

The Métis Nation and Canada's Labor Force Development
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The Hill Times has highlighted the fact that Aboriginal people under the age of 30 are the fastest-growing segment of Canada's work force and identified the need to engage them more in meeting Canada's increasingly pressing labor market challenges. The Métis people have a unique and dynamic role to play in this development.

Of the 1,400,000 Aboriginal people in Canada, there are 420,000 Métis. We are taxpayers and our labor force participation rate is approaching that of the general population. We account for a miniscule part of total federal Aboriginal spending, probably less than 1%, and are excluded from its Aboriginal education and health programs. At the same time, we consistently produce the best results in areas where Ottawa has invested in our institutions, namely skills development and business development.

A recent study by the Chamber of Commerce identified the unique opportunities and challenges offered by the Métis population in addressing the private sector's labor market needs:

The Métis are young, urban and highly mobile. Relative to the broader Aboriginal population, the Métis have better economic, social and health outcomes, making them an ideal source of labor for long term engagement. However, Métis education and labor market outcomes are less positive than those of the non-Aboriginal population."

Closing that gap in education and labor market outcomes has been a key focus of our work with industry in recent years as well as my recent meeting with the Prime Minister. It is very much a primary mutual objective of the Métis Nation and the Harper government. On that note, I was pleased that the Prime Minister has agreed to participate, along with his Ministers, in a broader meeting with Métis leaders to follow-up on the specific proposals I discussed with him.

Among them is renewing and strengthening our skills development agreements with Ottawa that have enabled us to significantly raise Métis labor force participation through partnerships with employers and an emphasis on training to employment. We want these agreements to address the education gap by ensuring greater Métis access to federally funded head start programs at the pre-school level and greater federal support for our endowment funds that provide bursaries to Métis students for post-secondary education. The important role played by the Métis Nation's education and training institutions should be recognized and built upon. According to a recent study, Saskatchewan's only Métis professional degree program - the teacher education program operated by the Gabriel Dumont Institute since 1984 - has increased provincial GDP by \$2.5

billion and provincial government revenue by \$1.0 billion.

Another job creation proposal I discussed with the Prime Minister is significantly expanding the capital of Métis Nation financial institutions that are leaders in their field in business development. These professionally managed, arms-length institutions providing loan and equity capital to Métis entrepreneurs have rolled over their initial capital many times over in new loans and investments, supporting the start-up or expansion of hundreds of Métis businesses that have created thousands of jobs.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce study recognized the key role of the Métis Nation in addressing Canada's skills challenge and the best practices of its economic development institutions in this regard. I was very pleased that its President, Perrin Beatty, wrote to the Prime Minister in advance of his meeting with me to forward the Chamber's recommendations: prioritize improving the education outcomes of the Métis; ensure equity in federal funding for Métis education and employment programs relative to other Aboriginal peoples; work to ensure that employment, education and economic development policies reflect the unique characteristics of the Métis; and work in collaboration with Métis to clarify Métis rights and spell out the "rules of engagement" for government, business and Métis organizations.

I am confident that with the interest of the Prime Minister and the backing of the private sector in pursuing greater Métis engagement in the workforce, significant gains can be achieved. The foremost impediment will be bureaucratic inertia, a particular problem for the Métis given the low profile we occupy in the vast Aboriginal affairs landscape in Ottawa. At the same time, the stakes are high both for the Métis people and the western Canadian economy; let us hope that the vision guiding the Prime Minister's jobs agenda will prevail.