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Conversation with The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc

Canada-U.S. Trade, Major Projects & Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo's Role in Canada's Economic Future

The Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce was honoured to welcome The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade, and One Canadian Economy, for an exclusive moderated conversation with Chamber President & CEO Dianna de Sousa.

The discussion explored the major economic and policy priorities shaping Canada's future, including Canada-U.S. trade, the renewal of CUSMA, internal trade barriers, labour mobility, major project execution, and Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo's role as one of Canada's most important economic regions.

Throughout the conversation, Minister LeBlanc emphasized the importance of building a more competitive, resilient, and unified Canadian economy, one that supports investment, strengthens trade relationships, accelerates major projects, and recognizes Alberta's critical contribution to national prosperity.



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Key Highlights

1. Canada's Economic Future Depends on Stronger Trade and Diversification

Minister LeBlanc highlighted the importance of Canada's highly integrated economic relationship with the United States and Mexico, noting that North America's competitiveness has been strengthened by decades of cross-border trade and investment.

At the same time, he emphasized the need for Canada to build greater resilience by diversifying markets, strengthening domestic supply chains, and advancing nation-building projects at home.

Key themes included:

- Maintaining a strong Canada-U.S. trade relationship
- Supporting the continued strength of CUSMA
- Reducing exposure to reliance on a single trading partner
- Expanding global market access for Canadian resources
- Building a more productive, competitive, and resilient economy

For Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo, this reinforced the importance of market access and trade certainty in supporting long-term investment and economic growth.



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2. Energy Is Central to Canada's National Competitiveness

A strong message throughout the discussion was that Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo is not only important to Alberta's economy, but to the entire country.

Minister LeBlanc spoke directly to the importance of the region's energy sector, describing Fort McMurray as an economic engine for Canada and recognizing the innovation, skill, and productivity driving the sector forward.

He noted that energy remains a key example of how Canada and the United States can work together in a way that benefits both economies, particularly given the importance of Alberta's energy supply to North American energy security.

Key takeaways included:

- Alberta's resource economy supports prosperity across Canada
- Fort McMurray plays a critical role in national and continental energy security
- Energy trade benefits both Canadian and American economies
- Projects such as Pathways represent world-leading innovation
- Canada must speak more clearly and confidently about the value of this region



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3. Major Projects Must Move from Announcements to Execution

Minister LeBlanc acknowledged the importance of turning policy commitments, memorandum of understanding, and project lists into real projects that get built.

He spoke to the federal government's focus on simplifying regulatory approvals, reducing duplication between levels of government, and creating clearer timelines for investment decisions.

Discussion points included:

- The importance of "one project, one review"
- Reducing duplicative federal and provincial processes
- Advancing projects concurrently rather than sequentially
- Providing greater certainty for private capital
- Ensuring environmental review and Indigenous consultation are completed properly and efficiently

For the region, this message was especially important. Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo's long-term growth depends on the ability to attract investment, move projects forward, and ensure that major economic opportunities are not delayed by unnecessary regulatory complexity.



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4. One Canadian Economy Requires Removing Internal Barriers

Minister LeBlanc described the “One Canadian Economy” agenda as a major priority focused on removing barriers that prevent people, goods, services, and investment from moving efficiently across the country.

He pointed to internal trade barriers, inconsistent rules, and duplicative requirements as obstacles to national productivity and competitiveness.

Key priorities included:

- Improving labour mobility across provinces and territories
- Recognizing provincial and territorial credentials more efficiently
- Creating faster pathways for skilled tradespeople to work where they are needed
- Reducing unnecessary differences in building codes and product requirements
- Supporting a more seamless Canadian market

For a region with significant workforce needs, stronger labour mobility is especially important. Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo depends on skilled workers, and a more coordinated national system would help support major projects, housing, infrastructure, and business growth.



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5. Federal-Provincial Collaboration Is Essential to Progress

Minister LeBlanc emphasized that Canadians expect governments to work together, particularly on files that directly affect jobs, investment, and economic opportunity.

He spoke positively about collaboration with provincial leaders, including the Government of Alberta, and noted that strong intergovernmental relationships are essential to advancing major projects and building national competitiveness.

Key themes included:

- Reducing friction between governments
- Aligning federal and provincial priorities
- Supporting practical solutions over jurisdictional disputes
- Building trust with provinces, territories, Indigenous partners, and industry
- Focusing on outcomes that matter to Canadians and businesses

This collaborative approach is critical for Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo, where federal and provincial alignment can directly affect investment, infrastructure, workforce development, and long-term economic opportunity.



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What This Means for Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo

1. Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo remains central to Canada's economic strength

Minister LeBlanc's remarks affirmed that the region's energy sector, workforce, innovation, and investment potential are vital to national prosperity.

2. Trade certainty and market access remain essential

The future of CUSMA, Canada-U.S. trade, and broader market diversification will continue to shape opportunities for Alberta energy and resource development.

3. Major project execution must remain a priority

Policy alignment is important, but the region's future depends on moving from announcements to action, including permitting certainty, infrastructure investment, and steel in the ground.

4. Labour mobility can help address workforce pressures

Reducing barriers for skilled workers across Canada would support local employers, major projects, housing development, and regional growth.

5. Advocacy and relationships matter

Events like this demonstrate the importance of sustained Chamber advocacy and strong relationships with government decision-makers at every level.



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Local Perspective

Today's conversation reinforced the importance of ensuring Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo's voice is heard at the national level.

For local businesses, the issues discussed, trade certainty, labour mobility, regulatory clarity, energy infrastructure, and major project execution, are not abstract policy topics. They directly affect investment decisions, workforce availability, operating costs, and long-term confidence in the region.

The Chamber continues to play a vital role in bringing business leaders and national decision-makers together, ensuring the realities of doing business in Wood Buffalo are understood, represented, and acted upon.

"This conversation reinforced why advocacy and access matter. When our members have the opportunity to engage directly with national decision-makers, we ensure the realities of doing business in Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo are heard, understood, and connected to the decisions shaping Canada's economic future."

– Dianna de Sousa, President & CEO, Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce



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Looking Ahead

The conversation with Minister LeBlanc reflected an important national moment: Canada is focused on competitiveness, resilience, internal trade, and major project development.

For Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo, this creates meaningful opportunity. As one of Canada's most significant economic regions, the community has a direct role to play in shaping the country's future, through energy, innovation, workforce development, infrastructure, and investment.

Continued collaboration between business, government, Indigenous partners, and community leaders will be essential to ensuring that national policy translates into regional opportunity and long-term prosperity.

The Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce extends its sincere appreciation to Bouchier, Presenting Sponsor of this event, and Oil Sands Alliance, Supporting Sponsor, for their commitment to fostering meaningful dialogue and strengthening connections between business, government, and community leaders.

Their support helps create opportunities for advocacy, engagement, and conversations that matter to the future of Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo.