

Workforce Development
PNWER Annual Summit – Whistler, British Columbia

July 21, 2014

Co-Chairs Sen. Maralyn Chase, Washington State

Co-Chair Colin Smith, Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists, British Columbia (APEGBC)

Speakers:

Amrik Virk, *Minister of Advanced Education, Government of British Columbia*

Shana Peschek, *Director at Construction Center of Excellence, Renton Technical College*

Doug MacLaren, *CEO, SkillSource*

Randy Ambuehl, *Training Director, NW Electrical Industry JATC*

Dr. Steve Addison, *Director of Bachelor Degrees and New Program Development, Clover Park Technical College*

Ron Nilson, *CEO, Ground Force Manufacturing*

Elizabeth Aquin, *Senior Vice President, Petroleum Services Association of Canada*

Co-Chair Colin Smith introduces the conversation by acknowledging the importance of developing a workforce with the innovation and support from the representatives present at the meeting. Several topics were discussed during the workforce session which led to more concepts for improving workforce development and mobility in the region.

Pathways towards Finishing Degrees

The discussion began with Minister Amrik Virk acknowledging that different cultures are present in front of him with respect to workforce development and mobility. Transitioning into his involvement at Kwantlen Polytechnic School, he suggests that post-secondary schools should look towards establishing a system that cannot just meet the changing needs for students but also be able to “see around the corner” beforehand. He referenced the Canadian study that suggested the opening of 1 million jobs in British Columbia in its near future. Based on the diversity of BC he provided more demographic analysis to highlight the goal and need of increasing the rate and ratio of learners to earners. Minister Virk highlighted the topic of Mechatronics and the benefits of the field and how it provides an opportunity for integrating several disciplines together to meet the demand for training individuals in Advanced Manufacturing jobs. Approximately 275 million dollars were budgeted to improve the conditions of the students and faculties. Several goals are being aimed at with this budget such as;

- I) Improving the clearance of loans within 3-4 years after graduation
- II) Introducing new trade facilities at Vancouver College and Okanogan campus’
- III) Integrating the growing population of first nations into post-secondary education
- IV) Aiding handicapped students by making schools more accessible
- V) Creating paths to go around the struggles of school waitlists

VI) Inviting partnerships with regional industries

Following Minister Virk's comments, Colin Smith spoke about the importance of Engineering Mobility in the region. PNWER has been commented for several years to encouraging states and provinces to provide reciprocal engineering licence recognition. Following Colin comments, Senator Maralyn Chase points to the importance of the middle market business in North America. Being that the middle market is around the same percentage of the population in both Canada and the US; Senator Chase explains the importance of projecting revenue growths for this market for the lone reason being this sector is both healthy and well rooted in our communities. Disregarding Canada as its own middle market has not been studied as thoroughly; the US has around 3300 middle market companies poised to grow even further. The introduction of advanced manufacturing techniques is believed to be among the causes for this.

Both Shana Peschek and Doug McLaren spoke together regarding cross border collaboration on apprenticeship in BC and Washington State. Shana works for the Construction Center of Excellence which puts students through training programs for skilled trades people. One of the goals of the program is to train skilled workers and give them the most opportunity for work. One trade in particular is working on cross border recognition for skilled electrical workers.

Randy Ambuehl from the IBEW highlighted the demand for electricians in the construction industry. Randy suggests that credentials recognition in Canada and the US make it hard for workers to work on the opposite side of their respective border. To treat the demand for North America as a whole, lessons should be learnt from the Red Seal program in Canada which allows workers to travel and work freely from coast to coast in Canadian provinces. Following a brief summary of his ongoing position at his electrical joint training program, he aims to recognize the several workers who travel around the globe in attempts to bring them back to North America. The demand for trade workers in BC is slowly but surely reaching the same level as the present demand for them in Alberta. Demands which, Randy proclaims should be more inviting towards the jobless tradesmen in the US. Pilot programs are also a goal of his to create so that we can further study the benefits of this dual-idea mentality as work permits are currently the only thing in the way.

Dr. Steve Addison later adds on the topic of Mechatronics and Manufacturing specifically in the area of Washington. Because of the expected rise of job openings in the field of advanced manufacturing, He has established a four year program at his Technical College in Clover Park where students can learn manufacturing and operation studies. The reason for the program being four years is to attract more students who are looking forward towards completing their MBA for the potential openings in managerial positions also expected to pop up in the near future. The programs course schedule is designed in the following format:

1st Quarter – Workshop Safety, Qualitative Process and Inspection

2nd Quarter – Fundamental Physics and Mathematics, Programming in AutoCad and Solidworks

3rd Quarter – Circuits, AC Design, Motors, and digital electronics

4th Quarter – Robotics followed by the Capstone project

With the associates' degree offered after completion, student will find most of their work in the manufacturing, construction, and food processing industries. Mr. Addison adds that the uniqueness of this program in comparison to all the other ones in Washington is its versatility and utility in the industry outside of Washington.

Ron Nilson is then introduced as the next speaker to add his thoughts on the matter of student aid. Referencing the statistic for the high percentage of students who don't graduate high school several times, He argues that not enough support is being asked for from the private sector that has both the funds and willingness to invest in the students in their area. He has also helped establish a program in the state of Idaho where students acquire technical education during high school, adding that 95 percent of students in the program also manage to graduate from high school as well.

The last speaker for the event was Elizabeth Aquin with PSAC, a national trade association in Canada that represents 250 different services in the nation. Labour force requirements, she states, represent 125,000 individuals who are in low growth scenarios while only 149,000 are in the scenario of expansion. To assist in the aid of meeting demand for workers in both nations, her organization performs the following initiatives;

- A) Organize virtual career fairs for unemployed Canadians
- B) Recruit workers across the country in order to balance needed demand in the given states
- C) The Calgary Catholic Immigration Society and Canadian Military; both assist immigrants in learning great transferable skills towards their career
- D) Organize presentations with member companies for aboriginal students to raise awareness of the services and workforce in the current industry

The session ended with a discussion on potential action items with a focus on continuing efforts for engineer reciprocity in the region and examining how to further expand middle market opportunities.