

November 13, 2009

The Honourable Diane Finley, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Human and Skills Development  
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada  
140 Promenade du Portage  
Gatineau, QC  
K1A 0J9

Dear Minister:

In October, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce concluded its 80<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Victoria. A major highlight of our AGM is the Policy Session. It is during the Policy Session that resolutions submitted by local chambers of commerce and boards of trade from across Canada are debated and voted on by accredited delegates. Once approved, these resolutions become policy of the Canadian Chamber for the following three years. In 2009, our delegates issued a clear and decisive national policy mandate that we intend to pursue vigorously with the federal government over the coming months.

The following resolutions, which pertain to your portfolio, were adopted by our delegates.

**Making the Work-Sharing Program Work Better**

Many aspects of this Program benefit employers and employees. To make the program clearer, more flexible and less administratively onerous on employers, as well as to encourage a higher level of participation, the Canadian Chamber recommends the federal government allow employers participating in Program to make business decisions without limiting any needed hiring and scheduling of employees; simplify employers' eligibility requirements for participation and shorten approval wait times; expand on the criteria for eligible positions; promote the Program to employers; and by December 31, 2009, re-assess the temporary measures included in Budget 2009 for possible extension beyond April 3, 2010.

**Skills Training for a Low Carbon Economy**

With the job losses associated with the economic crisis, and the retraining many Canadians are undertaking to prepare themselves to re-enter the workforce, comes an opportunity for Canada to plan for future low carbon industrial practices and the skilled workers needed to support growth for those industries. To maximize this opportunity, the Canadian Chamber

recommends that the federal government work with the provinces and territories to develop a database of emerging green technologies, and other technologies in which Canada has a competitive advantage, as well as a clear strategy for ensuring sufficient numbers of skilled workers are available for them; and ensure training funds and education programs support a strategy for addressing any skills shortfalls.

**Aboriginal Labour Force Strategy: Tapping into an Underutilized Pool of Labour Supply**

Even with the economic crisis, Canada continues to face a skills shortage that will only escalate with our aging population. Canada must position itself to fill this skills gap by tapping into underutilized pools of labour, such as the Aboriginal community which represents the largest untapped labour force in the country. The Canadian Chamber recommends the federal government, the business community, provinces, territories, Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal service providers coordinate their efforts to improve Aboriginal economic and labour market outcomes; strengthen electronic linkages to better connect Aboriginal clients to services and employers; and adopt flexible funding approaches that encourage successful economic development partnerships with Aboriginal communities.

**Increasing Canada's Productivity through Early Childhood Development**

The Canadian Chamber recommends the federal government, in cooperation with the provinces, territories and other stakeholders fund, and assist in the development of, an effective early childhood development program to improve Canada's long-term productivity through a better educated, more highly skilled workforce.

Should you wish to discuss these issues further, I would be pleased to do so.

Sincerely,

Perrin Beatty  
President and Chief Executive Officer

Attachments

c.c. Janice Charette, Deputy Minister, Human Resources and Skills  
Development Canada

Minister  
of Human Resources and  
Social Development



Ministre  
des Ressources humaines et du  
Développement social

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0J9

JAN 25 2010

The Honourable Perrin Beatty, P.C.  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
The Canadian Chamber of Commerce  
420-360 Albert Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1R 7X7

Dear Mr. Beatty:

I am writing in response to your letter of November 13, 2009, outlining the policy resolutions that were adopted during the Canadian Chamber of Commerce's 80th Annual General Meeting. I apologize for this delayed reply.

I wish to thank you for sharing these recommendations. I am always interested to learn of the policy considerations of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, as your input can help us to improve our programs to better meet the needs of Canadians.

As you may be aware, Canada's Economic Action Plan is helping Canadians and their families weather the economic storm, protect and create jobs, and prepare Canadians for the jobs of the future. For example, our government is, over the course of this year and the next, extending the duration of work-sharing agreements by 14 weeks to a maximum of 52 weeks, and increasing access to work-sharing agreements through greater flexibility in the qualifying criteria while streamlining processes for employers. This means that more Canadians can continue working while companies experience a temporary slowdown and recover. I am pleased to inform you that, since the Economic Action Plan initiative took effect in February, the Work-Sharing program has preserved the jobs of thousands of workers. We currently have over 5,900 Work-Sharing agreements in place, and they are helping over 167,000 Canadians continue working.

In addition, through the Economic Action Plan, we are providing a one-time grant of \$15 million to the YMCA and YWCA to place unemployed youth aged 15 to 30 years in internships with not-for-profit and community services organizations with a focus on environmental projects. As well, several of the projects being funded through the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership (ASEP) and the new Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund (ASTSIF) are supporting the development of greener skills.

