



State of the Region

**Remarks by the Chair of the Board for the
St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce**

May 14, 2010

Good afternoon, and welcome to the State of the Region Luncheon right here in the Green Energy Capital of Canada.

As you may know Niagara was recently declared the Green Energy Capital of Canada and there is no better place than in a room full of business, academic, and government leaders to celebrate this important declaration for our region.

On behalf of the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce, I would like to welcome our partners in this event – the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce and Grimsby & District Chamber of Commerce. Through collaboration on events like today’s State of the Region, we are demonstrating that we are committed to working more closely together with chambers in Niagara to ensure that the interests of business are being considered at all levels of government.

A stronger Niagara includes a diverse, modern, and robust private sector – and it’s our collective goal to be the voice of business in Niagara. Together, we represent more than 1700 businesses – businesses that pay property taxes, employ people, and contribute to causes that benefit the people living in our community. Without a strong and vibrant private sector, there can be no sustainable economic recovery, certainly no return to prosperity or growth.

As we mark the 40th Anniversary of the Regional Municipality of Niagara this year, the moment affords each of us the opportunity to reflect on Niagara.

We have come a long way since the launch of regional government in 1970 – and yet there continue to be barriers to our collective success. In the coming month, the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber will be releasing a report on the interaction between government and business in Niagara. In consultation with businesses across the region, we have examined areas in which we can work with governments to create an environment that fosters private sector growth and development.

We have weaknesses as a region – let's acknowledge them and get to work turning them into areas of strength for everyone's benefit.

For example, we need an inter-municipal transit system that is both cost effective and allows people to connect to Niagara's three largest urban centres. We cannot afford to waste more time on studies and reports – it's time to act.

The issue of Water/Waste Water rates needs to be addressed. Efficiencies between regional and municipal levels of government need to be found to stem escalating costs. We cannot afford the status quo, in tackling this issue it will be important to consider all options both public and private for management of water and wastewater.

This year, a Regional Budget Working Group (a joint effort among the Chambers in Niagara) was formed to analyze the budget developed by the Region of Niagara. One of the most substantive points raised by the Working Group was the need to involve the business community in developing options related to the allocation of \$350 million in realized revenue from provincial uploading. To date there has been little public debate and input into how best to leverage the provincial uploading. It's time to have that discussion.

These are only a few of the areas that we touch upon in our report – and we are confident that we will be able to work with government to have a positive impact on the future of Niagara.

This is an election year. It is our hope that those seeking office will take the time to understand the concerns of business in our communities. Whether at the municipal or regional level – we need people in office that will take a leadership role in making Niagara a place that encourages economic development, fosters the growth of business – and brings communities together.

Finally, as today's address by Chair Partington will be his final one to the Chamber of Commerce, I would like to thank Chair Partington for his years of public services. You have given of your time generously – and we are grateful for your commitment to your community and to Niagara.

You have been a leading advocate for Niagara Week, and of speaking with one voice at Queen's Park and in Ottawa – and your efforts have played an important role in gaining many of the infrastructure investments that we have in Niagara today.

As your retire from regional office – know that your contributions to the community have been greatly appreciated.

In closing, we look forward to continuing our strong working relationship with the regional councillors and staff in an effort to advance the interests of the business community. Together we will build a stronger Niagara.

Thank you