

Windsor-Essex chamber successfully advocates for marijuana policy at national AGM

Tom Morrison

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The Canadian Chamber of Commerce has adopted a policy to “maximize the economic benefits of recreational marijuana” following a recommendation from the local chamber.

The resolution was approved at the Canadian chamber’s annual general meeting Sunday. The Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce acted as a co-sponsor with the Niagara Chamber of Commerce on the issue.

One of the recommendations of the policy is for the federal government to “investigate and implement a retail and distribution policy in partnership with the provincial governments to preserve consumer choice, ensure a level playing field and adherence to regulations and restrictions and avoid offering special treatment to any person or organization in the industry.”

“We want to look at all different options and see what the process dictates, but we’re not necessarily advocating one thing over another,” said Matt Marchand, president and CEO of the Windsor-Essex chamber. “What we’re saying is that we want to make sure all options are included, both the public and the private model.”

The Government of Canada announced in April it plans to move forward with the Liberal Party’s election platform to legalize and regulate the sale of recreational marijuana with legislation planned for spring 2017.

The chamber resolution quotes a study which found the legalization of marijuana would create a market up to \$5 billion. It also states “strict regulations” must be passed to protect youth.

“We want to maximize the benefits of recreational marijuana, but minimize the social risks and we do that by being proactive, showing the leadership and being at the table, and chambers across the country agree with that position,” said Marchand by phone from the AGM in Regina Monday.

Jon Liedtke, co-owner of Higher Limits, a downtown Windsor medical marijuana lounge, said this is a “good policy” and shows that chambers don’t want the marijuana industry to become a monopoly.

“The biggest thing is you don’t want to see a lock-down system where there isn’t choice,” he said. “At the end of the day we need as many points of access to this as possible because we’re talking about the free market.”

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce wrote a letter to the premier last week advocating for a system which would auction off licenses to both the public and private sector.

In response the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, which represents workers at LCBO stores, sent out a news release saying it doesn’t want a “free-for-all” system for the sale marijuana.

The union commissioned Nanos Research to conduct a survey of Ontarians’ views on legalizing recreational marijuana. The LCBO was chosen by 41 per cent of survey respondents as their top choice for the distribution of marijuana.

“Ontarians know who they trust with their children’s safety,” said OPSEU president Warren Thomas in the news release. “Unfortunately the (Ontario) Chamber is so excited about the possibility of profits that they’re choosing not to see the facts that are clear to everyone else.”

Liedtke said the results only show that almost 60 per cent of Ontarians don’t want the LCBO as their first choice. Other answers included pharmacies at 32 per cent, privately-owned marijuana stores at 17 per cent and anywhere tobacco is sold at six per cent.

“If 40 per cent of Ontarians want to be able to get it through an LCBO store, I think that’s great,” said Liedtke. “I don’t think that the government shouldn’t be in the business. I think that there should be other kinds of access as well.”



Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce CEO Matt Marchand speaks during a press conference at the WindsorEssex Economic Development Corporation April 23, 2014.



Jon Liedtke stands in front of marijuana equipment at Higher Limits Lounge in Windsor, Jan. 29.

Marchand said the issue is important to Windsor and Essex County because the local agriculture industry in particular “stands to benefit substantially.”

Tom Morrison is a Windsor-based journalist. @TomMorrison12 on Twitter