



MAYOR DREW DILKENS

STATE OF THE CITY – CHAMBER REMARKS 2025

“Building Windsor’s Future”

Thank you, Steve Salmons, I appreciate our working relationship and the importance of the Port Authority to our community. Thank you for your sponsorship of today’s event.

I also want to congratulate Ryan Donally on your appointment as CEO of the voice of business in Windsor-Essex. You’ll do a fine job and the Chamber is lucky to have you!

Before I start, I’d like to recognize my colleagues on City Council who have joined this lunch today: Joanne Gignac, Ed Sleiman, Jim Morrison, Renaldo Agostino, Gary Kaschak, Fabio Costante, Kieran McKenzie and Angelo Marignani.

They likely won’t tell you that their role, if done right, is far more than a part-time job requiring casual contact with residents or the odd meeting.

Anyone who has done this work, or is contemplating it, needs to know that serving as a City Councillor is far more than a part-time role and requires commitment seven-days a week with varying hours each day.

Elected office can be both rewarding and often thankless at the same time.

As we work together every day, through the thick and thin of issues – I don't often have the chance to acknowledge their efforts.

But today, in front of this esteemed group, allow me to express my gratitude for all your work on behalf of our residents and our city.

Also in the audience are several City employees.

I'd like to acknowledge our senior leadership team led by City Manager, Joe Mancina. Ladies and Gentlemen, I can tell you, these people work very hard on your behalf and solve some incredibly complex issues that help build our city and our region.

All the decisions approved by City Council are ultimately delivered by these people and their teams.

Thank you to our Senior Team - please give them a round of applause.

Finally, thank you all for being here.

As leaders in one of Canada's busiest cities, there are many different lunches and events you could attend each week, so my thanks go out to each of you for making time to be here, helping our Chamber, and hopefully gaining some insight on our "thinking-as-a city" moving forward.

We are just past the midpoint of this council term.

And as I stand here today, we are truly at an inflection point in our nation's history, which undoubtedly impacts our city and region.

Think about our current position.

The federal government is in chaos with a prorogued parliament and a leadership race underway to choose a new Prime Minister who, if the projections are correct, may not even have a seat in the House of Commons.

We are in the midst of an early provincial election as the government seeks a new mandate in contemplation of having to spend billions of dollars supporting businesses and families as a result of the whims of one man.

And that one man, Donald J. Trump, who holds one of the most powerful political roles in the world has taken aim at Canada - his country's closest friend, ally, and his largest trading partner.

Few in our country have as much at stake as those in this room today. Your employers, employees, colleagues and your families.

Of course, I'm talking about the threat of general tariffs.

A 25% tariff on all Canadian goods entering the United States would have a swift and dramatic impact on our region.

Within weeks, the auto industry would notice a decrease in vehicle sales as prices rise significantly.

This in turn, would have the OEM's adjust their inventory to match decreasing sales, meaning less people needed to make fewer cars.

This would lead to widespread layoffs across the board.

Parts suppliers would equally dial-down production and send their teams home as there would be no need to build parts for cars that aren't being made.

As the cascading effect of lower-demand works its way through the supply chain, you'd ultimately find, the young person behind the counter at Tim Horton's out of a job as disposable income drops while everyone saves money in an effort to weather the storm.

Twenty minutes away, our greenhouse growers operate the 2nd largest cluster of 'land-under-glass' on the planet! They grow and ship 'produce' 24/7/365.

They too will be faced with a stark reality as 85% of their production is exported to the United States.

And although we may be able to defer the purchase of a new vehicle for a period of time, we all need to eat – but would you be willing to pay 25% more for your vegetables? Many Americans wouldn't.

As the effects of tariffs play-out across the country, every community will have a different story, but ultimately, the effects will be the same, collectively leading us into a recession in Canada.

The widespread nature of this pain will require financial support from federal and provincial governments on a scale analogous-to-that provided during the pandemic.

This at a time when governments are least able to absorb that financial expenditure as everyone works to stabilize their balance sheets post-covid.

