michiganders,’” Norton said. “There will be 10,000 jobs for Michiganders. We are paying the costs, but everyone wins with this project.”

Bridge executive Mickey Blashfield said Monday the 10,000-jobs claim represents total person-year jobs, not total jobs created each year.

“In addition, these jobs are temporary and they are not only Michigan-based jobs, but include positions in surrounding states,” Blashfield said.

“Michigan voters need to ask themselves why the governor insists upon building a multi-billion dollar government bridge we don’t need and can’t afford, when our state is facing so many other

more urgent concerns. The only way to protect Michigan's bottom line is to vote yes on Proposal 6 and give the people a choice before taxpayer dollars are spent."

Bridge president Dan Stamper also jumped into the fray Monday, says Moroun is ready to build his own twin span when traffic dictates.

"It's time for politicians to stop standing in the way of progress by protecting this boondoggle," he said. "When they do (need a new bridge), the Ambassador Bridge is ready and willing to invest in a state-of-the-art border crossing at no cost to taxpayers on either side of the border."