



**Business Council of  
British Columbia**

July 31, 2008

Honourable Diane Finley  
Minister  
Department of Citizenship and Immigration  
House of Commons  
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

**Re: Amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act – Budget Bill C-50**

Dear Minister:

Thank you for the invitation to submit comments on the above matter, and also for providing an opportunity to engage with your senior officials during the past year in relation to the legislative amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) contained in Bill 50.

We applaud the government for taking the initiative to find ways to better address Canada's skills and labour shortage situation ~ through modifications and other administrative measures to streamline the operation of the Provincial Nominee Program, through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, and now by amending the IRPA to speed up the process of selecting skilled immigrants.

Here in British Columbia, employers from a range of industries continue to experience challenges in finding and hiring qualified workers. Within the Business Council's membership, these challenges are especially significant in industries such as health care, advanced technology, engineering, and construction. But the issue of skill shortages today resonates right across our economy. The Business Council has long believed that smart immigration policies can play an important role in increasing the supply of skilled and qualified individuals available to work in Canada.

With respect to the IRPA amendments, we welcome the fact that these changes will give the Minister greater latitude to directly respond to labour market requirements, to deal with the immigration backlog that now approaches 950,000, and to process certain categories of applicants on a priority basis. Among other benefits, skilled workers should arrive in Canada sooner as these measures are implemented. At the same time, we note that safeguards will be put in place – notably, the integrity of humanitarian considerations is maintained such that if foreign skilled worker applicants are rejected, they cannot circumvent the rules to enter Canada.

The Business Council is also encouraged by the introduction of the Canadian Experience Class. This will permit temporary foreign workers and international students to apply for permanent residency while in Canada. Over time, this should enable Canada to retain more of the talented people who are already here and who have demonstrated the ability to integrate into our work force.



Honourable Diane Finley  
July 31, 2008  
Page 2

and society. The new Canadian Experience Class will also help the country attract and recruit potential talent offshore.

While we raised some concerns, mostly of an administrative nature, during consultations with your officials over the past year, the Business Council supports the thrust of the government's efforts to align immigration policy more closely with the needs of the economy and labour market, especially through the economic class, while keeping a balance with other demands of the family and humanitarian categories.

We are hopeful that the amendments to the IRPA will give your department the ability to direct resources when and where needed and position Canada more favourably in the global competition for talent. The amendments should also help in clearing up the 950,000 application back-log and in ensuring that prospective economic class immigrants are processed in a timely manner. The new service standard for decisions on applicants – from 6-8 months as opposed to the current average of 5+ years – promises to make Canada a more appealing place to seek work and enable Canadian employers to better attract top talent.

Minister, the steps you have taken to date are positive. As we understand from discussions with your officials, more changes are being contemplated. In that connection, I would like to draw your attention to a report that the Business Council prepared and released last May entitled "Labour Market Needs, Immigration Programs, Foreign Credential Recognition, and Employment: LIFE in Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Canada". In that report, we compared the systems in major competing, immigrant-receiving countries and made 16 recommendations for improving the system in Canada. We are pleased that many of these recommendations are being acted on by your government and by the BC government.

There are other ideas that the government may wish to explore. One that warrants early consideration is to centralize the processing of skilled immigrant workers (to the extent possible for the initial parts that could be done electronically). This has been done in Australia, which as you know is a key competitor to Canada for talented immigrants.

The Business Council appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the work being done by the government to improve Canada's immigration system. We will be pleased to participate in any future consultations the government may hold on these issues.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "V. Greene".

Virginia Greene  
President and Chief Executive Officer

cc: Honourable Gordon Campbell, Premier of British Columbia  
Honourable Murray Coell, Minister of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development  
Business Council of British Columbia Board of Governors