Now here are some things we all know about tariffs:

Tariffs are bad for Canadian business but equally harmful to US consumers who ultimately pay the bill. The recent announcement of 25% tariffs on steel and aluminum mean that cars, appliances and machinery will be more expensive to US consumers.

Tariffs will lead to inflation in the United States at a time when affordability is a central issue. This in turn, will lead to lower consumer spending and economic activity.

Tariffs will raise the value of the US dollar making their exports more unattractive-globally further amplifying their trade imbalance and leading to layoffs. We saw this when China retaliated against US tariffs, American farmers suffered due to reduced soybean and pork exports.

The uncertainty caused by tariffs, or even the threat of tariffs will discourage investment and expansion. Businesses will park their capital and wait for more certain times to mitigate risk.

It's fair to say, a trade war will see casualties on all sides.

Here's what we know and can expect with President Trump:

He doesn't much care for left-leaning politicians, so-called progressive-agendas, woke ideology, climate change or transgender issues.

He's mostly surrounded himself with a cabinet of people who've never held public office, nor do many have expertise in the areas to which they are being appointed.

He dislikes any focus on DEI.

He wants a greater focus on immigration and border security.

He sees fentanyl as the scourge it is in every community across our continent; but believes it's others who aren't doing enough to combat production of the drug and rise of fentanyl-related deaths across US cities and towns.

He's volatile, erratic, and wants to put America First. A laudable goal for any US president, I suppose.

He's prepared to throw-around the weight of his office, and the might of his military.

He's willing to use unconventional tools, economic leverage, and perhaps-more-against allies in an effort to achieve his end-goal of creating a '*golden age of America*' – the definition which itself is uncertain.

Perhaps he just wants to 'win' as defined by him, in real-time and subject to change.

One would assume that creating the 'golden age' and winning wouldn't entail causing US citizens more financial pain... but that too is uncertain.

Ultimately, President Trump doesn't care about us.

If I were to surmise what he really wants and what he really cares about is our oil, natural gas, potash and fresh water. And he cares a lot about our rare-earth minerals which Ontario is blessed to have massive supplies.

He also cares a lot about our strategic positioning related to the melting arctic and the abundant supplies of natural resources that exist there.

As the Arctic melts, more resources will become available to extract. But that means Russia, China and others will also want to stake-claims.

President Trump likely wants Canada and Greenland so he can create a global resource superpower, blocking adversaries with his global military superiority.

Has anyone here read the book called "Commanding Heights?" Authors were Daniel Yergin and Joseph Stanislaw. The book was also adapted into a 6-hour

docuseries by PBS. It's about 25 years old now but I strongly encourage you to read the book or watch the docuseries.

It really tells the story of economic control of segments of the economy that largely control or support others...things like steel, banking, railroads, oil and natural resources.

In context, what Donald Trump is doing is he's trying to build the commanding heights for his economy at any expense to others.

What he doesn't seem to fully understand is that dismantling our integrated industrial complex will take decades and would cost hundreds of billions of dollars.

The rewiring of all supply chains would cause a certain amount of global calamity leading to productivity and efficiency turmoil that doesn't seem to be well understood.

The President also seems to lack an understanding of the juxtaposition regarding our admiration and appreciation for our American friends, while strongly wanting to maintain our Canadian identity and pride.

Nonetheless, for the next three-years and eleven-months we are going to have to work with this self-described 'stable genius' as we plot a future for our country and work to stave off becoming the 51st state.

In Windsor, we are ground zero for the impacts of tariffs and this threat we must take seriously.

Pierre Berton wrote an incredible book on the War of 1812. In it he described cannons being placed along the waterfront in Detroit, aimed at what was then called Upper Canada. Likely aimed at Sandwich Town.

And although there are no recorded accounts of these cannons ever being fired, surely those alive at that time, living here, felt the weight of that threat from our neighbours across the river.

Today, so too, do we feel the potential of an economic threat on our country, in which we each hold a tremendous amount of pride.

And we have a lot to be proud of, and a lot to offer as a nation.

We are home to 41m capable people.

We boast the world's second biggest land mass.

We have the world's third largest oil supply.

We have the world's fifth largest supply of natural gas.

We have the third largest supply of uranium and the biggest supply of potash on the globe.

