

August 20, 2018

The Honourable Patty Hajdu, MP
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Hajdu,

The Whistler Chamber of Commerce represents over 700 businesses in the Whistler area and has worked closely with all levels of government for the last several years to recommend solutions to solve the serious issue of understaffing which affects almost all Whistler businesses and many resort communities around our province.

The Chamber is an avid supporter of hiring Canadians first and I have attached our 2018 Economic Growth Flat Sheet, which outlines our situation and strategies for hiring Canadians first.

Unfortunately, despite significant efforts to hire Canadians this has not filled our labor gap and businesses are struggling. Some examples include a restaurant in one of the top locations in Whistler closing their doors due to staffing shortages and many businesses closing early and/or closing sections of their business as a result of significant service challenges. This not only reflects poorly on Whistler and Canada, but also significantly limits the ability for small business to thrive, grow and invest in their future. Attached are letters from some of the many businesses in our community struggling to keep their businesses open while maintaining the customer service that keeps visitors returning and businesses thriving.

Whistler has a rich history of temporary foreign workers. The temporary foreign worker program in the past allowed businesses to compliment staffing by Canadians and also gave excellent exposure to Whistler throughout the world. Many of the young temporary foreign workers who worked at the resort 20 years ago are some of the best advocates for Whistler and Canada.

There are two very simple solutions to assist with the labour shortage in Whistler and Resort Communities:

- Extend the duration for Temporary Foreign Workers:
 - Allow workers to extend their work permit by one year through a simple work permit extension.
 - These foreign workers have been prescreened and approved by Immigration Canada and there are few additional resources required to engage this action.

- Review foreign worker programs and application approvals by employment rates:
 - Whistler and most mountain resorts have extremely low unemployment.
 - Increase the number of allowable foreign workers for low unemployment areas.
 - Increase the size or allocation of the International Experience Canada program.

Here are some of the initiatives we have taken over the past few years:

- Jan 10 & Aug 25, 2014 – letters to Honorable Jason Kenney Re: Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), Urgent Exemptions Needed for Destination Mountain Resort Economies.
- June 2015 – Meeting with BC Minister Yamamoto and MLA Jordan Sturdy to discuss immigration concerns.
- Feb 2016 – published Canadians 1st - Supporting Access to Workers in Tight Labour Markets.
- Feb 2016 – Val Litwin, CEO of the Whistler Chamber of Commerce went to Ottawa as a member of the BC Delegation to Ottawa. “Roundtable on BC Workforce Development”

The Chamber identified this challenge and has been working for many years on solutions. We look forward to working with you to implement rapid solutions to the issues outlined above.

Kind Regards,



Melissa Pace
CEO – Whistler Chamber of Commerce
Whistler Chamber of Commerce

Cc:

Government of Canada

- The Honourable Pamela Goldsmith Jones (MP West Vancouver-Sunshine Coast– Sea to Sky Country)

Government of British Columbia

- The Honourable Bruce Ralston (Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training)
- The Honourable Jordan Sturdy (MLA West Vancouver – Sea to Sky)

Whistler Blackcomb

- Pete Sonntag (Chief Operating Officer, Whistler Blackcomb)

Resort Municipality of Whistler

- Nancy Wilhelm-Morden (Mayor)
- Mike Fury (Chief Administrative Officer)

Tourism Whistler

- Barrett Fisher (President & CEO)

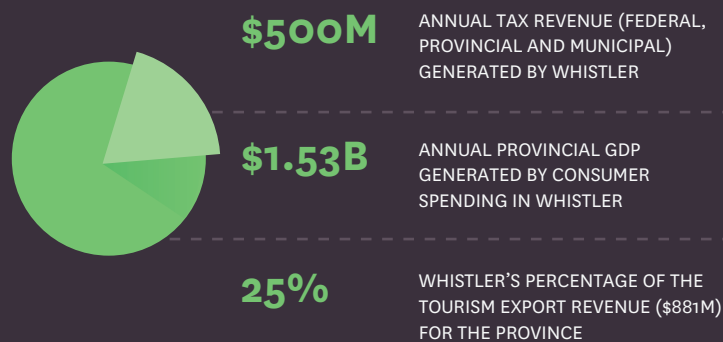
Putting Canadians **1ST**

Supporting Economic Growth in Tight Labour Markets & Putting Canadians First in 2018

