

Ecker blasts Liberals for anti-U.S. sentiment

Finance minister says recent comments could be financially detrimental to country

By **JASON MISNER**
The Champion

Finance Minister Janet Ecker said anti-U.S. sentiment from Parliament Hill has American businesses wondering if Canada is their ally and causing them to question investing in this country.

She said she recently met with some New York business people who told her they're not sure where Canada stands.



Janet Ecker

"It's not right that they think they have someone on their border who is not their friend or ally anymore," she told a crowd of supporters at a Tory MPP Ted Chudleigh fundraiser in Milton Thursday night.

"It's got nothing to do with an individual who supports or doesn't support a war, but you cannot keep doing what the Liberal caucus is doing, you cannot keep kicking our chief trading partner in the teeth and not expect that to start to harm that important trading relationship we have."

An applause roared from the crowd.

Some of the U.S. anti-sentiment includes Mississauga Centre MP Carolyn Parrish who referred to Americans as "bastards" a few weeks ago.

Comments don't represent all Canadians' views, says Ecker

Ms Ecker told the crowd the business community should do its part and reassure American investors that Ontario, and Canada for that matter, is still a friendly place to do business.

In an interview, Ms Ecker — noting \$1 million in trade occurs between the two nations every minute — said the possibility of a lack of American investment in Ontario is real.

"The concern that's been expressed is it's going to cause them, maybe, to not want to do as much investment with us or as much business here, that when they have to make a choice of locating a new plant in Milton as opposed to Ohio, for example, that they're going to go to Ohio and not to Milton."

Also, Ms Ecker said recent comments from American ambassador Paul Cellucci that the U.S. is "disappointed" with Canada's stance on the Iraq war prompted Premier Ernie Eves to write a letter expressing Ontario's unflinching support.

Meanwhile, Ms Ecker said this year's budget — mired in controversy for being released outside the Legislature March 27 — said pointedly that it will be before MPPs to debate when the House resumes sitting April 30.

In an interview, she said: (The budget) will be presented and debated in the house, as it always has, and voted on, as it always has, and the only difference with this budget was the venue we presented it in."

The decision to release the budget at a car parts business in Brampton rather than before elected politicians raised the ire of many. Opposition members called it a TV infomercial.

And, perhaps the most damaging of all criticism, Oakville Tory MPP and House Speaker Gary Carr expressed outrage at the budget's release.

He hired a constitutional lawyer who

released a report saying that while the budget's release outside Queen's Park wasn't illegal, it was unconstitutional.

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