

## CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# Province running out of workers

By MARIA COOTAUCO  
Leader-Post

The province's strong economic upswing is in danger of stalling due to the worsening labour shortage, the Regina & District Chamber of Commerce warned Monday.

Based on the current rate of job creation that saw 20,700 new jobs between February 2006 and February 2007, the chamber estimates that Saskatchewan will run out of workers within 19 months.

"The demand out there is ever growing," said Randy Jeworski, president of the chamber.

"We are going to continually have to bring people here. There's no question about that. We cannot survive and take advantage of these opportunities if we try to do it with our population as is."

Despite the fact that the province enjoys a labour force participation rate of 70 per cent, the second-best in the country, and the second-lowest unemployment rate in the country at four per cent, there are not enough workers to meet the demand.

To satisfy supply and demand, the chamber released recommendations it would like to see the province implement to curb the impending labour crisis.

Education, recruitment, immigration, communications strategy and a more streamlined governmental process are the cornerstones of the chamber's report.

"A century ago, the Homestead Act set out and it gave land as an incentive to bring people to this province," Jeworski said. "Let's use education

this time to bring people back into Saskatchewan and drive that equation."

The chamber recommends educational incentives in the form of non-refundable tax credits, bursaries and loans for students who stay in the province. And by offering the incentives to non-residents and foreign workers, the chamber sees it as an opportunity to build a larger workforce.

Labour shortage is the largest single issue affecting the chamber's members, a 2007 Regina & District Chamber of Commerce economic indicator survey found.

Not only is the labour shortage creating reverberations in the chamber, but in the trades as well.

"I think it's probably the No. 1 public policy issue facing the government right now," said Michael Fougere, president of the Saskatchewan Construction Association. "It's facing all the construction trades."

Fougere spoke of a major construction company in Saskatoon that was slated to build a major project for development in Saskatoon. Earlier this year, the company postponed the construction due to labour shortages and rising material cost.

"If you have a larger demand to build many projects and you don't have an increasing number of skilled workers to help you, or you have a decreasing number, then obviously it's going to affect the pace of development for sure," Fougere added.

"In our industry, the labour shortage is not coming. It's here now. It is acute in some of our industries; it is actually hurting our development."

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