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Advocacy Bulletin

Roundtable Discussion with Federal Minister Jim Carr

Dear WRLA Members;

February 16, 2021

The WRLA alongside other stakeholders was invited to participate in a Roundtable Discussion with Minister Jim Carr, Special Representative for the Prairies. The purpose of the meeting was to bring organizations that represent various businesses and industries that contribute to the Saskatoon Region and Provincial economy.

Each stakeholder was awarded the opportunity to:

- Provide feedback on the Federal COVID-19 supports, what worked, what didn't and why.
- Identify gaps, where support is still needed and why.
- Opportunity to put forward asks and discuss what we can expect for future avenues of support, i.e., economic stimulus, infrastructure funds, future role of Western Economic Diversification, specific targeted funds, etc.

Discussion Overview

Minister Carr kicked off the discussion with a brief introduction and acknowledgement that their government was quick to come out of the gates without their laces done up and experienced a few falls along the way.

He also acknowledged the Liberal Party's political failure in the Prairie provinces (0 seats is a political failure in his words) was a reflection of their platform not offering programs to meet the needs of the Prairies and as a result, Minister Carr has been appointed to be the "megaphone" for the Prairies and to be an advocate for the needs of the Prairies to Parliament Hill.

Following his comments each representative on the call had the opportunity to share feedback, realities, and concerns if we don't get back to some semblance of normal this year. Upon completion of the stakeholder presentations, the Minister addressed each participant individually as such ample time was provided to each industry represented on the call.

Over WRLA Presentation

While the WRLA acknowledged how grateful the LBM industry was to be able to operate, it became very clear on the call that if other industries don't start to recover soon, the available disposable income to keep projects in the funnel will diminish. Coupled with disruptions in the supply chain creating major material shortages and price increases, there is some concern that the stall created by this perfect storm will create further delays in economic recovery.

Member input was critical to shape the key messages shared by the WRLA and as a result of member feedback the following messages were presented:

- Growing concern about the longer-term effect of COVID-19 on the economy. The federal government needs to exhibit more urgency in vaccination and return to normal. This point was reinforced by all the other stakeholders on the line representing various industries.
- Labour shortages continue and this is mostly due to resources dedicated to individual support programs rather than being directed to SME's to support their operations.
- Invest in Canada first. Support domestic energy. Support domestic agriculture. Support domestic soft wood. Support domestic manufacturing. Support domestic innovation.
- Now might be an opportune time to invest in infrastructure. There are more than 4.5 million dwellings in Canada that need minor or major upgrades and with the focus on efficiency and climate strategy, investing in retrofitting schools, government buildings, and post secondary institutions will help meet climate strategy initiatives while generating employment and economic activity.
- Material shortages are growing, high demand and short supply is also driving up pricing and becoming an issue for other sectors which was addressed by both the WRLA and the Saskatoon Home Builder's Association.
- The proposal to implement a federal HRTC submitted by BMCC on behalf the industry as a whole was basically dismissed as such the request to revisit this proposal following the province of Saskatchewan's lead was put forward for reconsideration.
- Last but not least, opportunities for discussion between industry and government such as this one should take place more regularly to help support government policy and ensure sufficient insight from industry is provided.

Outcome

While not all of our points were acknowledged, the Minister indicated that he would like to connect to discuss the material shortages and supply disruptions. We have followed up and look forward to hearing back from the Minister's office on potential dates.

While the Minister did not acknowledge the HRTC piece, the proposals sent by both the WRLA and BMCC have been forwarded to the Minister's attention, in addition to the information pertaining to the Saskatchewan HRTC program which we communicated was very well received by residents and businesses alike. We will continue to keep you updated on the outcome.

Other important comments that were brought forward pertained to the need to revisit that Canadian Income Tax Act as this is past due. A revisit will enable efforts to find better solutions such tax incentives for example. Once again we will keep you informed on any follow up we receive.

Stay tuned for more information, we will continue to keep our members informed on our efforts, outcomes and important updates.

Should have any questions or comments, please feel free to reach out at lkovach@wrla.org or 204.770.2416.

Best regards,

Liz Kovach
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