

Congress of Aboriginal Peoples

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?

The Aboriginal Peoples of Canada have a strong self-employment rate, with very little variation across the country. The number of Aboriginal business owners and entrepreneurs is growing at a rate that far exceeds the self-employed rate for Canadians as a whole. In Canada, 98% of businesses are classed as small businesses (under 100 employees). It is the small businesses that employ half of the total labour force within the private sector. Similar to small businesses across Canada, Aboriginal businesses provide employment, economic sustainability and a sense of social security. Developing practical business prospects is necessary for Aboriginal Peoples' future achievements and for improving Aboriginal employment outlooks, particularly for the increasing number of young Aboriginal job seekers entering the labour market. Aboriginal entrepreneurs face many more barriers when first establishing their businesses compared to non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs. In general, Aboriginal companies usually have less access to capital and lack reputable business connections, they incur higher costs due to their remote locations, and they may have limited access to required skills and/or training. As the principal drivers of a community-based economic activity, entrepreneurs are needed for Canada's economic recovery and enhanced economic growth. In fact, self-employment rates move in line with the broader economy. Self-employment rates increase during phases of poor economic growth and decrease when growth is strong and the labour markets increase hiring. Improvements in self-employment rates is not a measurement to suggest an improved economic situation, yet the swiftly rising figures contributed to self-employed Aboriginal Peoples suggests a strong entrepreneurial impulse within Aboriginal communities, and potential for continued growth under the right conditions. Given the growing successes Aboriginal entrepreneurs have achieved, along with the continued growth and contributions to the Canadian labour force, providing tools and initiatives to assist small businesses further enhances economic growth within Canada. Small business programs need to be implemented to address the challenges Aboriginal entrepreneurs face. Specifically, programs to provide skills and training as well as mentoring Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Providing access to capital is also necessary to encourage economic development. Despite the obstacles faced by Aboriginal entrepreneurs, the impact of Aboriginal businesses is remarkable. TD Economics report estimated Aboriginal-owned businesses in Canada were projected to earn \$974 million in 2011.

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?

To promote job creation in Canada, investments in programs that support the continued growth of Aboriginal entrepreneurship are needed. Aboriginal run businesses benefit society as a whole by providing a sense of community and sustainability. They are diverse and range from construction, mining and oil and gas extraction to emerging knowledge base fields, such as education, health and

scientific and technical services. Aboriginal businesses in Canada have increased 85% between 1996 and 2006. These businesses are involved in global markets such as mineral exploration and tend to hire other Aboriginal Peoples. Programs promoting Aboriginal entrepreneurs require access to capital for stronger economic development initiatives. One of the fastest growing populations in Canada is the Aboriginal population, yet they are notably underrepresented within Canada's workforce. Aboriginal Peoples should be considered a solution to filling labour force gaps. Aboriginal Peoples want to work and contribute to society, they want to be financially independent, and they need opportunities made available to them. The challenge is to raise awareness among employers for creating opportunities to involve more Aboriginal Peoples in the labour force. It is important for governments to take a role in helping to publicize positive stories about Aboriginal Peoples. The mainstream media, too often portrays Aboriginal Peoples in a negative fashion by focusing on issues such as extreme poverty and substance abuse. By profiling Aboriginal Peoples in a positive light, and concentrating on Aboriginal achievements, more employers will be encouraged to engage with the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada. At the same time, this will assist in combating negative stereotypes among the non-Aboriginal population. Aboriginal organizations do participate in acknowledging success stories about Aboriginal Peoples, although they would be perceived with more legitimacy if they came from non-Aboriginal organizations. These measures would positively contribute to Aboriginal participation and reduce the current and future projected labour shortages. Increasing the Aboriginal population in the Canadian labour force also requires policies, programs and practices that support and encourage education, skills development, communications, respect and cultural awareness.

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?

