



Immigration - A Better Life for All

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Immigration Policy Conference: Competition
for Global Talent
Ranchmen's Club,
Calgary, Alberta

June 28, 2012

Check Against Delivery

Good morning. I'd like to begin by thanking the conference co-chairs for the invitation to speak today – and I want to extend my appreciation to everyone involved in organizing this important event.

In an increasingly competitive and mobile world, it is important and indeed it is progressive for a nation to debate the value it places on its citizenship – and the circumstances under which it is prepared to offer and share it. Our collective attitudes and actions regarding immigration help shape the extent to which Canada will remain a vibrant and diverse country.

My own thoughts about immigration have been heavily influenced by my experiences at RBC and the fact that I live and work in one of the most diverse cities in the world, Toronto.

Over the past decade, my thinking has evolved ... from the early days, where I supported the notion of diversity as “the right thing to do”.... a kind of moral imperative... to today, where I believe that it is one of the most important opportunities we have – to grow successful companies, to build enriched and enriching communities, and to see Canada advance not just economic prosperity but also our reputation as one of the best places in the world to live.

While this conference is primarily about immigration, I strongly believe that immigration, integration, diversity and multiculturalism are all intertwined and success will be determined by our country's ability to lead across the board.

Why? It's very clear that the world is changing. As the world globalizes, many countries are implementing proactive immigration strategies to attract talent beneficial to their national interest, benefits that come from different perspectives, skill sets and experiences.

Other countries, who employ immigration strategies to preserve the past and protect the status quo, do so to their economic, social and political detriment. I lived in Japan for three years and there is no better example...and they are paying a high price.

Like the countries we operate in, companies are also faced with choices about immigration. For us at RBC, where we have a large workforce that serves 18 million clients – not just in Canada but around the world – we strive to be the workplace of choice; to be the financial institution of choice for diverse clients; and, to help build healthy inclusive communities.

I've seen firsthand at RBC how newcomers enrich our workplace – just as they enrich our country – with their international experience, diverse language skills, access to international networks and understanding of global markets. They make us more agile, more complete, more nimble and vital.

As a company, and as a nation, being a recognized leader in diversity and inclusion can help us better compete. I strongly believe that if managed well, immigration, diversity and multiculturalism is one of our country's great competitive advantages.

While we have challenges, we are far better positioned than many of the countries with which we compete to take chances and institute long-term policies.

Immigration is one of the main pathways to a more diverse workforce and to nation building. That's true today and it was true more than a hundred years ago, when our young country sent out a message to the world: Come join us. Our sparsely populated land needed people to settle it, to work it, quite literally to shape and create a nation. "Let them all come," said Cornelius Van Horne, the famous railway pioneer. "What we want is population."

What this remark lacked in eloquence, it made up for in truth. Canada needed to grow. The prime minister of the time, Wilfrid Laurier, understood and appreciated the need for a new wave of immigration. He and his government promoted Canada internationally as a promising place to start anew and build a future. But Laurier also proclaimed what would become a defining Canadian attitude toward newcomers.

He said: "We do not anticipate, and we do not want, that any individuals should forget the land of their origin or their ancestors. Let them look to the past, but let them also look to the future; let them look to the land of their ancestors, but let them also look to the land of their children."

This remark, so inclusive and forward looking, still reflects, I believe, our national sentiment about immigration: We will not try to make you forget your heritage. We will not try to shape you as individuals; it is you, and others like you, who will help shape us as a country.

A century later, our need for newcomers is just as great. Retiring baby boomers are increasing our need for a well-educated workforce. Canada is facing a serious labour shortage, a fact that can be mitigated in part by improving productivity, increasing training and education and lifting the retirement age. But more is needed.

In some provinces, and in certain industries such as mining, oil and gas and health care, there is already a shortage of workers with the requisite education and skill. Nowhere is this jobs deficit being felt more today than here in Alberta, where it is estimated that deficit could reach 114,000 jobs within the next 10 years.

A million jobs could be going unfilled across the country by 2021 because of a lack of qualified candidates. This will hamper the ability of provinces like Alberta, and our country as a whole, to grow economically, to prosper, and to achieve our potential. Even in a Province like Ontario where unemployment rates are high there remains a shortage of skills to fill many jobs.

In a competitive and economically volatile world, where every nation is scraping for every advantage, we can't afford to play shorthanded. We need to create a system that brings in more skilled workers.

The future success of our country depends on today's leaders making bold decisions, now and in the years ahead. This may be difficult against the backdrop of sluggish economic growth and relatively high unemployment but sound immigration policy will help resolve our problems not increase them.

But it is not as simple as opening the door wider.

You'll be hearing later today from the Immigration Minister, and he is right when he points out that immigrants to Canada are significantly more likely to be unemployed or underemployed than people born in this country.

