

May 8, 2014



Honourable Jason Kenney
Minister of Employment & Social Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Kenney,

The recent moratorium on the food services sector's use of the Temporary Foreign Workers is short sighted and has caused incredible disruption for business, workers, and customers. We ask that you immediately rescind your order and allow all sectors to access these critically important workers.

This province has experienced a significant period of growth and our businesses have worked hard to meet the demand. I am proud to say that our provincial government and training institutions have also ramped up both their capacity and outputs to serve the needs of a rapidly growing economy in all areas of the labour market. I also acknowledge that the federal government has worked with us – business and the provincial government – to address the long list of shortages we are faced with. For that, we remain thankful.

However, the need for businesses to access foreign workers is clear and the demand is continuing to grow. The demand of our markets is increasing and we are doing what every Canadian province should do to create wealth, jobs, and enhance the Canadian economy.

It's also very important to repeat the steps we have taken to enhance the quality and quantity of our domestic workforce. Saskatchewan has increased the education supports for Aboriginal and immigrant students. We have greatly expanded the apprenticeship and training spaces at our regional and technical colleges as well as at our universities. We have committed millions to undertake recruitment efforts across Canada and internationally. We are focusing on more flexible workplaces for women re-entering the workplace, older workers, and people with disabilities.

These efforts have been undertaken by our businesses, communities, and governments at all levels; however, even with this unprecedented level of worker development and recruitment, we still have a crisis in terms of a shortage of workers across the province.

This shortage clearly impacts the viability of continued economic growth in all communities. It negatively impacts all people – domestic and immigrant alike – currently working in businesses that may face reduced operating hours or who must refuse sales due to lack of staff. It also impacts the general public as they see reduced services in their communities. Clearly, the need is great and the situation is both complex and time sensitive.

As an organization that has always believed in partnership and shared wins, we offer the following considerations for you:

1. The lack of current labour market information in Saskatchewan and across the country makes public policy and business decisions more difficult. We pledge to use our resources, and those of our members, to create a greatly enhanced system, and to do it soon. We ask you join us in that effort.
2. Labour market situations vary by province. As such, we need a blend of programs with greater provincial input so that provincial needs can be met while ensuring national continuity. To that end, we repeat the offer of the provincial Chambers of Commerce to create with you, and the Canadian Chamber, a roundtable that will bring policy makers and business to the same table.
3. Public policy must be well planned while ensuring that all consequences are fully considered. The recent change to the restaurant and food service industry has created a flurry of very negative feedback to some employers and a vast range of immigrants – both TFWs and people who have lived here for most of their lives. The amount of hatred is surprising and shows the need for better communication about the facts of business, of the value of immigrants to Canadian culture, and a reminder that most of us are of immigrant descent. We are undertaking a media campaign here to take those messages to the public and would encourage you to do the same nationally.

Clearly, business is not the culprit; nor are the hard-working immigrants who accepted our invitation to come to Canada the problem. The need to get us all back on track and make the immigration system do what it was intended to do must be our collective priority.

In closing, I ask that you immediately rescind your order and allow TFWs for all sectors of the economy. Saskatchewan businesses will do our share and more to make the future outcomes more positive than those we have recently experienced.

Yours truly,

Steve McLellan
CEO

cc: Honourable Brad Wall, Premier of Saskatchewan
Honourable Bill Boyd, Minister of the Economy
Honourable Perrin Beatty, President & CEO, Canadian Chamber of Commerce
Board Members, Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce