

Red tape and green technology colour MPP's Chamber breakfast

By Brock Weir

Cutting red tape and boosting supports for green technology added colour to a recent breakfast hosted by the Aurora & Newmarket Chambers of Commerce for Aurora's Provincial Representatives.

MPPs Christine Elliott and Michael Parsa sat down with business leaders at St. Andrew's Valley Golf Course recently for a meeting which focused on business growth, education and health.

Among the audience members to ask a question was a manufacturer of over three decades, who commended the Province for moving to foster a climate that makes it more attractive for businesses to make capital investments in equipment.

That being said, however, he questioned what the Government was doing to help businesses make the move into a global arena and attract international investment.

?It is [about] giving confidence back to investors and job creators because, quite frankly, we lost many people who were not looking at Ontario anymore,? said Mr. Parsa, who represents Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill. ?The amount of red tape we had here, the regulations that businesses had to deal with?we lost many opportunities where people wanted to invest in Ontario.?

Citing the United States, Mr. Parsa underscored his point with a hypothetical: if a manufacturer wanted to open up new warehouse space south of the border, they would be up and running in six months. In Ontario, he argued, red tape means it could take over two years.

?We're looking into putting in a bill in the spring and fall of every year to remove [red tape],? he continued. ?We want to hear directly from businesses [like you about] some of the red tape and over-regulation you're dealing with in your industry.?

Added Ms. Elliott, who represents Newmarket-Aurora, ?I want to reiterate how important it is that you let us know some [of] the biggest impediments to you. That is something we don't just talk about and say we want to reduce [it] by 25 per cent and nothing ever happens.?

Another attendee, George Hughes, said up until he replaced his pickup truck with an electric vehicle, he was spending upwards of \$8,000 on fuel. Since going green, he said it costs

around \$500 a year to keep the car going, but the challenge he has is finding a place to refuel the vehicle because there are so few places to plug in.

Posing the question of what the Government's plans are to increase the Province-wide use of non-fossil fuels to help offset the cost of running a business, Mr. Hughes was told by Mr. Parsa that the Government is ?asking businesses and people to go more green in order to reduce greenhouse emissions.?

?We also have to do our part to make sure that it is convenient for the people,? Mr. Parsa said. ?It is early on, and you're right, I personally looked at an electric vehicle for myself and because of the travel I do it wasn't available in certain areas, it wasn't viable, we're not there yet, and you're absolutely right. We have to do a better job. There are areas where I think all levels of government can work together to accomplish a certain goal and that is certainly one of them.?

Other levels of government, however, had their own concerns to pose to the MPPs.

Among these representatives was Tom Vegh, Deputy Mayor and Regional Councillor for the Town of Newmarket.

?When I first came into municipal politics, it was at the tail end of the Mike Harris government where they downloaded a lot of the responsibilities and financial obligations onto municipalities, causing an average of \$200 increase to property owners,? he said. ?On the one hand, it helped with the Provincial deficit, but we didn't have anybody else to download onto except the taxpayer [through] property taxes. Going forward [over the next few years] perhaps you can provide some reassurances that you're not going to be balancing the budget by downloading responsibilities onto the municipalities. That was not a good experience and it was a bit of shuffling of the chairs.?

This question was tackled by Ms. Elliott who said, ?we can provide that reassurance.?

?In fact, we're taking on some of the responsibility in Toronto with respect to the subway system, \$11 billion out of \$28.2 billion budget. That is an upload, not a download. With respect to some of the public health services, I know some people are feeling that that is being downloaded to a greater degree on the municipalities; however, the actual legislation indicates it is the municipality's responsibility in the first place. There is no obligation for any public funds at the Provincial level to be provided.

?That said, we know there always has been that agreement between the Province and municipalities, so any increase is going to be done over a gradual basis and is not going to be something that is going to require, in my view anyway, given the amount of

money that is involved, it wouldn't require a property tax increase because we recognize at the end of the day there is only one taxpayer.?