

# DAILY COMMERCIAL NEWS

## AND CONSTRUCTION RECORD

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### Open-shop contractors and trades council agree next federal government must broaden skilled-labour focus

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Federal parties should focus their plans to address the skilled labour shortage away from just training and apprenticeships, say provincial trades and open-shop officials.

"Any proposals to improve incentives and training are a good thing but will there be jobs out there, at the end of the day, for apprentices or journeymen to work at," says Pat Dillon, business manager of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario.

Dillon would like to see all party leaders talking about how to "help Canada get a soft landing" going forward as the United States economic crisis continues and further economic pressures hit Canada.

"Indicators are that we could be in for a tough few years if a recession hits in any way like the early 1990s," adds Dillon. "It is one thing to talk about training a work force but the real issue is how many jobs are there going to be in the future economic plan."

David McDonald, chairman of the Open Shop Contractors Association (OSCA) says the next federal government, regardless of party affiliation, should only be concerned with reducing labour mobility barriers to help tackle the labour shortage. The federal government is in the best position to negotiate and deal with the provinces on the mobility issue.

"Our view is that the problems we have with training and apprenticeships are a provincial matter," says McDonald.

"There is no point in bringing in an extra level of bureaucracy, it is a provincial issue. The only thing which should be important at the federal level is to intervene on labour mobility."

The Canadian Construction Association (CCA) considers the labour mobility issue an important tool in addressing the labour shortage. CCA has called for more cash for publicly funded colleges that will improve training capacity which is crucial to tackling skilled trade shortages.

The Conservatives recently unveiled its plan to provide a \$2,000 completion bonus to apprentices who finish an apprenticeship program in a nationally recognized trade. Over the last two-and-a-half years the Conservatives have created the taxable \$1,000 Apprenticeship Incentive Grant and the Tradesperson's Tools Deduction of \$500 for expenditures over \$1,000 for tools required for employment.

The Liberals propose to invest \$600 million to make available to all full-time apprentices a \$400 per month education tax credit. Apprentices would also be eligible for guaranteed student loans of \$5,000, regardless of parental income. The Liberals would also revamp the immigration points system to give greater weight to the skilled trades.

The NDP would commit \$100 million a year for an expanded Canadian Training and Apprenticeship Tax Credit and would provide employers with targeted incentives to invest in training. The NDP says it would also work with the provinces and territories to develop a better way to recognize the prior experience and education of foreign workers and immigrants.

The Green Party would increase ear-marked federal transfer payments to provinces for post-secondary

education to enable post-secondary institutions, academic and trades, to increase spaces for student enrollment in exchange for tuition fee reductions. The Green Party would also forgive 50 per cent of a student's loan when they complete a degree or certificate program.

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