



Chamber provides labour shortage solutions to the Federal Human Resources Minister

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The Chamber's Human Resources Committee and policy staff offered new ideas to increase the supply of workers during a meeting last week with the federal Minister of Human Resources and Social Development Monte Solberg.

"We view underrepresented groups in the workforce such as older workers, aboriginal people, and new immigrants as critical to solving the labour shortage," said Geoff Pradella, Vice-President of Public & Government Affairs.

To encourage older workers to remain in the labour force, the Chamber recommended changes to federal retirement programs such as the Canadian Pension Plan (CPP), Old Age Security (OAS), and RRSP. These recommendations were part of a Chamber submission to a federal expert panel which was soliciting ideas to better engage older workers.

Suggested changes include:

- Expand the age range of CPP eligibility from 60-70 to 60-75, and provide incentives for individuals who take their benefits later (e.g. after 70).
- Remove the clawback mechanism of the OAS so benefits aren't reduced as income increases.
- Allow greater flexibility to allow RRSP savings to continue until age 75.

The proposed approach could add 767,000 (3.5 per cent) more workers to the labour pool in Canada, according to Chamber estimates. In Alberta, this could mean 80,000 additional workers. It would also generate over \$24 billion in federal government income tax revenues and pension savings.

The Chamber also stressed the importance of the aboriginal community in solving the labour shortage.

"The aboriginal population represents the largest untapped labour force in the country," said Geoff Pradella. The unemployment rate of aboriginal people in Alberta is 14.9 per cent. A drop in this rate to the Canadian average of 4.8 per cent would add about 10,000 in the province.

In 2008, the Chamber plans to host an Aboriginal business and labour force symposium to increase aboriginal community-business engagement, promote cultural awareness, and share entrepreneurial skills.

Meeting participants also discussed the importance of immigration and temporary foreign workers. Businesses are increasingly using these avenues to access skilled talent.

Discussion centered on recommendations to improve both the immigration process and temporary foreign workers program, including:



- Improving the staffing levels at foreign Canadian Consulates to improve processing times, especially at those locations with the largest backlog of foreign worker applications for permanent residency, student and temporary foreign workers.
- Encouraging foreign Canadian Consulates to prioritize applications based on the "Occupations Under Pressure" list rather than on a "first come-first served" basis, to help speed the processing of applicants in the most needed skilled occupations.
- Examining the immigration processes for skilled immigrants in competing jurisdictions (such as Australia and New Zealand) with a view to adopting effective practices to improve the competitiveness Canada's competitiveness.
- Expanding the list of occupations in their Expedited Labour Market Opinion (LMO) Pilot Project to include as many of the Occupations Under Pressure as possible, giving priority consideration to applicants in managerial, technical and professional occupations.
- Considering broader information sources in determining the appropriate salary or wage level, including industry sector surveys that can often be provided by those employers.
- Expanding the list of occupations in their Expedited LMO Pilot Project to include as many of the Occupations Under Pressure as possible, giving priority consideration to applicants in managerial, technical and professional occupations.
- Increasing the numbers of candidates they are able to consider for the Provincial Nominee Program.

The Minister shared his appreciation for the past work of the Chamber's Human Resource's Committee and urged the Calgary Chamber of Commerce to continue to bring forward new ideas "We need organizations such as the Calgary Chamber to continue to help government improve the business climate in Canada."