Immigrants with a university degree have twice the unemployment rate and earn 40% less than Canadian-born people with a university degree. And it's not getting better – in fact, newer cohorts of immigrants are falling further behind. This is where integration, diversity and multiculturalism came into play. To build long-term prosperity we have to get the whole package right.

A recent report from RBC Economics concluded that if all immigrants found the work for which they are qualified, and if their skills were rewarded in a manner similar to that of Canadian-born workers, the result would be an increase in immigrant incomes of more than \$30-billion a year – or about 2 per cent of our GDP.

That's quite a gap. Are today's immigrants encountering bias? Are we welcoming people who are less likely to succeed, or whose skills are not in demand here? Are we squandering opportunity because of archaic accreditation rules? It is critical that we invest our time and resources in coming up with answers and devising solutions to reverse the trend.

I'm sure the Minister will have much to say about his proposed new selection process, which will place greater emphasis on language ability, youth and skilled trades. I commend the Minister for taking bold action on the immigration file but remind people (particularly in Alberta) long-term prosperity is not solely about filling skilled jobs. It is about maximizing human capital from immigration and many great Canadians would not necessarily pass a skill requirement test.

For my part, I'll say this: the effectiveness of immigration depends on attracting skilled immigrants and ensuring they find work that is consistent with their education and ability. Smart immigration combined with maximizing potential is a powerful combination.

If Canada is to maintain and improve its standard of living – and if we are going to be able to continue to afford the social safety net we've created – we must become the destination of choice for skilled immigrants: scientists, professionals and entrepreneurs. And we must not turn away from them once they're in the door. We must help them settle, adjust and begin to reach their potential.

We need local groups that help to integrate skilled immigrants into the regional labour markets. Let us not forget that as a group, the immigrants we welcome to Canada are better educated than those of us who were born here.

Yet, for all their qualifications and all their academic achievement, some immigrants find they lack the so-called “soft skills” that are vital to securing and succeeding in the job they want.

At the same time, we need businesses to see the tremendous reward that comes from hiring newcomers and helping them find their way – and we need those businesses to help government better understand what jobs and skills will be in demand tomorrow, not just today. As was said by a great Edmonton Oiler “go where the puck is going – not where it is.”

This is important because right now, labour market projections and federal priority occupation lists reflect past trends – not current and emerging industries and occupations.

The opportunity is there for government and business to create and share transparent, timely data about genuine market needs.

We must understand that people come to our country because they are driven by the dream of a better life. Immigrants to Canada want more than a first job. Like many of us, they want viable paths to improvement and promotion. They desire access to training. They seek role models and mentors. We must therefore actively cultivate and nurture our commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Last year, RBC worked with the Institute of Canadian Citizenship and other organizations on a survey that examined what it means to be a good citizen in our country.

Naturally, many of the respondents ticked off the boxes you’d expect: you need to follow the laws, you need to pay your taxes. But just as prominent were responses that spoke to a vision of social cohesion and community engagement. Sixty-three per cent of people said that “feeling connected to others in society” was “very important” to being a good Canadian citizen.

That ranked higher than knowing Canadian history. It ranked higher than displaying pride in Canada or giving to charity or speaking both French and English.

I will say it again: we need to help new immigrants settle, adjust, integrate and begin to feel that connection. It is not just about filling a skills need. This assistance requires an investment, a kind of pay it forward. Attracting, developing and retaining the best talent are essential to the success of any business, any city, any province, and any country.

We can’t succeed together if individuals aren’t succeeding on their own and maximizing their potential. And no country is better positioned to make this work than Canada.

Ladies and gentlemen, our labour challenges are real. They will impede future economic growth if we do not find a coordinated strategy to leverage the skills and talents of people who have come here looking for a chance to succeed – or are eager to come here and make their mark.

And let me just add: We make a mistake when we assume that, as a country, we can always change our mind sometime later, somewhere down the road, and open our door wider to welcome in the skilled people we need.

The competition for talent is growing increasingly global and increasingly tough. Many other countries share our demographic trends and are keenly aware of the ensuing economic challenges. They too seek people of talent and ability.

And let us not overlook the fact that in some cases, immigrants to Canada and other countries – people who have achieved success and are contributing to our economic well-being – are choosing to return to the land of their birth as these countries experience growth and improved living conditions.

As an example, a recent survey in the US found that 72% of Indian immigrants that returned to their home country said that the opportunities to start their own businesses were better or much better than in the US. For Chinese immigrant returnees, the figure was 81%. Immigrants have choices. They won't come here or stay here if they can't succeed.

Canada has a lot to offer as a destination and as a potential home – a good education system, quality health care, vibrant cities that are safe and clean, a rich and varied cultural life, and more.

