



Ontario: A Magnet for the World

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Canadian Club of Toronto
April 15, 2009

Good afternoon everyone!

Let me begin by saying that I am humbled to be standing here today.

For I see before me some of the greatest leaders in our province.

Leading companies - corporations – municipalities - or associations – is no small task anytime – but particularly now.

Each of you has a great weight on your shoulders.

Your employees – members – and shareholders have placed their future in you.

Your directors have placed their faith in you.

Your communities have placed their hopes in you.

And your families have placed their dreams in you – that’s an awesome responsibility.

Today – I’m afraid I’m going to ask permission to add to that burden.

Today – I’m going to show you that Ontario’s promise also rests on your shoulders.

And that now – more than ever – our collective stewardship – our collective inspiration is needed.

Today – I’d like to talk to you about a vision – a vision for a great province – and the power each of us in this room has - to bring this dream to life.

In our own organizations – we consider a vision – pretty much essential.

We wouldn’t think about embarking on a bold initiative – without first knowing where we wanted it to take us.

In my life outside of the chamber – it is our dream – our vision – that guides the decisions we make at our winery each day.

So why should our province be any different?

Now is the moment when a dream is most needed in Ontario.

You know? It’s easy to get mired in the day-to-day challenges facing our organizations – and our economy.

Let us not for one minute downplay the extreme difficulties being experienced in our communities – by our families – friends – our neighbours.

They are suffering real pain and uncertainty.

We must continue to find ways in which we rise above those challenges.

Some measures will fall squarely on government and others will be a collective responsibility.

To identify these opportunities has been and will continue to be the core activity of the chamber.

Why just two weeks ago in the provincial budget – you saw the results of a sustained effort on the part of the Ontario Chamber network –

The introduction of a single sales tax for this province – puts in place the third pillar of a tax reform package first proposed by the Ontario Chamber in 2004.

Sales tax harmonization – in combination with the other two pillars – corporate tax consolidation – and the elimination of capital taxes – as well as the move to a 10% corporate tax rate – will shore up our competitiveness.

Ontario has been slowly sinking in the quicksand of a high and inefficient tax system – and these measures in combination will help rescue us from certain fate.

But while this work continues to be at the heart of what we do at the chamber – to be at the heart of what we do – you and I – in our collective efforts

We also believe that we have a responsibility to look further to the horizon.

To focus on that image – faint but definitely visible in the distance – of the Ontario that we want to be.

The Ontario that we can be.

And there can be no more critical time than now to build a conversation around a dream.

I'd like to recall the words of a former Premier of Ontario:

“Today’s problems are different than those of a dozen years ago, and tomorrow’s will be quite different from those of today.”

“I am confident, however, that we here in Ontario, in common with all Canadians, will respond to the challenges ahead with the same ingenuity, enterprise and courage which our people have shown throughout our history.”

Those words might have been said just yesterday – by Premier McGuinty – or any other political leader.

But in fact they were spoken in 1961 by Premier Leslie Frost.

I would assert that they are just as valid today as they were then.

Ontario is a place of ingenuity – of enterprise – of courage.

We consider ourselves an integral part of a country that we love.

And we know that our future determines in large part the future of all Canadians.

We will overcome the challenges currently facing our province.

Not just by focusing on what’s ailing us.

But by – focusing on tomorrow’s potential today.

Some of you may be thinking – “what is this guy drinking”? – or worse yet – is he running for politics?

Let me put your minds at rest.

The last drink I had was 18 hours ago – Ontario wine – and no – I’m not running for politics.

Instead - I truly believe that our chamber network is best positioned – to take a lead on this effort.

For no one represents the same cross-section of the economy that we represent.

We bring together business – labour – non-profits – academia and government in a way that is truly unique.

Who else can take the lead on a unifying direction for Ontario?

No one but the chamber bridges political divides – philosophical divides – geographic divides.

What I’m about to share with you – is a dream or a vision for our province.

When we started thinking about this last year – we were looking for a bold statement but one that was still within the realm of the possible – a goal we could all believe in – that would motivate people throughout the province to join in the campaign.

We identified the needs people are looking to Ontario to fulfill ... and the core value we must provide in order to consistently deliver on their hopes and aspirations.

So here are those values.

And this is our dream.

Imagine.

Imagine when people are looking for a place where they're free to create – free to share opinions – free to choose how they live and with whom – free to choose their destiny.

Where efforts are made every day to achieve access and equality – to obliterate barriers whether based on ability – race – religion – or gender.

And when they think of this – they think – Ontario.

Like Ramin Jahanbegloo – an Iranian – Canadian who was arrested in 2006 in his native Iran and held for four months in Tehran's notorious Evin prison – accused but never charged - of spying.

Later it was learned that his attendance at international conferences was viewed as working against the security of the Iranian state.

Jahanbegloo endured 125 days of solitary confinement – for the first 40 he had nothing but two blankets to lie on – nothing to read – and was blindfolded every time he left his cell.

He has since published a book based on notes he scratched on scraps of cardboard while in prison.

Jahanbegloo was released in August 2006 and is now a visiting professor at the Centre for Ethics at the University of Toronto.

Here in Canada he openly shares his opinions about tolerance and diversity – non-violence and freedom of thought.

From Canada – he also shares these opinions with the rest of the world.

Jahanbegloo is exemplary of the freedom provided here in Ontario – for thought – expression – and activity.

Jahanbegloo recently wrote, “Toronto is a global city because it represents a peaceful home for those who are in search of sharing their differences with others. But also, because Toronto has a spirit which is greater than the sum of its differences.”

He’s here with us today.

Imagine.

Imagine when people are looking for a place that welcomes them – no matter their skin colour – no matter their religion.

That allows them to retain their cultural identity while living and working side by side with people from other religions, other cultures – all within a larger multicultural community or cultural mosaic.

Where they can express their individual and collective aspirations and manifest their dreams.

And when they think of this – they think – Ontario.

Imagine.

Imagine when people are looking for a place where hope is more than just a concept – it’s a tangible experience – embodied in the story of Terry Fox – an iconic Canadian whose final steps in an incredible journey were taken near Thunder Bay.

A story of overcoming inconceivable odds – of digging deep into the depth of human spirit.

A young man whose every step reverberated in the hearts of those who bore witness to his perseverance and sheer resolve.

But even more profound – a hope that continues to inspire generations who weren’t even witness to his journey.

Generations in other places quite apart from Canada.

It was in Ontario that Terry’s marathon of hope was really embraced – it soared in Ontario and to this day Ontarians give generously to the foundation.

Terry Fox embodies the notion of hope and when people think of a place that makes that faith possible.

And when they think of this – they often think – Ontario.

Imagine.

Imagine when people are looking for a place where they can invest their time and money – and where the risks they take are sure to be encouraged and rewarded – where their dreams can be made and shared.

And when they think of this – they think – Ontario.

It was Ontario where Thomas Bata came to build his shoe empire in the late 1930's – expanding the family business here from the Czech Republic.

He dreamed of cultivating the business on his own and chose Ontario as the place to do it. When in 1945 the Czech factories were nationalized by the communist government – the company headquarters also moved to Ontario.

At its height the Bata retail chain had 250 stores and a production facility in this province.

The Bata Shoe Museum remains a legacy of Thomas Bata's belief in Ontario as a place to innovate and create.

Whether we talk about someone who came to this country from afar, or someone who chose to remain here as opposed to anywhere in the world – Ontario offers opportunity for success.

Imagine.

Imagine when people are looking for a place where success is celebrated – not in an obnoxious way – but in a way that delights in the achievements of individuals and how their success enables them to give back to the communities in which they live – work and dream.

And when they think of this – they think – Ontario.

Just look at the way we celebrate the achievements of RIM or Wayne Gretzky. or Pinball Clemens – who – by the way – openly calls himself Canadian by choice.

We embrace these stories as if they were our own – as symbols of all that is possible in Ontario.

And imagine.

Imagine when people are looking for a place where resources are abundant – where nature envelopes them with beauty and richness – where cultural expression flourishes – and intellectual and human resources are nurtured.

And when they think of this – they think – Ontario.

Ontario has it all.

A major city – ranking in the top 5 in North America and on par with the economic powerhouses of the world.

Charming small towns and mid-size cities.

Industry – finance – a massive postsecondary education system – all of which are the envy of the world.

Fantastic agricultural land – a motherlode of natural resources and thousands of acres of pristine wilderness.

A free and open society.

While most places in North America could point to several of these assets – very few places could count all of them.

In the view of our chamber – these qualities provide the possibility for a dynamic dream for this province.

A dream that's bold but believable – audacious but achievable.

This is our dream:

Ontario is a MAGNET FOR THE WORLD

Whether people are looking to invest – to grow a business – to travel – to work or to start a family – they look to Ontario for the reasons I've described.

Ontario is a MAGNET FOR THE WORLD.

It is also these very aspects that keep so many people here in Ontario – second and third generation Ontarians who could choose to live anywhere in the world but who've chosen to stay here.

Ontario is a MAGNET FOR THE WORLD.

And Aboriginal Ontarians who – day in and day out – toil to build a better place for their children and grandchildren.

Ontario is a MAGNET FOR THE WORLD.

That doesn't mean that we are perfect – or that we live up to this reputation without fail.

We have many blemishes.

And when I say that – it is not meant to be a partisan statement.

Multiculturalism – access and equality – hope – and above all – opportunity – this is the soul of Ontario – but we still must work together to get it exactly right.

This is meant to be a message of inspiration as well as aspiration.

But while our core work at the Ontario Chamber of Commerce will continue to be advocacy – providing insight and solutions into what can make a better and more prosperous province – in the meantime we're willing to dream big.

To set our sights on the Ontario we can be.

We believe that each one of us – each individual – each organization – each community – can and must live up to that promise of a MAGNET FOR THE WORLD.

For whether you lead a business that attracts talent from overseas – like my good friend Shayne Smith of Wardrop Engineering.

A school whose research puts us on the global stage – like the U of T or so many of our outstanding universities and colleges.

Or a community or region – like Niagara – whose exquisite wines capture honours throughout the world.

We all have an opportunity to become a MAGNET FOR THE WORLD – and a responsibility to ensure that we meet that promise.

Even an individual becomes an ambassador for Ontario in their daily activities and travels.

So today – I want to invite you to join us in our campaign to build consensus around this dream for Ontario.

I want you to share your stories and the things you are doing to be a magnet for the world – whether on an individual level – an organizational level – or a community level.

I want you to spread the word to others – so that they too will begin to focus on the potential of tomorrow while overcoming the challenges of today.

It's time to dream big Ontario!

It's time for Ontario's big dream!

For only when we regain optimism in the future – when we shed this suffocating feeling of doom and gloom – will we in fact achieve a future in which we are stronger.

In which we can truly be A MAGNET FOR THE WORLD.

Thank you.