



## Immigration key to success

**By Heather Douglas, President & CEO, The Calgary Chamber of Commerce  
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Russian poet Irina Ratushinskaya, long imprisoned in a Soviet labour camp, eloquently described the best way to retain one's humanity while in desperate circumstances.

"You must never allow yourself to hate," she wrote in *Grey is the Colour of Hope*. "While you cannot always perform heroic acts, you must not lose the ability to see another's concerns before your own. Being generous keeps you alive."  
Today, much of the world faces grinding poverty and terrible humanitarian conditions.

Many look longingly at Alberta's wealth, hear about our critical labour shortages, and line up at their local Canadian embassy to fill in the necessary applications for a visa or a work permit.

Alberta boasts a long, rich tradition of generously welcoming immigrants. This practice catapulted us into one of the fastest growing and most affluent jurisdictions in the Western world.

As immigrant families arrived, settled in homes, got jobs and contributed to our growth, they quietly sent cash back home to pay for their families' food, housing, health care and education. Being generous kept their loved ones alive and, in many cases, improved their economic status.

As more immigrants unpacked, Alberta was able to finance denser neighbourhoods, create close-knit communities, upgrade infrastructure (with more public transit, better water and waste-treatment facilities) and erect schools and playgrounds. Immigrants enriched our cultural fabric by introducing new food, music, arts, dance and language.

They launched import-export businesses and brought in many of their local goods and services to us while exporting Alberta's expertise to their families and friends.

We owe much of our prosperity to the hard work ethic of immigrants.

This week, the federal government listened keenly to the persuasive voice of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce and has implemented our recommendations to expand the number of occupations covered in the Temporary Foreign Workers Program. Employers who cannot find suitable Canadian candidates will now be able to hire temporary foreign workers faster -- in critical areas such as construction, engineering, maintenance, sales and service and manufacturing.

The Chamber applauds this positive move and makes several more recommendations:

- Increase staffing and resource levels at Canadian embassies to improve the processing of visas and work permits for permanent residents, temporary foreign workers and international students.
- Prioritize visa and work permit applications based on Canada's "Occupations Under Pressure List" to help speed applicants in the most needed occupations.
- Examine the immigration policies and processes from successful countries (such as Australia and New Zealand) and adopt their most effective practices.



- Work with the Alberta government to increase the number of candidates they can bring in through the provincial nominee program, an employer-driven initiative, which fast tracks the process for new immigrants to come to Alberta.

Albertans can afford to be big-hearted to immigrants. After all, with our aging population and declining birthrates, if we cynically decided today to not allow another person into our province, the last Albertan would die in 175 years.

While we cannot always perform heroic acts, our immigrants continue to be the gift that keeps on giving.