But we are not the only game in town. The United States remains a popular choice for economic migrants. And the President's executive order halting deportation of young illegal immigrants highlights the recognition of the waste to their nation of repatriating young educated and talented workers. And we have active and determined rivals in Britain, Australia, New Zealand and countries in Europe. Australia has not only done a better job than us in facilitating smart immigration, they are attracting many skilled immigrants from Canada.

So we must at all times remember: we are in competition not only to prosper in the global economy, but also to attract and keep the people who will help us do that. We must therefore sell ourselves better to the world. We must ensure those who want to come here are not forced to wait an unreasonably long period of time in the queue.

We must be plain and straightforward about our ambitions for the future and our hopes for our country. We must move beyond tolerance to valuing and leveraging the differences that define and strengthen us. We must invest to make our cities the kind of places in which people of talent want to live, work and raise a family.

We must show to the people of the world, to the talents of today and tomorrow: Here is where you will find opportunity. Here is where you should build your life.

When we demonstrate to the world that we welcome newcomers, and that newcomers have every chance to succeed, that they are succeeding, and that there is room for more to succeed – then we become a more attractive destination for those wanting to build a better life.

The fact that our country naturalizes a higher percentage of immigrants than any other speaks well to the connection that people feel after coming here and the prospects they hold for ongoing success. We are good but we just have to be better.

I imagine there are many in this room who read with great interest the recent and rather provocative Globe and Mail series on immigration. The Globe advocated that Canada double its level of economic migration over the next five years, which would push total immigration to 400,000 new permanent residents annually. The result would be a younger Canada, more innovative, more diverse and better placed to meet its future labour needs. There are some who point to opinion polls showing that only a minority of Canadians support an increase in immigration targets. They cite this as reason for Canada to stay the course – to stick to that familiar annual benchmark of a quarter of a million newcomers.

But it is my belief – and I hope it is yours – that leadership means having the foresight and the confidence to guide public opinion, not merely reflect it. And I believe that today there is an urgent obligation upon policymakers and all interested parties – politicians, business leaders, academics and citizens alike – to educate Canadians about the reality of our demographic destiny. Immigration must be viewed as an opportunity that will benefit all Canadians.

One study, that albeit US, highlights the incredible power of immigration and found that 25% of all high-technology firms established between 1995 and 2005 had at least one foreign born founder. And by the way – those companies created 450,000 jobs and over \$50 billion in sales. And that is just high tech. Skilled immigrants support jobs and living standards. Immigrants will start new companies, add value to large and small companies and fill labour needs...critical to future prosperity.

We need to build our labour force in order to better compete internationally and ensure the ongoing viability of the social programs we cherish. To get there, we need to show leadership in confronting the challenges of how best to attract and integrate newcomers.

And I must say that I am very encouraged about the people and passion underlying the initiatives and programs underway. I chair the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council or TRIEC, which is working to ensure we attract skilled immigrants and integrate them into our local economies and social fabric. Groups like TRIEC, and CRIEC here in Calgary, are an important part of the network to leverage the new talents and energies offered to us. Here in Canada, we have over the decades built a country to which untold millions around the world have aspired to come – to escape tyranny... to reunite with family... to find new hope, build a life and pursue a dream.

Our history is made of diverse generations coming to our shores – and finding their way and their place among those who came before. A century ago, many thousands of men and women made the journey from Europe to a young country, and west toward the Rockies, attracted not only by the vastness of the land but by the opportunity to be free, to create something of their own out of the long and lonely Prairie.

They came to humble beginnings – helping to settle the land, building communities and contributing to the diverse and prosperous country we know today: rich in multicultural traditions and dedicated to the principles of democracy and to the freedoms and the rights of individuals. It has served us well to keep our door open – to better reflect the changing world as it is. But our population is aging and our needs are growing. Immigration, diversity and multiculturalism – collectively is a great source of competitive strength for Canada.

You should always play to your strengths. In today's challenged world, we have opportunities to do things from a public policy perspective not available to more troubled nations. The US and Europe have significant social issues that impact their immigration policies...we don't.

We are in an extended period of economic challenges that will be marked by slow growth, high unemployment and social challenges. The solutions are multi-dimensional and many involve fiscal discipline, regulation, industrial policy, skills and training, innovation, investment, and the list goes on.

But immigration is high on the list and part of the solution. It is easier for us in Canada. Our economy, culture, diversity, education and healthcare all provide advantage.

But we need:

- 1) Population > Human capital is our most valued asset
- 2) Skills
- 3) Talent

There are still challenges to overcome but opportunities to be seized – opportunities that will shape our current and future Canada. If we get it right it will pay great dividends for our country.

Thank you.