

Event: Empire/Canadian Club

Date: September 26, 2005

Time: 1:00 pm

Thank you very much for having me here today. I came here today to deliver a very simple message.

Let me get straight to the point. I've come here today to talk about the role Toronto businesses need to play in the safety of our city. That role is straightforward: I want Toronto's business community to provide jobs and other opportunities to young people in our city who do not have them.

I know that every person in this room is aware of recent events in our city – shootings have led the news and dominated conversations for months. I hear about it from the media, from other politicians, and from people I meet on the street and in the subway every day. People want us to keep this city safe, and they know that there is only one good time for us to act, and that time is now.

Toronto is a safe city.

I don't say it's safe to diminish our outrage at the murders that have rocked our city – every life ended by a bullet punches a gaping hole in the fabric of our community.

I don't say this city is safe in an effort to avoid my responsibility to face these crimes head-on – my office and City Council must lead the effort to keep our streets safe, and I have accepted this duty without hesitating. We have led, and we will continue to lead the effort to keep our streets safe and our neighbourhoods strong.

The reason I feel it necessary to remind people that our city is safe is that I am concerned. I am concerned that people might become discouraged. That people will start to accept that these kinds of crimes and somehow see them part of the normal course of events. I am worried that people will start to think of gun crime as an inevitable aspect of life in Toronto. And I am worried that people will think there's nothing to be done.

The reason I'm here today is because there is *so much* to be done. The City of Toronto has been working to keep our communities safe since long before this latest spate of violence. I will talk about some of the things we are doing, but first I want to say more about

why it is so important to provide employment and job training to young people.

We have proven over and over again that education, job training, and jobs that give young people hope and opportunity, help turn young people away from criminal activity. We can't prevent the murders that have already happened in our city. But if we take the initiative now, and give young people in our city a decent chance, we can prevent many potential crimes before they happen.

Nobody is better equipped to give this kind of chance to Toronto's at-risk youth than the people in this room today.

Through the City's Community Safety Plan, we have already seen what a difference makes to put young people to work, even if it is only for a few weeks in the summer.

The Community Safety Plan is a comprehensive group of initiatives aimed at balancing enforcement with prevention. We know that the greatest deterrent to committing a crime is the fear that you will be caught. Police Chief Blair and the Toronto Police Service send that message loud and clear with every new arrest and with every charge laid.

Recently, we have taken advantage of a Provincial program that has allowed us to hire 150 new police officers. Adding to the force on its own, though, isn't enough. We're also changing the role of officers in our community.

The police have increased their focus on community policing, and developing a partnership with the community. This both helps turn young people away from crime, and emboldens witnesses to come forward when a crime has been committed.

With the leadership of Chief Justice Roy McMurry, who is Chair of the City's Community Safety Panel, the City has been focused on prevention. We have been working with the school boards, other governments, businesses and community groups to invest in young people's futures and to give them an opportunity.

In the two years since the program has been in place, the City has worked with many partners to make a difference in the lives of hundreds of young Torontonians. Through the plan:

- The Provincial government funded summer jobs for youth from vulnerable communities this year and last.

- Centennial, Seneca, and Humber colleges have provided training to give young people the skills they need to find meaningful work
- Companies like Heenan Blaikie, Goodwill, and IBM have agreed to employ young people, and also to train them, so they get the most out of their employment opportunities.
- Carpenters Union Local 27 enabled eleven young people to participate in a 9-week pre-apprenticeship training program, opening the door for them to future skilled employment.

Together, we have helped hundreds of young Torontonians, but we need to help thousands. The City is expanding its programs wherever it can. I am pleased to be able to tell you that we will be expanding our Community Safety Plan from the current four target neighbourhoods to seven. At the same time, a separate City-led Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force is helping us to focus our community programs and facilities in many other neighbourhoods where there are not enough resources.

I attended a meeting of the GTA caucus of the federal government a few days ago. I was very pleased to see the politicians that Torontonians elected getting together to talk about this important

issue, and I went there to deliver a clear message. My message was that the time for talking is over.

It's time for our federal partners to act.

The City has shown what needs to be done. There are already many successful programs in place and they must be expanded across the city. For the federal government, that means providing new money for programs like Pathways to Education. This program has cut the dropout rate in the Regent Park neighbourhood from just under 60 percent, to well under 25 percent. That is a huge change. There is no better service we can give our young people than to find ways like this to keep them in school.

People expect this kind of investment from governments at every level. They expect community organizations and educational institutions to be involved.

I want you to know that I believe Toronto businesses also have a responsibility to invest in their city. A responsibility, and also an opportunity.

This is an opportunity to attract young employees who have the potential to contribute to the growth of your business. These are kids who are bursting with energy and ideas, who only need the opportunity to show what they can do.

As Mayor of Toronto, I have the privilege of speaking regularly with community leaders, local business people, and young people all over the city. I have heard many stories of people who have excelled when they were given even the smallest window of opportunity. And sadly, I have also heard the tragic stories of those who had no chance at all.

Whenever the subject of violent crime comes up in conversation, people's reaction is always the same. They are distraught, shocked, and sometimes horrified. But at the same time, people all over the city are quick to ask the question, "What can I do?"