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We also recently partnered with the Public Policy Forum on a symposium concerning green jobs and implications for the labour market. As we move forward, we recognize the importance of ensuring that our employment and labour market policies are responsive to the challenges associated with a low carbon economy, to support our continued competitiveness in a global market. We will continue to monitor the greening of the labour market, using tools at our disposal such as the Labour Market Information and Sector Councils, and explore future policy directions. In this context your recommendations are timely and will be carefully considered.

When it comes to specific populations, our government is cognizant of the need to fully engage Aboriginal people and communities in the economy and labour force. A number of programs have been put in place to enable Aboriginal people to obtain the training they need to successfully meet the labour and skills demands of Canadian businesses.

Specifically, Canada's Economic Action Plan is responding by providing an additional \$100 million for the ASEP program and \$75 million for the creation of the ASTSIF. Through a partnership-based approach, the ASEP program addresses Aboriginal employment by providing Aboriginal people with the skills and training needed to participate in major economic opportunities across Canada, leading to lasting benefits for Aboriginal communities, families and individuals. Partnerships consist of Aboriginal organizations and employers with federal government partners, provinces and territories, training institutions and others to develop and manage multi-year training-to-employment plans targeted to long term, sustainable skilled jobs. The ASTSIF is designed to address the short term requirements of the labour market with a focus on jobs, projects ready for immediate implementation, and expeditious delivery through the existing Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy (AHRDS) network. The ASTSIF, derived from an incentive fund concept considered a component of a new Aboriginal labour market strategy, was advanced and adjusted to respond to the economic downturn and acts as a bridge to the new Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS), the successor to the AHRDS, which will begin in 2010.

Through this new five-year, \$1.7 billion strategy, Aboriginal people will receive the training and skills they need, both now and for the long term. The ASETS will require Aboriginal service delivery organizations to develop demand-driven employment training programming and partnerships with the private sector, and across government. This strategy will include a rigorous five-year strategic planning process to improve coordination and collaboration between Aboriginal service delivery organizations, their communities, employers and government, in order to provide better economic and labour market outcomes for Aboriginal people.

The Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF) is a new open and discretionary project-based component of ASETS that will provide the ability to consider strategic responses to emerging economic and partnership opportunities across Aboriginal communities. The SPF will promote strategic partnerships, and innovations in systems and service delivery, as well as alignment to government priorities for Aboriginal labour market programming. This fund will be available to agreement holders under ASETS, as well as to other Aboriginal organizations.

While making investments in Canadian workers, our government also understands that families are the building blocks of a society, and that getting the best possible start in life is crucial to ensuring that children reach their full potential. We have consistently put families first by working closely and strategically with other levels of government across Canada. The Government's approach recognizes that parents know best what their children need and that every family has its own circumstances and needs. It also respects provincial and territorial responsibility for the delivery of early childhood development, including child care. As such, we have concentrated our early years investments on early childhood development and early learning and child care by providing \$5.9 billion in 2009–2010 through transfers to the provinces and territories, direct spending, such as the Universal Child Care Benefit, and tax measures for families, such as the Child Care Expense Deduction and the Child Tax Credit. This is more than any other government has spent in the history of Canada.

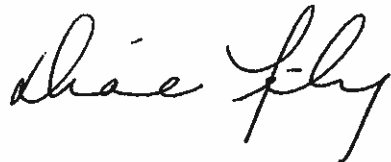
Recognizing the financial costs families face in raising their children and that child poverty has long-term consequences on the health and overall well-being of children and society, the Government is making a number of other investments including the Canada Child Tax Benefit, which comprises the National Child Benefit Supplement; Employment Insurance maternity/parental benefits; and programs and services for Aboriginal children. Together with the \$5.9 billion in support of early childhood development and early learning and child care, these measures represent an investment in children and their families of over \$19 billion in 2009-2010.

Moving forward, we will continue to concentrate our efforts on addressing the needs of Canadian employers and workers in transition, as well as Aboriginal people and families. We will continue to work with jurisdictions across the country and develop synergies with private sector and labour market partners to ensure skills development is well aligned with the changing needs of the labour market.

Further information on our programs is available on the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada Web site at [www.hrsdc.gc.ca](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca) and additional information on Canada's Economic Action Plan can be found at [www.actionplan.gc.ca](http://www.actionplan.gc.ca).

Again, I want to thank you for sharing the Canadian Chamber of Commerce's detailed observations and recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diane Finley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Hon. Diane Finley, P.C., M.P.