

Subject: Pre-Budget Meetings

Dear Mr. Cameron Friesen, the Honourable Minister of Finance:

RE: Pre-Budget Consultation

Thank you for providing an opportunity for local organizations to provide feedback on what we feel should be priorities for government. Speaking as the President of the Thompson Chamber of Commerce and its 150+ members, our focus is naturally on the needs of small businesses. In saying that, and as you are aware, small businesses continues to be the economic engine for the growth of Manitoba and Canada's economy. Business are the ones that create wealth and, depending on which statistics you look at, there seems to be a general agreement that small business accounts for about 80% of private sector jobs. As a Chamber, we would like to see priorities in the following areas:

1) Increased support for entrepreneurs and small businesses-

-The 3rd Edition of the Manitoba Prosperity Report (issued by the Manitoba Employer's Council) shows Manitoba being in last place for the Western Provinces and Ontario when it comes to the number of employer businesses per 1,000 population. We believe that everyone is better off when more businesses are created, or when more businesses are able to expand. The Chamber recommends the Province to look at supporting programs that will:

- a) help build capacity in entrepreneurs;
- b) increase access to capital for small business to grow and for entrepreneurs to start businesses;

2) Development and Implementation of a Northern Strategy-

- The Chamber recognizes that the Province, through their Yes! North document is mindful of the need for northern development. Thompson, being a regional hub for services, also recognizes that we are better off when our fellow Northern neighbours are also doing well. We ask for the Province to work with other stakeholders to put together a Northern strategy that will focus on the economic development of the North and takes into account how to support key primary industries such as forestry, mining, and fishing but also the service industry such as tourism. The Chamber also supports the Manitoba Chamber in requesting the creation of a northern commission to assess Manitoba's transportation infrastructure and its limitations on northern development.

As the Minister is aware, industrialized communities such as the Pas, Flin Flon and Thompson are going through some challenges. Currently, Thompson's economy will have to deal with the upcoming closure of Vale's smelter and refinery. Churchill is also facing challenges when it comes to the port and the bay line communities are dealing with access to reliable rail transportation with the uncertainty over the rail lines owned by OMNI Trax. Many of the First Nation communities and small NACC communities

have stagnant economic growth. There is a huge need to have an actionable Northern Economic Development Strategy that takes all of these factors into consideration and which works on helping to grow and diversify our Northern economy.

3) Growing Capacity in our Workforce-

- Manitoba ranks last when compared to the other Western Provinces and Ontario when it comes to the percentage of workers in the labour force with a high school diploma. This is also the same when it comes to individuals in the labour force with a university degree. In the North, with a high aboriginal population, this is especially challenging as highlighted by a recent report from the Auditor General that was released in January of 2016 (*Improving Educational Outcomes for Kindergarten to Grade 12 Aboriginal Students*) highlighting the gap of 55% to 96% of aboriginal and non-aboriginal high school graduation rates. For businesses, it speaks towards the lack of capacity when it comes to the labour pool for jobs that businesses need filled.

In addition to the development of a Northern Strategy and a northern transportation infrastructure strategy that bring roads and other means of transportation to the north east region and through to Nunavut (by way of Churchill), the Chamber has four resolutions put forward to the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce for assisting in lobbying the government to address:

- 1) Implementation of a northern based 911 Services
- 2) Passing Lanes on Provincial Highway 6
- 3) Review of the Landlord Tenant Act
- 4) Recognizing that the Provincial government implement recognized service standards to the regional communities and provide internship programs to train people in the local community with consideration of the accessibility requirements of users.

Thank you again for providing this opportunity.

Oswald Sawh, CPA, CGA, MBA, BComm (Hons)
President
Thompson Chamber of Commerce