Federal Government Must Listen to Employers on New Immigration System

OTTAWA, ON, Jan 07, 2014: The federal government must ensure that upcoming changes to Canada's immigration system reflect the needs of employers, according to a report released today by the London Chamber of Commerce and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

The report, *Think Fast: Ontario Employer Perspectives on Immigration Reform and the Expression of Interest System*, provides advice to the federal government as it finalizes the design of the Expression of Interest (EOI) system, a new process for selecting and processing the majority of new immigrants to Canada.

Slated to be introduced in early 2015, the EOI system will give employers a key role in selecting future Canadians through job offers. In the new system, many immigrants will have jobs before they arrive in Canada.

Changes to the immigration system must meet the needs of the employers. The proposed EOI model needs to be efficient and competitive enough to attract the best global talent whilst ensuring the best use of already existing talent, especially the young graduates from our universities who find it hard to enter the job market says Ian Faris, President and CEO of the Ottawa Chamber of Commerce.

According to employers, *Canada must aim to have the fastest system in the world.* The speed of the system is the single most important factor in determining whether employers will participate in the EOI system. Under the Australian model, visas for permanent residence are processed within 58 days. The Government of Canada is proposing a 6 months processing time under the EOI system.

“This wait is far too long for businesses, many of whom have jobs that needed to be filled yesterday,” says Allan O'Dette, President and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

*The EOI system must also be client-focused.* In order to successfully encourage prospective immigrants and employers to use the EOI system, the federal government must view both parties as customers. This implies, at a minimum, one-window access to an online system, a 24 hour hotline for employers and immigrants, and minimal paper burden.
“A simple, customer-focused system will attract the participation of small and medium enterprises, the linchpins of our economy,” says O’Dette. “These employers typically do not have the time or resources necessary to navigate a complex system. Reduce the time and effort required to navigate the system, and they will participate; make the system too complex and bureaucratic, and they won’t.”

The EOI system must also be marketed internationally to top foreign talent. An ‘if you build it, they will come’ strategy will not work. Canada must aggressively brand itself to potential immigrants as the world’s best place to live, work, and do business.

According to O’Dette, “other countries are upping their games when it comes to attracting top talent from abroad. Our long queues and slow processing times for skilled immigrants are hurting our competitiveness. The EOI represents a big opportunity to fix our dysfunctional immigration system, if it is designed properly.”

To read all 13 recommendations, download the report here

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