

Speech to first meeting of Council 2015

A dhaoine uaisle,

Ta me thar a bheith sasta bheith anseo libh anocht, agus ba mhaith liom, ar dtus baire, ar son Cumann Tractala na Gaillimhe faila chuir romhaidh go leir.

Good evening and welcome to our 215th year as Galway Chamber of Commerce. I wish to express my sincere thanks for the confidence and trust you have placed in me by electing me as President of Galway Chamber of Commerce.

Comhghairdeas to each of you on your re-election – the dynamism and vision you have shown over the last year in driving Galway forward has been extraordinary. May I particularly single out the Chairs of all our committees who put in enormous amount of work and had the courage to take on some of our toughest problems. Also may I say fáilte roimh to our new directors. You will not only bring a wide range of skills and experience, but fresh and new insights on how we can further strengthen the impact of our work.

On behalf of the Council I would also like to sincerely thank retiring board members Michael O’Hare, Enda Folan and John Madden for their years of service and dedication on Galway Chamber of Commerce Chamber council.

The challenge for all of us over the next year is to continue to help make this City and County a better place to do business. Tonight, we turn over a new leaf. It’s 2015, and the Chamber’s job is to continue to make this city work. . Let’s make sure that our city gets its mojo back – and keeps it! Tonight, I want to share what Galway Chamber wants for this city this year and what I, as President, want for our city.

Our ambition must be to make our city as good as - if not better than - anywhere else in the world, and keep it that way. To achieve this we have to continue our insatiable appetite for advancement -

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- Advancement of all the proposals in our 5yr Economic Plan
- Advancement of the Atlantic Economic Corridor,
- Advancement of a 5yr Tourist Plan,
- Advancement of all the NUIG Strategic Review Recommendations
- Advancement of our Networking events particularly the V.C. Event on 17/18th Sept and Chamber Gala Business Awards Dinner on the 7th or 14th Nov. (Carmel Brennan)
- Advancement and completion of the upgrading of our Hardware and Software installation thus enabling us to communicate and grow our membership base in the smartest way possible. (Dave Hickey)

Also continue our campaign for:

- An credible City By-Pass,
- Sustainable Public Transport System,
- The Port Development,
- Urban rejuvenation including the development of both the Docks and Ceannt Station areas,
- Ensure the continued growth of Small, Medium & Large Business and that their interests are constantly at the heart of all local and National Government decisions.
- That Local Government provide physical infrastructure essential to support enterprise and promote employment. Also that they deliver essential services to business and are geared to respond to the needs of local communities, employers and entrepreneurs speedily and efficiently.

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On the National Front:

(1)

One key message tonight for us all is the absolute requirement that we protect our reputation as a pro-business economy. It has taken many years to develop our internationally recognised reputation as a good place to do business. We need to sustain that reputation as such things are easily lost.

All of us share the responsibility to ensure that our Governments of the future remain pro-business in their philosophy and policies. It's the Chamber agenda; it's our agenda. We need a stable business environment to support entrepreneurship, investment and job creation

(2)

It is imperative that not just SMEs but also small businesses be placed at the heart of government policy making to ensure that growth can be delivered upon to the benefit of all. It is recognised that small business is the lifeblood of any economy. However, we currently penalise risk-taking by charging the self-employed higher rates of labour tax and then denying them protection against the risks of failure if they become unemployed. This makes no sense and must be changed. One very positive initiative by Government is the establishment of the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, which plans to release €800 million+ in additional funding for our SME community.

Another is the Regional Action Plan for Jobs. We very much welcome the fact that our Economic Strategy Committee under Mike Devane is part of the consultation process. We ask that the "Regional Action Plan for Jobs concentrate its resources and efforts

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on the parts of the country most in need (It currently includes all parts of the country)

(3)

We all know that the pattern of development in Ireland has been very uneven so that economic and social disparities remain substantial and has resulted in average income in the West/N-West being 20% less than the Dublin/Cork areas. We ask that the Principles of European Regional Policy be applied to the Regional Action Plan for jobs. These Principles support regional and sector specific investment in economic development, and have been an important factor in the past 20 years in helping poorer regions to compete in the European Single market and to catch up with more prosperous areas.

It's three key priorities are:

Concentration of resources: the greater part of structural fund resources (70% for 2014-2020) are concentrated on the poorest regions and countries

Concentration of effort: Targeting Investments on Key Growth Priorities Research and Innovation; Information and Communications Technologies ICT; Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs and Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy.

Partnership: Each programme is developed through a collective process involving authorities at European, regional and local level, social partners and organisations from civil society. This approach help ensure that action is adapted to local and regional needs and priorities.

On the Regional Front:

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Galway Chamber's strategy for the future is to plan for 2030 and beyond. With the expected population growth and the employment forecast, the infrastructure impact must be prioritised as part of our planning for our greater city area. Our members are sorely feeling the cost of congestion – a traffic crisis which will dampen Galway City's attractiveness and reputation for years to come.. We need a steep change in transport infrastructure in the wider city area if it is not to come to a standstill – the current traffic chaos clearly demonstrates why we need a single local authority and Planning Department for this greater Galway City Area and why we should be planning for 2030 now.

TOURISM

Last week the Government launched their 10yr Tourism Policy with a target to increase overseas tourists from 7m to 10m, revenue from €3.5bn to 5bn and employment numbers from 205k to 250k. It didn't give a Regional breakdown. However we know from Bord Failte stats that Galway had 1.2m (17%) overseas visitors and 800k domestic and if you breakdown the National Stats on a prorata basis County Galway has 10k+ employed in Tourism related activity and receives in excess of €500m revenues and if this were to grow in line with Government National projections – within 10 years we should have an additional 6K people employed in the Tourism industry in Co. Galway and generating an additional €300m revenue.

However we cannot afford to take this increase for granted. The Tourism Industry has to devise a 5yr Plan and taking the lead in this regard will be a top priority for Galway Chamber in 2015.

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CHAMBER ECONOMIC PLAN AND ATLANTIC ECONOMIC CORRIDOR:

It is people who define this Region, none more so than Mike Devane and his entire Committee. They have the courage and ambition to solve some of this Region's toughest economic problems and their work will continue to be a top priority throughout 2015.

GALWAY PORT: Likewise with the Port development – we are currently “in match terms” only at half-time and awaiting the resumption of play. So far “Man of the Match” has been Declan Dooley and his team.

Some other key 2015 Chamber initiatives proposed for 2015

1. Key on my to-do list is the strategic imperative around developing the Chamber proposition for the next great generation. As a country we should be developing employers of the future, not just employees of the future. We must generate founders. On a personal level I am an admirer of Bizworld which is a non for profit education initiative that teaches children entrepreneurial skills at the ages of 10 to 12. St Joseph's N.S. Kinvara won the 2014 over all Bizfactor Social Entrepreneur of the Year Competition. I would like to see all National Schools in Galway join this initiative. We must be proactive in developing the next generation of business people and I am seeking two Council members who will represent us with Bizworld in promoting an entrepreneurial spirit and ethos amongst the next generation – in summary “We sow the seeds so they can grow their future”
2. Propose the launch of Galway Gift Voucher scheme under the auspices of Galway Chamber of Commerce to support our shop local campaign and help boost the local economy. This voucher

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scheme would be a great incentive to help boost retail in Galway. It will not only support local retailers, it will anchor local jobs and will lead to a boost in employment in the retail sector also. The vouchers will come in denominations of €10, €25 and €50 and members of the public can buy them for friends and family for all occasions (birthdays, communions etc.). Businesses could buy the vouchers as gifts for their employees (e.g. for Christmas or performance-related payments). Under the Revenue Commissioners approved 'Small Benefit Exemption' scheme, a company can award staff up to €250 as a once off payment that is tax free. However a lot of work is required to get this scheme off the ground including liaising with all other Retail Groups in Galway, Major Employers in Galway and surrounding areas, Galway City Council and possibly a "Service Industry" sponsor. The delivery of this Voucher scheme will be a priority for Galway Chamber in 2015 and I again call on two Council Members to put their name forward to spearhead this initiative. Galway City Business Ass., Latin Quarter, Galway Hotel Federation et will each be asked to nominate a member on to this committee. The successful implementation of this scheme will not only support local retailers, it will anchor local jobs and we hope it will lead to a boost in employment in the retail sector and revitalisation of City Centre and Salthill.

3. Lastly, next year is a momentous year for Ireland as it celebrates the 1916 Rising. The Proclamation contained many references to social principles. Today social inequality, homeless and rights of children continue to remain burning issues. To help bring attention to the issue of social inequality, I am proposing to the Chamber Council that we do something

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meaningful with our Chamber Member Charities this year. I would like your suggestions at the next Council Meeting.

In conclusion, our ambition must be to make Galway a better city. A better city is where start ups and small businesses drive growth. A better city has a long term economic, tourism and infrastructure development plan. A better city supports all range of employers and employees. A better city protects our most vulnerable and alone. A better city explores partnerships and embraces technology. That's what we want and it's what we deserve. Let's continue this great work together

Go raibh mile maith agaibh go leir