

Regroupement des gens d'affaires (RGA) Breakfast

2005

Mr. Chair, members of the RGA, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you this morning once again, first and foremost to offer you my best wishes for a happy and very successful new year.

This year will feature a return engagement of my marathon feat-a speech entirely in French.

The theme of my talk today is "The City of Ottawa in 2005". Of course, given the time available to us this morning, it will not be possible to look at all the activities and problems that the City must deal with this year.

Before beginning, I'd like to congratulate the RGA on the excellent work accomplished over the past several years for the community as a whole.

January 1, 2005, was a milestone-the 150th anniversary of the City of Ottawa.

January 1, 2005, also marked the fourth anniversary of the new City of Ottawa.

This anniversary is the link that connects our past with our future. It gives us a great opportunity to reflect on our city's evolution, from its beginnings to today and into the years to come.

I have looked through the archives at some of the issues that the first Mayor of Ottawa, John Bower Lewis, and his councillors had to deal with 150 years ago, at their meetings in the old Byward Market building in Lowertown.

Ironically, many of the questions that the first City Council faced weren't all that different from those confronting us today at the council table.

Let's look at rail service...

This also began in Ottawa 150 years ago.

In 1854, the Citizen published the schedule offered to travellers by the brand-new Bytown and Prescott Railway Company.

According to the schedule, a train left the city at 6:00 a.m. and stopped at Gloucester, Osgoode, Oxford and Spencers. It then returned to Ottawa at 6:00 p.m.

Fast forward to 2005: the expansion of the O-Train's north-south line to Leitrim continues to progress. Our light rail transit service now carries up to 10,000 passengers a day on the line that links Bayview to Greenboro.

Following the extension of service to Leitrim, we will construct a line linking Barrhaven and Nepean South directly to downtown.

We are moving as fast as we can to offer an east-west light rail service. We are in the middle of an environmental assessment and will be in a position to study a range of recommendations for the best route and the best technology for the new service.

Our city's continued success depends on better, faster and more environmentally friendly public transit. If we do not plan now for a better public transit system, the congestion of our road network's principal arteries will eventually lead to the decline of our city's health and economy.

Last May, on the very day on which the federal and provincial governments announced a grant of \$400 million for the O-Train project, our Medical Officer of Health issued a smog alert for Ottawa—a problem directly linked to automobile emissions.

One hundred and fifty years ago, dramatic population growth and new infrastructure requirements were having major repercussions.

Between 1850 and 1855, the population of Ottawa doubled, growing from 5,000 to 10,000. There were serious problems to resolve with sewer lines and water quality.

Since the creation of our new City four years ago, the population of Ottawa has increased by more than 50,000.

That growth puts immense pressures on our current infrastructure.

Today, for example, one of the problems that the cities of Gatineau and Ottawa must deal with is the question of interprovincial transport, particularly trucking; this is a situation that will continue to deteriorate unless an alternative is found.

For this reason, I began to work with the National Capital Commission and the City of Gatineau some time ago towards the construction of new bridges that will enable us to eliminate the daily bottlenecks caused by lack of transportation corridors adequate to accommodate the increasing level of traffic.

I am very happy to be able to say that all levels of government involved in the issue of interprovincial transport have finally agreed to move forward on the environmental assessments needed to plan the construction of new bridges.

You have no doubt read in the papers that the governments of Ontario and Quebec have each released one million dollars for this purpose.

For its part, the federal government, through the agency of the NCC, is also going to contribute one million dollars, for a total of three million for the environmental assessment, which must be completed before construction can begin. If all goes well, I am confident that we will see two new bridges in our region within the next ten years.

But infrastructure includes more than just roads, bridges and sewers.

The human component is at least as important to the City's quality of life and vitality.

I am delighted that this Council approved several essential community projects that we have initiated or completed since the beginning of its term.

Here are some examples of projects we can be proud of:

- the new Plant Pool and Recreation Centre in Centretown;
- the renovated Glebe Community Centre;
- the new four-pad Sensplex and field house in Kanata;
- the new Gary J. Armstrong Long-Term Care Centre on Porter's Island;
- expansion of two more ice pads at the Ray Friel Centre in Orléans;
- the construction of a new two ice-pad facility in West Carleton;
- a new Thunderdome indoor soccer and recreation facility in Orléans;
- an R.F.P. process for an East-End Arts Facility;
- capital Funding assistance for several community arts facilities;
- new Petrie Island Beach and recreation complex;
- expansion of our Park and Ride facilities;
- through the leadership of Telecom Ottawa, extensive expansion of rural high-speed Internet services;
- start of construction on the new South Central District Library;
- a new day-care facility for the City View Centre for Child and Family Services;
- new state-of-the-art skateboard park at Centrepointe in Nepean;
- and I could add many more to the list.

Some of these projects were completed through our public-private partnership office. I pushed to establish the idea of a public-private partnership office, and credit should be given to this City Council for following through with a commitment to help build things differently in our community.

We will probably be able to build the two new bridges using the "Triple P" model.

These Triple P projects in Ottawa have leveraged an investment of almost \$100 million in new capital.

And I want to take this opportunity to thank Réjean Chartrand in the Triple P office for getting those deals and projects off the ground. Without his dedication and hard work, we would not have had the funds to undertake all our projects.

As everyone is aware, cities across Canada are coping with enormous infrastructure deficits and have been forced to find new ways to finance and carry out their projects.

In spite of the success of our public-private partnership projects, our City still needs help from the other levels of government to repair its aging infrastructures and build new ones.