And of increasing importance, we have one of the worlds' largest supplies of fresh water.

We have a lot going for us, and it's no wonder others want/ what we have.

But we are a proud sovereign nation, and we should wear our maple leaf with pride. "Buy Canadian" where possible; and do little things that send financial signals that we won't be taken advantage of by a bully.

Stand tall and be proud to be a Canadian – but please, and I know it can be hard, don't boo at the US national anthem.

We're better than that, and we like our US neighbours too-much to hold them all accountable for the actions of a single American.

Let me share with you something I learned many years ago. I'm not perfect at this but I am getting better everyday.

I was talking with a Windsorite many of you will know, some thirty years ago.

He had taken the Amtrak train from Detroit to Chicago one hot summer day.

Midway through the ride the train broke down in the middle of nowhere. Then the AC stopped working. As he sat in the metal box, sweating, a severe thunderstorm started. That storm proved - to all on-board that the train cars were anything but waterproof.

And as he sat there deciding whether the indoor rain was comforting in the heat, or some form of Chinese water torture, he felt a certain calm.

I said, "You were calm? You must have been so stressed that you were stuck out there in those conditions."

To which he replied, “My father died of a heart attack at the age of 40, I’ve learned not to get stressed about the things I can’t control.”

And in that spirit, I’ve learned not to spend a lot of time in areas where my impact is irrelevant.

I try not to get stressed about the things I can’t control.

But if you know anything about me, I take ownership for the things I can.

Last week, I did an interview with CBC’s Rosemary Barton. Regarding the Trump Tariff threat, she asked me, “Are you angry?”

To which I replied, “No, I’m more resolute to win.” This is a rallying cry for me.

And I want this threat to be a rallying cry for all of us!

You may recall in 2018 I delivered my inaugural address, and it was not a speech in the traditional tone that one would expect for that type of an event.

It was meant to be a wakeup call for Windsor based on the-then recent decision by General Motors to close the auto plant in Oshawa.

The question then was – what happens to ‘Windsor’ if our largest employer closed their operation?

What are you prepared to do to make our region stronger and more resilient?

That speech led the City Council of the day to undertake the *Windsor Works* economic action plan that included over 40 recommendations, including a primary focus on landing an EV battery plant.

And then we got to work – and with the help of federal and provincial governments, and great partners in Stellantis and LG - we got it done.

I know that we are all aware of the incredible economic success which flows from the decision to locate the NextStar EV battery plant in east Windsor.

By now everyone in this room should be able to recite the statistics:

A \$6-billion project that will create over 2,500 new jobs and secure Windsor’s place at the heart of automotive manufacturing.

As I said at the time, the supply chain potential was going to be nearly as large, in aggregate, as the investments that Stellantis and LG are making in our region.

In fact, since 2023, the City of Windsor has welcomed 39 new investments and expansion projects above and beyond the NextStar build.

These additional investments will create about 2,700 more jobs and generate over \$830-million in capital spend within our community.

What's more, I'm excited to say that our pipeline of further job creation remains strong, with our municipal Economic Development team chasing over \$6-billion in further investment that could land up to an additional 4,600 employment opportunities.

There are other achievements that I would be remiss not to mention today.

Windsor's economy is expanding at nearly twice the national rate.

Stats Canada recognized our area's national-lead in business activity, and the Conference Board of Canada has Windsor outpacing all 24 major Canadian cities they study, with the highest rate of GDP growth per capita.

We've proudly earned our title as the 'Revival City', with new jobs and opportunities emerging daily.

And as our community grows, so does our responsibility to ensure housing - keeps pace with demand, and that our community is safe and vibrant.

By implementing Housing Solutions Made for Windsor, we are accelerating development of housing and safeguarding and shoring up critical infrastructure.

In 2024 we exceeded our provincial housing target by more than 130% and are now in-line for more than \$3m in recognition of that success.

Through our Strengthen the Core revitalization plan, we are attracting new investments, businesses, residents and visitors to our downtown. We hired more police, invested in support services for those struggling with mental

health and addiction and welcomed 40 new auxiliary police officers to our complement.

