

Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat

Responses

1. Economic Recovery and Growth

Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?

As the world changes and adapts to global circumstances, the government must also change its approach with First Nations communities and people to ensure they fully become part of the market economy and clearly benefit from the resource development and growth which is beginning to be at the forefront of the economy. A recovery or decline has not impacted the First Nations to a great degree as many of the communities still exist in great poverty and live at the baseline of the social safety net in Canada. The ongoing need for basic programming and services is paramount for the communities and the government must continue to support these basic services and activities. The need for basic infrastructure and governance at the First Nation level is critical if our communities are going to shift from solely a poverty focus to one of hope and prosperity. Many First Nation communities are struggling to provide the basic social safety net and services to their people based on funding provided which has not kept pace with population growth and costs. Basic programs and services provided to all Canadians must continue for the First Nation communities to meet the demonstrated needs for housing, infrastructure, social services, education, employment and economic development. Another important aspect is access to capital and a top priority of our Chiefs in Atlantic Canada is economic development. All our First Nations communities need access to significant amounts of financial capital with long term loan terms to be able to address fully the capital needs for communities. The federal government approach to do capital on a cash basis has created many serious gaps in funding for communities to build and grow for the future. In particular, the First Nations Financing Authority model must be accelerated and expanded so more First Nations communities can get access to long term low interest cost financing. In Atlantic Canada, the community of Membertou First Nation is the first community in Canada to access these resources and much needed capital. This example can serve as an important gateway for other First Nations communities to build and grow with success and future development and more fully address the growing needs for capital for communities and very many major projects. Growth can only come to the First Nations communities based on further investment and speedy access to capital. Access brings opportunity and the ability of communities to become participants in the greater Atlantic and Canadian economy.

2. Job Creation

As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?

The size profile and the potential of the population of First Nations communities are considerable and must be accessed by the economy. The young and skilled population must become part of the economy and job creation both on and off reserve. To do this however; considerable work must be done to address critical barriers to employment and much needed life skills to move from a reserve community

to the city or town and even off reserve. Many times the transition does not go well and the First Nation person and/or family retreats back to the community after the first crisis that affects them. There is great need to address and build strong supports for those who wish to make the transition for training, education and employment. A successful model of this approach has been created in Cape Breton and is called the Unamaki Benefits office. This approach has produced sustainable jobs and contractor opportunities to allow our communities and individuals to create their own jobs. This is a model and approach which can be replicated across Atlantic Canada to allow all our communities to benefit from all activities and projects being undertaken in the Atlantic region. The direct connection with people and providing ongoing supports is a key element of success and long term employment. This can be done across the economic and in partnership with the Atlantic business community to allow clear connections between demands and the supply of labour for the economy and various businesses across the region. The key elements of a strong education foundation and upgrading, life skills and training to a job is critical to produce success. Through such a process it becomes the goal of the individual to achieve success based on their efforts. As noted, the foundation to jobs is education and the need to increase the levels of enrollments and success rates in all grades is paramount. Only based on this foundation will the youth have the greatest chance for success to pursue and trade and/or university degree and employment. There is a growing need for job internships starting at high school to allow young people additional opportunities to find out the nature of a job and employment before the start of a career for a lifetime.

3. Demographic Change

What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?

The population of our communities continues to grow at birth rate well above the Canadian average in all parts of Canada. In Atlantic Canada, the age profile of the region is old and older and in Nova Scotia in the past year more people died than were both putting increase pressure on all aspects for services and the growing need for employees. The median age of our people is 25 years old and have a great deal of time and expertise to contribute to the economy and be the key supply of labour for the economy. Nationally, as over 600,000 First nation youth enter the job market between 2001 to 2026 there is a great need to ensure they are the people to address skill shortages in the economy. The need for stronger partnerships with the private sector are essential to build trust and concrete strategies and actions whereby First Nations people are the preferred employees. Unless the private sector firms and First Nations establish a positive working relationship which produces jobs and opportunity this will be another lost generation for our communities. The government must respond to the devastating conditions which persist in our communities. The incidence of poor health and health risks to the very young, youth and elders must be address for communities to live life in safety and health. The supports of programming a services and programming to communities as home care and non-insured health benefits must not be eroded in any way. The significant gap in conditions must be address in partnership with agreed strategies and actions and new investments.

4. Productivity

With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada's population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?

First Nations must become part of the Atlantic and Canadian economy. Our communities have a very important role to become part of the economy and the solution to improved productivity. The lack of participation in the economy is a major challenge and this must change now not in the future. Both

provinces and the federal government must allow the First Nations to build strong relationships with the private sector to become the preferred supplier of skilled labour. There are many specific examples of success that have happened in Canada and these must be replicated in Atlantic Canada. In this region, a key aspect of our economy is the Atlantic fishery and tourism. Our communities need to build and strengthen their actions in these sectors but must also increase the level of diversification in other activities in the economy. Opportunities must match the skills, needs and aspirations of our communities and people. They must be fully engaged to ensure the opportunities created match their dreams and visions. Because of economic and employment racism which exist today, many First Nations people have not been given the opportunity to access opportunities. This must change and all skilled and educated First Nations people must be given the opportunity to clearly demonstrate their skill and vision of achievement. Open and frank dialogue with the private sector is essential if such barriers get destroyed and First Nations work in partnership to supply skilled employees. There is a need for growth in investment in economic development for communities and businesses. There is a need to build on existing demonstrated success and to continue to invest in the AICFI and ACFDI for 5 years of at least 8 million per year.

5. Other Challenges

With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?

The challenges of First Nations are the greatest challenge for the government of Canada. The reality of poverty and despair in many of our communities continues today. People and families without hope or a dream of a better future have very little to look forward to in the coming days, weeks or years. Unless fundamental changes and progress is made in the near future, increasing frustration will grow to direct actions. Many studies and reports have clearly documented the need for change and the need to move forward. The government must work with First Nations to focus on what changes are needed to recognize our rights and move toward implementation which would produce economic prosperity and well-being in the community and for the people. There is a great need for long term 20-30 years predictable funding for communities and the basic services they provide to their people. Core health services, mental health and addiction services are of paramount need for the communities to help change the perspective from helplessness to hope and opportunity. The conditions in the First Nations communities have not happened overnight and still today many Canadians just accept the situation. These problems have persisted for many decades and the need to focus on First Nations solutions to the myriad of problems is the only solution for the future. The leadership and people working in communities must continue efforts of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Truth & Reconciliation Commission to complete the path to healing.