Four years ago, the Big City Mayors initiated a campaign to get the federal and provincial governments to strike a financial "new deal" for cities.

Mayor Ducharme has played a key role in this respect in his capacity as the former president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. We are all extremely proud of what he has accomplished in this area.

I was aggressive in seeking a bigger share of tax revenues, both local and national.

Many people scoffed at the idea.

They said that the mayors would not see a single new dime from the other governments.

They were wrong.

Between now and mid-year, our City will be receiving new revenue totalling \$60 million, growing to over \$80 million per year in 2006, from federal and provincial gas tax rebates and federal GST rebates.

In addition, we will be receiving \$400 million from the federal and provincial governments for infrastructure funding for our light rail project.

Obviously our approach has been extremely successful, and our New Deal will make a huge difference in our ability to establish a long-term budget, as well as in our residents' quality of life.

We have a realistic, easily financed ten-year capital program.

The City of Ottawa is also a leader on environmental issues.

Just two months ago, our City signed a \$70-million contract with Energy Ottawa to take the landfill gas that is discharged from Trail Road and transform it into electricity.

Once in operation, these facilities will produce enough green energy to furnish electricity for up to 5,000 homes, as well as providing a revenue source for the City.

In addition, Energy Ottawa has improved its operations and now runs a green energy power plant at the Chaudière Falls on the Ottawa River.

The City of Ottawa is in the testing phase of a hybrid bus. Every year, one of the most unpredictable elements in our budget is the cost of gasoline for our vehicle fleet. The savings we can achieve here, as well as the reduction in emissions, will be financially and environmentally beneficial.

So I am delighted to announce that the replacement of the Mayor's automobile by a Toyota hybrid has resulted in savings of over \$200 per month in gas expenditures since last year.

I have asked the City Manager to look into replacing our vehicle fleet with hybrid vehicles wherever possible, as has been done in several American cities.

Barely three weeks from now, we will adopt the 2005 budget. This budget will emphasize public services.

The City's finances are very healthy.

The City of Ottawa has received a Triple A rating in the latest Moody's Investors Services Report, the highest possible grade.

This last report stated that Ottawa's rating is supported by a low debt burden, fiscal discipline and a commitment to long-range financial planning.

Our local economy remains very strong, which will allow us to finalize our budget with a sense of confidence.

The unemployment rate is at its lowest in three years.

Last year we created over 25,000 jobs in Ottawa-the greatest increase in employment in nearly five years of above-normal economic growth.

And that job growth will likely improve as our high-tech industry continues its steady rebound.

As important as infrastructure projects are to the well-being of the community, there are other aspects of its residents' lives that a dynamic and vibrant city must look after.

In this regard I cannot ignore an issue that is of great importance to Ottawa's French-speaking community. I am referring, of course, to the bilingual services provided by the City of Ottawa.

My position on the issue is crystal clear: In 2000, I gave Council my unqualified support when it approved the policy whose purpose is to ensure that our francophone population receives the services in French to which it is entitled.

I also supported the request that Council submitted to the provincial government for an amendment to the law establishing the City of Ottawa to include the city's language policy.

I am delighted to inform you that the provincial government has acted on Council's request and last month introduced a bill that requires the City of Ottawa to provide services to its residents in both French and English.

I expect to see this bill, which will enshrine in law the City of Ottawa's present policy, pass its third reading in the very near future.

This is a historic and unprecedented initiative for the province of Ontario-the first time that an Ontario municipality has been required to have a bilingualism policy.

It is a fact of life here that all National Capital Region residents, whether they live in Gatineau or in Ottawa, live in a community that is one organic whole.

We must also recognize that residents of both sides of the Ottawa River enjoy the advantages and benefits of living in the National Capital Region, including the major role played by the federal government in the daily life of all.

It is therefore essential not only to reflect local characteristics but also to project a national vision in our actions and policies.

This is one of the objectives of the tripartite committee composed of Mayor Yves Ducharme, NCC Chairman Marcel Beaudry and myself.

Over and above the ongoing collaboration among our various officials, the three of us have succeeded in establishing an atmosphere of cordiality and mutual respect that enables us to work together on a great number of issues of concern to our two cities and to the NCC as the representative of the federal government.

Two factors have completely altered the face of Ottawa over the last fifteen years.

The first is the phenomenal expansion of the high-tech sector, which has changed Ottawa from a relatively quiet administrative centre to a vibrant, multicultural and bilingual community.

The second great change is that we are now one big city, with a population of more than 800,000 people, equivalent to the population of New Brunswick!

This is the context in which we have developed the major guidelines that will shape the development of Ottawa over the next decades.

My vision of Ottawa is a city where people feel a sense of belonging and where they want to live or visit because it offers such a wonderful quality of life.

This implies a city with a sound rate of economic growth and a dynamic social and cultural life; a city that is safe and secure, where all communities work together harmoniously for the benefit of all; one that is environmentally healthy and where the rural and the urban complement and mutually enrich each other.

All in all, a capital of Canada that will truly reflect the values and character of this country nationally and internationally, a city that respects the heritage that we have inherited since the founding of Bytown in 1827 and its transformation into a city in 1855.

I began this speech with a glance at the era of the very first Ottawa City Council, 150 years ago, mentioning some of the challenges that the Council had to face.

Today our Council faces the same challenge: we are building a city—a world-class capital city.

And while we've laid a solid foundation over the last four years, there is still a great deal we must do, together, to build this new city.

Thank you!