Torontonians' willingness to do their part for their city one of the things I love so much about living in this city. Torontonians know how to pull together. They know how to work in partnership across neighbourhoods, across cultural boundaries, and across religious, racial, financial differences. It's this spirit that inspired me to be here today to talk about investing in our young people.

I have been using the term “investment” and I assure that I use it advisedly. I am not here today to ask you to give to charity. The proposal I have presented you with today can help make your business stronger, and our city safer. It is actually about the wisest investment you could make.

In addition to your self-interest, though, I hope that you also agree that this is a good idea because it is the right thing to do. We all owe it to our young people to give them a chance. We all owe it to our residents to divert young people toward jobs, and away from guns.

I recognize that it costs money to hire people. I recognize that some companies are small enough that adding even one or two people to the payroll makes a big difference.

But consider Heenan Blaikie, an excellent law firm, but not a large corporation. Heenan Blaikie brought in four young people from communities identified in the Community Safety Plan to work in their offices as paid interns. At the end of the planned period, things had worked out so well that one of these interns was offered a permanent position.

This is one example, and we need thousands more like it in Toronto. The unemployment rate for people between the ages of 15 and 24 is almost 14 percent in Toronto – far higher than the overall rate. And let's be clear: there are many young people from groups who face systemic barriers, and the unemployment rate among these groups is higher still.

We have to ensure that our efforts reach the right people. We have to make sure that people who face barriers because of race or poverty gain access to the same opportunities that are available to others. I often speak about how every resident in this city deserves to enjoy the benefits of living in Canada's economic capital. When I talk about hiring at-risk youth, I'm talking about hiring people who have been subject to disadvantages and discrimination. I'm talking about living up to the principle that we have to make this city work for everyone.

Hiring at-risk youth doesn't necessarily mean adding to the number of people on your payroll. Sometimes it can merely involve a shift in priorities when hiring opportunities come up naturally. I'm proud to say that the City of Toronto is a good example of this.

Our Parks and Recreation department for instance, concluded that resources were lacking in some of the communities targeted by the Community Safety Plan. They are in the process of filling these gaps. But even before this, they were already hiring young people from these communities who were in danger of slipping through the cracks and being left behind.

I firmly believe that City Council and my office must lead the effort to assist at-risk youth. We must lead both by setting a course, and by setting an example. My office is not large – a little more than twenty people. But we hire interns every year, and next summer at least one will come from an at-risk community.

On its own, this is a small step. But today, in addition to my request to the business community, I also want to challenge City Councillors and Toronto politicians from other governments to do whatever they can to employ young people who need an opportunity. I also extend this challenge to hospitals, universities, and other public institutions. Let every one of us lead by example.

In addition to all the other disadvantages many young people face in our city, there are often basic logistical challenges in connecting

them with employers. Through our Community Safety Secretariat, the City of Toronto is working to overcome these barriers as well. The Secretariat has been working with community agencies and with businesses to ensure that jobs go to the people who need them most.

If your company is willing to take up this challenge, they should contact Linda McGrath, who works in youth employment programs at the City. We have her contact information available here today.

The Secretariat is working to ensure that the people who benefit from these jobs are those who truly need the opportunity. At the same time, they work with employers to make sure that the jobs themselves are truly beneficial.

Providing jobs for at risk youth is about much more than putting a few dollars in their pocket. This is about giving young people hope for their own future. That means that the jobs have to be meaningful, teach skills, and lead to other opportunities.

A good example of this comes from Goodwill, another company that has already come forward to employ at-risk youth. Not only

have they agreed to give 100 at-risk young people in this city paid work, Goodwill is giving them skills training, making them qualified to move on and up in the working world.

Let me close by revisiting that term I have used so much today – “at-risk.” It is an inherently optimistic term. We have neighbourhoods that are “at risk” of being left behind. But we will not allow them to be left behind.

We have young people who are “at risk” of getting involved with crime. But we must give them the hope and opportunity that will keep them away from crime.

We have a city that has been touched by violence. We are “at risk” of allowing this violence become part of the backdrop. But we must not let violence become part of Toronto’s backdrop.

I sincerely hope that you share my commitment to make sure these risks never become realities.

Today I have been talking about rectifying some of the injustices and inequities in our city. But I want to close by reminding you of another consistent sentiment I hear every day: optimism. Despite

the headlines shouting about violence, and despite the tragic stories behind these headlines, Torontonians know that there is something special and wonderful happening in this city right now.

We are growing, and changing, and expanding – taking our place as one of the great world cities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. You can see it in our evolving skyline, in the changes that are starting to happen on our waterfront, and in smaller ways in every neighbourhood in the city.

Investing in our young people is part of this change. It's about making sure that every Torontonian gets the opportunity they deserve. It's also about building a prosperous, creative, welcoming city. When Toronto succeeds as a city, its businesses succeed also.

In closing, I would like you to think beyond the specific proposal I have presented here today. I'd like to invite you to consider other ways to change the role your company plays in our city. As Toronto changes, business leaders have the chance to be more than business leaders – they can be city builders. This city belongs to all of us, and I believe we share a common vision for its future.

I sincerely hope that you will work with me, with the Community Safety Secretariat, with labour and community groups, and with the young people of this city to make Toronto a place that fills every resident with pride, and with hope.

Thank you very much.