

Uncertainty on multiple fronts causing significant issues for local businesses: MP

Uncertainty from everything related to ongoing tariff disputes to a lack of a federal budget are causing significant issues for businesses in Aurora and Newmarket, says MP Sandra Cobena.

This is a key message Newmarket-Aurora's Federal representative says she will take back to Ottawa this fall after hosting a roundtable for local businesses on Friday alongside Saskatchewan MP Garnett Genuis.

Held at Treefrog on Newmarket's Davis Drive, the roundtable brought together local small- and medium-size business owners, and a handful of others from the broader Greater Toronto Area, representing sectors as varied as manufacturing and artificial intelligence.

It was scheduled to coincide with the release of new employment figures, but evolved into a greater conversation on how businesses are able to plan ahead in a time of instability.

"A manufacturer in Aurora had a decision to make," said Cobena, recalling one telling piece of feedback that came out of the roundtable. "He had a contract for manufacturing and he needed to put up a line. He applied for the permits but he also, while waiting for the permits and making a final decision whether to invest here in Canada, he got frustrated and went to Ohio.

"He said to me, 'Sandra, I flew down to Ohio and you won't believe it. I was able to get my approvals, my permits, my clearance, and I walked across the street and I was able to get my financing,' because, of course, in the U.S. there is a lot more financial institutions to choose from for retail and commercial. He said, 'I flew home and I just sat there going, 'I am Canadian. I want to invest here in my country, but how can I even begin to make that decision when I have been waiting over a year for a permit and I still don't know when it's going to come?'" Another story that came up where the exporters are saying, "We need to diversify our markets, but even as we do, and we find out that we are bidding for a contract in Europe, as an example, and we are competing with another company that provides a similar quality product at a similar price, we lose it because Canada has a bad reputation that we're very difficult to do business with." People don't want to deal with that if they don't have to. Businesses are at a real disadvantage now."

Uncertainty is a problem, she said, and while tariffs are a part of that, such concerns pre-date the trade fight. Compounding this, she contended, is the fact the government has not introduced a budget, updated housing numbers, and faced questions about immigration figures.

"We don't know what the plan is for the economy as a whole, it's just a difficult time," she said, noting the government needs to step up and provide some certainty. "I'm part of the Finance Committee and we have had no consultations, nothing. We've done nothing over the summer and I would have expected to be working through the summer; not only for Parliament to stay open - well, that didn't happen, even though we requested that, we were ready to work through the summer, because Parliament has only been open for 20 days this entire year. At least do some work, right, within the committees, but nothing. Now we're going to be rushed with consultations - and we'll see if a budget comes out and what's in it. I think that's also very unsettling for business owners.

"I think the uncertainty would be a big [message] because we do have manufacturers, lots of manufacturers from various sectors here in the riding and they are trying to plan, diversify, but also at the same time, there's already a certain level of uncertainty with business and the risk-taking when running a business. When we don't know what the government is going to do - is there going to be incentives? Is there not? What's going to happen? When there is no clear plan, businesses can't make decisions because they don't know what the situation is going to be. But also, maybe they don't want to miss out on any incentives that the government may announce. The message was? "We are working every day. We do not have the luxury of just taking the summer off. Please just get to work and tell us the plan. It would be nice to have some certainty with the tariffs, but even as we try to diversify beyond that, just tell us what you're actually going to do, because right now it's a black hole."

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