Demographic projections indicate that future population and labour force growth in Canada will come from immigration as opposed to utilizing domestic sources; however, there are Aboriginal populations in Canada that are quite capable of contributing to Canada's labour shortages. The Aboriginal population in Canada is youthful and growing. In fact, Aboriginal Peoples in Canada represent a significant resource of potential workers. It is anticipated that over the next 10 years, there will be a need to occupy approximately 400,000 employment positions. At the same time, it is estimated that 400,000 Aboriginal Peoples within Canada are expected to be ready to enter the labour force. The Aboriginal population lags behind the non-Aboriginal population as it relates to labour market participation. The main reason Aboriginal Peoples are less likely to partake in the labour market is due to their lack of education. In Canada, 34% of Aboriginal Peoples between the ages of 25 to 64 have not completed the requirements for a high school diploma. In contrast, 15% of non-Aboriginal Peoples, in the same age group, did not complete high school. This grim number prevents Aboriginal Peoples from accessing specialized training and most jobs in our modern economy. These rates will further accumulate for future generations until the problem is rectified. In order to prepare for the upcoming challenges of our aging population, it is essential to make an assertive effort to boost educational attainment amongst Aboriginal youth. It is important to note for post-secondary education, there are fewer Aboriginal Peoples entering colleges and universities and an even fewer amount completing their education. A strategy should be put in place that not only promotes education but also emphasizes graduation. Sadly, there are minimal support mechanisms for Aboriginal Peoples to reinforce completing their education. Programs need to be instituted to provide support for students to continue on with their education until completion. For instance: making Elders available to Aboriginal Peoples at universities to assist the students. To fulfill the goal of maximizing Canada's potential domestic resources, it's important to promote programs that progress throughout ones educational experience.

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?

The approaching threat of the declining workforce limits our future well-being unless there are significant improvements in productivity and increasing technological innovation. Investing in Aboriginal Peoples across Canada via programs addressing social issues unique to Aboriginal Peoples could, in time, increase productivity in Canada. A productive Canada needs to respect the unique social challenges of Aboriginal Peoples. Partnering and collaborating with Aboriginal leaders is a useful way to motivate and mentor Aboriginal Youth as they enter into the work force. Partnerships with Aboriginal leaders offer an opportunity to build solid relationships and gain insight on what is needed from an Aboriginal perspective to close the labour gaps. Aboriginal leaders also need to be involved in trade commissions and delegations overseas to assist in areas such as promoting Canada's resource sector. Aboriginal Peoples and Métis inclusion would add value to policy debates, such as developing a Canadian energy strategy. In the energy sector, job requirements are and continue to remain high. A recent study indicates by 2015, there will be a demand for approximately 52,000 workers in the Oil Sands, particularly in construction, operations and engineering. This figure does not take into account the growing demand that will come from other divisions of the energy sector. Evidence suggests when Aboriginal organizations are directly involved in initiatives geared toward other Aboriginal Peoples, the outcomes are much better than when it is provided by governments or mainstream organizations. Relatively, it is reasonable to recommend Aboriginal leaders be given the tools to motivate Aboriginal youth to partake in education and the workforce, rather than non-Aboriginal Peoples. Developing capacity for engagement is not simply about inclusion, it has to be an equal relationship. To develop a strong capacity for engagement in complex financial and business transactions, it may be necessary to teach financial literacy and wealth management skills to Aboriginal Peoples to work together. Creating equal partners allows for more opportunities to promote education, professional skills and financial expertise to Aboriginal youth. Building healthy and collaborative relationships, over a long-term period, between Aboriginal Peoples and non-Aboriginal Peoples promises sizeable mutual benefits for both everyone.

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?

Aboriginal Peoples in Canada play an important role in helping businesses meet their current and future labour demands. Aboriginal Peoples face a great deal of challenges and barriers in order to participate in the workforce. The challenges range from minimal education, lack of qualifications and experience, differences in expectations between employees and employers and a reluctance to move away from their own communities to work. The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples represents those rights and interests of off-reserve, non-status, Status, Métis and Inuit Aboriginal Peoples living in urban, rural, remote and isolated areas throughout Canada. Given the imminent need to address labour shortages, the mobility issue needs to be addressed. Especially considering Statistics Canada's most recent figures indicating that 60% of Aboriginal Peoples live off-reserve. In some instances, individuals have no choice but to leave their communities to receive a better education or employment. In Canada, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees every Canadian the right to mobility. Fundamentally, Canadians have the right to move anywhere without restrictions and receive a comparable level of service. This right ensures Canadians have the right to live or work wherever they want within Canada. They are able to pursue opportunities in whatever province/territory they choose. This is not the case for Aboriginal

Peoples who choose to leave their communities. Once an Aboriginal person leaves a reserve, their rights are taken away. On-reserve Aboriginal Peoples who move off-reserve are no longer afforded the same level of services/programs as those who reside on-reserve. Thereby eliminating incentives for Aboriginal Peoples to leave their families and actively participate in the workforce. The mobility rate of Aboriginal Peoples living on-reserve limits the ability of industries to employ them to fill labour gaps off-reserve. According to the 2006 Census, the mobility rate for Aboriginal Peoples living on-reserve was the lowest at 4.6% compared to off-reserve Aboriginal Peoples in urban settings at 10.6% and in rural settings at 9.6%. The mobility rate for non-Aboriginal Peoples living in urban areas was 5.8% and 5.7% in rural regions.