Through record investments in infrastructure, we're addressing aging roads and sewers, and working with upper levels of government to build out the key corridors that support cross-country and cross-border trade.

These actions are all key examples of “made in Windsor-solutions” to issues that communities are facing across Canada.

But I don't want any of you leaving here today thinking my remarks should be considered a victory lap.

I want to acknowledge that while we have seen these landmark investments in local economic development, our region's unemployment rate remains stubbornly high.

Residents across Windsor are feeling the impact of major cost-of-living pressures that are squeezing household budgets. Affordability is an issue for so many in our region.

And now... now we face Trump and the most unnecessary and illogical trade-war that the world never needed.

This whole situation reminds me of the *Sword of Damocles*. In that parable, a Tyrannical King invited a subject – Damocles - to a lavish dinner... but held a sword over his head with a single strand of horse-hair. Damocles was so nervous about the sword falling that he asked to be excused in fear of his life. In 1961, in the heart of the cold war, then President John F. Kennedy gave a speech at the United Nations. He stated, “every man, woman and child lives under a nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident, or miscalculation, or by madness.”

The term ‘madness’ sounds apropos today.

Of course we aren't under a nuclear threat, but we are going to need to lock arms, right now, in this moment, and not let go if it gets rough. And I'm not gonna sugar-coat this, and I hope I'm dead-wrong – but it may get rough.

And if it does – we need to stick together.

It's up to those of us elected to lead, and all of you here today, to take ownership and work to make a difference in areas you can control.

That will mean a continued and renewed focus on Building Windsor's Future – together.

We need to remain focused on investment, growth, and sustainability to protect what we've created here, and to weather the storms that may be coming.

And that's what we're working on.

So let's lift our heads up and look past the next four years.

We will be working intently to build this region with smart, strategic investments that allow for growth in Sandwich South – the area south of Windsor Airport.

When spring comes, we'll start work required for Lauzon-at-42 to be redone.

The planning work is well-underway related to the Lauzon Road extension from 42 to the 401. The Province of Ontario is finalizing their design work at that location with a commitment to build the \$125m cloverleaf that opens the 401 to Lauzon. Clearly, they won't do that work unless we are ready to connect our road at the same time.

The planning and design work for the widening of County Road 42 is well underway. This has to be done to support the economic growth at the airport, several massive housing projects south of the airport and, of course, our new acute care hospital.

Additionally, the enhancement of Lauzon from 42 to the EC Row expressway is also part of this work and will see significant upgrades as plans move forward.

This is all part of our 10-year, \$2.2-billion-dollar capital plan, that City Council approved just a few weeks ago.

This year alone we will spend more than \$225-million on capital projects in our city to help support a level of growth we haven't seen happen here, in my entire life.

The next piece of this puzzle is to open up nearly 1,000 acres of land in Sandwich South for employment purposes.

The Gordie Howe International Bridge will open later this year. It will have been nearly 25 years from the start of the conversation to the opening of the bridge. It's been incredible to see it come together.

So many people have told me how lucky we are to have this project being built in our backyard. True. But how are we lucky when it opens and you can drive from Montreal to Tijuana without ever having to stop – except at the border?

We need to put our flag in the ground if we want to create success for our region in the decades to come. And it will take about 8 years to make that land ready from the time City Council starts.

Our goal – creating the closest industrial park to the US-Canada border on the Canadian side.

Our friends in the County don't have land ready for these opportunities and we will, in the medium-term run-out of useable land at Windsor Airport.

There is urgency here and we have to act soon if we hope to ensure our future success as a city and region.

So, what else are we working on?

A permanent site for the H4 and a redo at Waterworld to allow for temporary support while the permanent site is located and built.

A new central library. We've been asked to vacate the Paul Martin Building as soon as practically possible as the owners want to accelerate development of the boutique hotel and event space.

Two days ago we approved a development on the Caron Avenue site that will ultimately lead to about 600 new units in our downtown. More details on that to come. And we continue to push on the other sites including Grace Hospital, Pelissier Street, Roseland Golf Course Parking Lot, Windsor Arena, Lowe High School and several other sites to add more supply to our housing inventory which is expected to help prices stabilize as the federal government dials-down immigration numbers this year.

