



Jobs and the Economy Key Priorities for Canada's Premiers

NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, July 25, 2013 – Premiers are working at home and abroad to successfully compete in the global economy. They discussed ways to strengthen their economies through collaborative actions on skills and training, international relations and trade, immigration, infrastructure and energy.

Skills and Training

Premiers committed to ensuring that all Canadians have the skills and training they need to compete in the global economy. Premiers directed ministers responsible for education to explore ways to improve the alignment between secondary and post-secondary education and the skills required for Canadians to succeed. Premiers also tasked provincial-territorial education and labour market ministers to host a symposium on this issue with academic, business, and labour leaders, and to identify innovative best practices occurring across the country.

Québec and Atlantic Premiers shared progress on the work of the panels they both put in place to review the impacts of recent changes to Employment Insurance (EI) on workers, communities and employers in those provinces. These changes were made unilaterally by the federal government without consultation or shared analysis and therefore without a full understanding of their effects. Premiers reiterated the importance of EI contributing to economic stability during times of temporary unemployment, and agree that meaningful consultation with provinces and territories should always be undertaken prior to reforms to the EI system, and that the program must support the unique economic circumstances of all regions in Canada, including seasonal industries, and must be more responsive to workers.

International Relations and Trade

Premiers recognize the importance of efforts to enhance international trade and commerce, including with key markets such as India and China, and through the Trans-Pacific Partnership. They strongly support the active engagement of provinces and territories at the table in trade negotiations in areas of provincial and territorial jurisdiction. Premiers agreed their trade ministers should continue to strengthen their exchange of information and coordination of trade negotiation priorities and activities. Foreign investments are also key to Canada's global competitiveness, and it is critical that the federal government engage provincial and territorial governments in the foreign investment review process.

Premiers reiterate the importance of concluding an agreement with the European Union which would be beneficial to their citizens and businesses, and commit to continue their involvement in the negotiation process in order to conclude a comprehensive agreement as soon as possible.

Premiers support enhanced coordination to trade relations and regulatory cooperation with the U.S., and expressed the desire to work closely with governments and businesses in both countries to mitigate U.S. measures that make the border a greater impediment to trade. Premiers are disappointed with additional Country of Origin Labelling (COOL) restrictions imposed by the U.S. in May 2013 and hope the U.S. will move quickly to comply with its international trade obligations. These new restrictions will only prolong and worsen the negative effects COOL has already had for agricultural producers and processors in the U.S. and Canada.

Immigration

Immigration plays a critical role in helping to grow provincial and territorial economies. Premiers called on the federal government to scale up the caps on immigration levels within the Provincial and Territorial Nominee Programs. Premiers also discussed the need for timely and reliable access to Temporary Foreign Workers to fill labour and skills shortages. For example, as a result of the June 2013 flooding in Southern Alberta, it is

anticipated that increased access to temporary foreign workers will be needed to assist in the flood recovery. Premiers also noted that Provincial and Territorial Nominee Programs, the Canadian Experience Class, and the Federal Skilled Worker Program can provide an effective path for these workers to become Canadian citizens. Premiers called on the federal government to expedite the processing of visas as these delays are impacting jobs and access for foreign students, Premiers also called on the federal government to reconsider the closing of visa offices. Provinces and territories are best positioned to manage immigrant settlement and language services.

Québec is already responsible for selecting immigrants and settlement services in Québec under the Canada-Québec Accord and will share information and best practices with interested governments.

Infrastructure, Jobs and Growth

All Premiers agreed on the importance of strategic investments in infrastructure to create jobs and generate economic growth in all regions of the country. Provinces and territories are in the strongest position to understand their infrastructure priorities and how their capital spending drives economic prosperity, improves the movement of goods and people and builds the foundations for connecting to the global economy.

Given the importance of jobs and the economy, Premiers committed to continuing their conversation on these critical issues at a COF meeting this Fall.

Energy

Premiers released a Progress Report from the Council of the Federation Working Group on the Canadian Energy Strategy.* The Progress Report identifies the Vision and Principles for the Canadian Energy Strategy, highlights important work done by provinces and territories since the 2007 Council of the Federation Strategy “A Shared Vision for Energy in Canada”, and identifies challenges as well as potential opportunities facing Canada’s energy sector.

As owners of natural resources, provinces and territories have an essential role to play in developing Canada as a global leader in energy development, knowledge and technology. This essential role includes ensuring that energy development takes place in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner that includes conservation and efficiency and supports the transition to a lower carbon economy. Premiers also agreed that the Canadian Energy Strategy should address ways to improve access to affordable, clean, renewable and reliable supplies of energy in Aboriginal and remote communities. The Working Group will continue its work across jurisdictions and with stakeholders and in the ten action areas identified in the progress report.

* In July 2012, British Columbia indicated that it will not participate in the process at this time. In April 2013, Quebec indicated that it was open to work with jurisdictions in specific initiatives but did not intend to participate in the development of the Canadian Energy Strategy.

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