

 <p>WESTERN ONTARIO WOWC WARDENS CAUCUS</p>	<p>Meeting with Hon. David Piccini Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development</p> <p>Monday, August 18, 2025 10:25 AM – 10:40 AM</p>
---	--

Chair Amy Martin:

Minister Piccini, thank you for meeting with us today. It is a pleasure to have our first delegation with you and look forward to many fruitful discussions.

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus represents 15 upper-tier and single-tier municipalities, that together form the economic engine of Ontario. We are one of the fastest-growing regions across the province, supported by your government's investments over the last few years – upwards of \$40 billion.

We have appreciated the opportunity to connect with your team over the past few years, creating a strong working relationship with former Deputy Minister Greg Meredith, ADM Ken Nakahara, and ADM Gloria Lee.

We were also pleased to host the Skilled Trades Special Advisor, David Cassidy, for a recent discussion with our Economic Development Directors.

Earlier this year at Queen's Park, we launched our 2025-2027 Strategic Priorities, emphasizing that Western Ontario is the economic engine of Ontario. We've focused on four core priorities: housing, workforce, economic growth, and infrastructure – reflecting the reality on the ground in our region.

Our region's population growth and housing starts now exceed those in Toronto, Hamilton, and even the provincial average. From 2016 to 2021, our population grew 7.8%, compared to 2.3% in Toronto and 5.8% across Ontario. In housing, Western Ontario saw a 28% increase in housing units, while Toronto grew by 17% and Ontario as a whole by 24%.

Our region continues to grow – and fast. With over 250,000 businesses, our exports grew by 34% from 2020 to 2022, reaching \$226 billion, including \$145 billion from manufacturing and \$12 billion from agriculture.

Vice-Chair Kevin Marriott:

However, trade risks related to U.S. policy pose significant threats to our economy. To address these challenges, WOWC is leading a regional Supply

Chain Mapping Project, and we are preparing an application to the Trade-Impacted Communities Program. We will lead this regional project along with partners such as local Economic Development Officers, Chambers of Commerce, industry associations, and post-secondary institutions. We look forward to sharing our insights to support our economy.

As you know, however, the future of our region depends on a skilled workforce. We are excited about the growth opportunities in clean energy and electric vehicles, but we also recognize the significant challenges in workforce retention and expansion.

Through our Western Ontario Workforce Strategy, we've identified that by 2030, Western Ontario will need to fill 214,000 new jobs. Investments in electric vehicle production, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing have created demand for another 30,000 skilled workers.

Healthcare and social assistance alone will require 82,000 jobs, and long-term care and early childhood education will need an additional 28,000 jobs.

Chair Amy Martin:

Yet many employers are struggling to fill these critical roles.

We've noted the increased funding for the Skills Development Fund in the 2025 Budget. The WOWC is ready to work with the Ministry to ensure that Ontarians have the skills to fill these in-demand jobs and are connected with employers, particularly in high-growth and high-demand sectors.

A couple of other points before we wrap up:

- ***Transit moves workers:*** WOWC is looking at establishing a regional rural transit authority – through a model similar to SWIFT, used for broadband procurement – to help improve inter-community mobility.
 - Currently, there is a lack of funding for rural transit; as an example, transit operational funding is \$191 per resident in the GTA, whereas this drops to \$13 in Huron-Bruce or \$14 in Windsor-Sarnia.
- ***We have lots of land:*** Within the WOWC catchment area, there are 66 properties (buildings and sites) listed on the Invest Ontario Partner Portal, for a total of just under 5,000 acres.
 - Sixteen of those properties are equal to or larger than 100 acres.
 - The WOWC catchment area represents 47% of the available land on the portal.

We would love to collaborate with you on workforce development initiatives and be involved in any pilot programs that could address workforce shortages and improve access to training in our region.

Minister, with the tremendous growth in our region, the increasing demand for skilled workers, and the bountiful space to grow – investing in Western Ontario will benefit all of Ontario.

We're ready to work with you to ensure we have the workforce needed to meet the growing demands of our economy.