There is so much happening to support the record growth in Windsor that it would be impossible in one speech to tell you how we allocate all parts of our billion+ dollar budget.

It's not a science...it's definitely an art, making incremental improvements over time to build a community.

Having been around the table during the Great Recession in 2008 and 2009, I can tell you the pressures were difficult.

I can also tell you that I'd take the pressures related to growth any day as it's exciting to see great things happen in a community like ours, that has so earned its stripes.

I first ran for City Council in 2003 and in that campaign, I came up short. In those days, the terms were three years, and we elected two representatives per ward.

In 2006, I worked hard and earned the trust of my neighbours and began to sit around the Council table.

In 2014, I earned the community's trust and have been proud and humbled to serve as Mayor since.

But as I run through this electoral history, I don't think about the countless debates, Council meetings or conversations with constituents.

I think about the fact that when I first ran – my daughter, Madison was only two years old and son Jack had not yet been born. Today they are 23 and 21.

Basically, for their entire lives, I've been making local politics part of our kitchen table conversation.

They, along with my very patient and supportive wife Jane, have been rockstars throughout.

My wife and I raised them in a city, a community, a province, and a country that is the envy of so many communities around the globe.

Madison moved to Edmonton last year and she came home for a visit last month, and Jane and I told her that while we're so proud of the life she's building – we simply wish she was building it here in Windsor.

We all know that Windsor is a great place to raise a family.

I also know there are challenges here, just as there are anywhere across Canada.

That will mean continued work to facilitate more housing options for folks laying down roots here.

Continued work to strengthen and diversify our economy.

Continued work to attract key investors across sectors.

Continued focus on solidifying our position as the *Automotive and Automobility Capital of Canada*.

This will mean standing united to fight against this looming trade war with a partner whom we share the worlds longest undefended border.

No fence, just a common understanding that brought us together in this way. The knowledge that we are better together. At least we were, and we will be again.

Regardless of your personal political views, I'm confident that I speak for everyone in this room when I say that, I sure hope that our national political leaders quickly get their act together and rise to the present challenge, as we have done in the past.

It really matters now, more than ever.

Closer to home, I have been asking myself – what can the city do to fight back against these challenges and reach out to seize the opportunities, wherever we find them?

What can we do to protect everything we've built and all that we're building?

I come back to our communities' character.

What are we known for?

Windsorites are tough. Determined. Some might stay stubborn.

And we punch well above our weight.

To my view, it's time for Windsor to stand up and start to be even more assertive.

We stood up and fought for the province to take notice and invest in the new acute care hospital, a project with a firm commitment for funding.

We stood up and made sure that LG and Stellantis took notice of a talented workforce and impressive business case.

We stood up and pushed the Province of Ontario to commit to a new 401 Interchange at an extended Lauzon Parkway.

We stood up and got those protestors away from the Ambassador Bridge when a similar group had occupied downtown Ottawa for more than a month – our police service cleared the way in less than a week.

We stood up to unite Border Mayors from coast to coast to ensure our voices are part of the national discourse around fighting Trump tariffs.

It's that spirit of resolve and that 'won't-quit passion and fight' that we have here in Windsor, that has transformed us into one of the most important communities to watch in Ontario and Canada.

I've said it before – Windsor is making the transition from a 'big small city' to a 'small big city'.

It is because of the success that we have seen over the past few years and looking ahead to the opportunities and challenges that are around the corner, that I believe we need to stand up, on our own two feet.

We need to show everyone how "Windsor proud" we are.

And as it relates to the things I can control - Jim Morrison loves it when I say - I've never been more optimistic about the future of our community than I am today.

And that there's no better place to build your career, buy a home and raise a family than right here.

Building to this day was a lot of hard work, friends.

Protecting what we've built is going to require even more from us.

And as the world continues to take notice of what we're accomplishing here, we must keep our focus on Windsor First.

Ontario First.

Canada First.

And if we do that, together, we'll continue to put the WIN in Windsor!

Thank you.

Drew Dilkens

Mayor, City of Windsor

February 12, 2025