

Talking business

MP Candice Hooppner gets the low-down on the local economy from business leaders

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By Lorne Stelmach

Portage-Lisgar MP Candice Hooppner turned to local business recently to hear how the commercial sector is faring across her riding.

Hooppner sat down February 22 with representatives from a half dozen of the region's chambers of commerce.

Winkler, Morden, Altona, Carman and Treherne were represented at the meeting, which Hooppner welcomed as an opportunity to hear directly from those who are involved in the local business communities.

"They really are the experts," said Hooppner, who noted this meeting was part of a series of consultations she has held in the riding while Parliament has been prorogued.

Hooppner heard the thoughts of the chamber reps. on the current state of the economy as well as priorities for the next federal budget.

She also put two questions to the chamber representatives:

1. How is their business community faring?
2. What do they think are the best ways for the government to return the country to a balanced budget?

Input from the local chambers seemed to suggest the federal government is generally on the right track but they also urged caution particularly with government spending.

Morden Chamber president Kent Winning said the health of the business community is their primary concern, and he agreed with the suggestion the region's economy is rebounding.

However, he added the message from their chamber members was for the federal government to "pay close attention to the deficit ... don't let it get out of control."

A similar message came from Winkler's Betty Hiebert.

She cited concerns about labour shortages and the impact of some layoffs in the area, but she also agreed the area's commercial sector fared relatively well through the recession and has been starting to pick up.

"A lot of businesses had a good year in 2009," she noted, "but we still have to be cautious."

Hooppner suggested one important step that had been taken to help businesses is to cut business taxes. This will help keep more money in the pocket of the business owners and help enable them to increase employment opportunities or reinvest in their businesses.

She also said the government will have to watch such factors as the impact of the high value of the Canadian dollar.

"The dollar is inflated ... and that is a challenge for manufacturers."

Hiebert and Winning said they appreciated the opportunity to provide their input on these issues, and Hooppner agreed this kind of consultation is valuable to her.

"I wanted to get a sense of what the business community is experiencing. I wanted to get their perspective directly."

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