Preamble

Canada boasts numerous destination mountain resorts that attract visitors from around the globe – and Whistler consistently ranks as one of the world’s top ski destinations. The resort drives nearly 25% of the tourism export revenue for the province and generates \$1.4 million in daily tax revenue for the federal, provincial and municipal government. A tight labour market continues to challenge our ongoing competitiveness as a tourism destination (the July 2018 unemployment rate for Mainland Southwest was 4.5% and Whistler was measured at 1% in 2018 by the Resort Municipality of Whistler’s Community Life Tracking Survey). Industry reports project a 14,000 full-time-equivalent labour deficit for tourism and hospitality positions in 2020 (Labour Market Study by go2hr, BC’s Tourism Industry Human Resource Association). The seasonal nature of the ski industry – much like in agriculture – makes it very difficult to obtain, train and retain talent. Along with Canadians, temporary foreign workers and working holiday visa holders are a valued and vital piece of our labour force. Without these workers Whistler could not deliver an exceptional customer experience.

The Whistler Economy: A Tax Revenue Driver



FOUR POLICY CONSIDERATIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO WORKERS

- 1** Create a stream for seasonal workers, like the Agricultural Program, that is accessible to all sectors on the same criteria where there is seasonal work with proven labour shortages. The clear – and sensible – precedent has been set with the agricultural workers. In the case of the ski industry, data shows there are simply not enough qualified Canadian snow sport instructors to serve the operating resorts in our country.

Whistler labour market by the numbers (2018 Whistler Chamber Member labour surveys)

➔ **85%** OF WHISTLER CHAMBER MEMBERS ARE SMALL BUSINESSES (WITH LESS THAN 50 EMPLOYEES)

➔ **VISA HOLDERS A VITAL COMPONENT OF THE WORK FORCE:**

64% OF MEMBER'S EMPLOYEES ARE FOREIGN WORKERS OF THOSE FOREIGN WORKERS 95% HAVE A WORKING HOLIDAY VISA

➔ **PAYING MORE TO ATTRACT CANADIANS:**

92% OF BUSINESSES SURVEYED INSTITUTED A WAGE INCREASE IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS (95% CONFIRMED THE INCREASE WAS BETWEEN 6-25%) TO ATTRACT OR RETAIN A TEAM MEMBER

➔ **MONEY "LEFT ON THE TABLE" EACH MONTH DUE TO LACK OF STAFF:**

30% SAID OVER \$5K UNREALIZED EACH MONTH

33% SAID OVER \$10K UNREALIZED EACH MONTH

➔ **POSITIONS MOST NEEDED:**

- 1 CULINARY STAFF - ALL POSITION LEVELS
- 2 TRADES PEOPLE - INTERMEDIATE, SUPERVISOR, TOP LEVEL MANAGEMENT
- 3 NIGHT AUDIT - ENTRY AND INTERMEDIATE LEVELS
- 4 MAINTENANCE - ENTRY AND INTERMEDIATE LEVELS
- 5 LABOURER - INTERMEDIATE AND SUPERVISOR LEVEL

➔ **KEY JOB POSITIONS CURRENTLY UNFILLED**

82% REPORT HAVING 3-20 POSITIONS UNFILLED

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS CONT.

2 Increase, or at the very least, maintain the number of allocated visas under International Experience Canada (IEC) program, and continue to enhance reciprocal bilateral agreements to liberalize program parameters, based on Canada's highly successful bilateral agreement with Australia. This program creates outstanding ambassadors for Canada for life and has been designed to be a net zero trade. Approximately 20% of Whistler's workforce is composed of Working Holiday Visa (WHV) holders – they are a vital complement to our Canadian workforce.

3 On the subject of the Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA):

- A** Extend the validity periods of LMIA's from 1 to 3 years – this allows the government to preserve "fee integrity", reduces processing workflow for government and removes red tape for industry.
- B** Consider prorating the LMIA cost based on the number of months it's valid for. Businesses should not have to pay for a full year if they are only utilizing a Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) for a portion of the year – for example, a 3-month TFW LMIA would cost $3/12 \times \$1,000 = \250 .

4 Increase the allocation to the BC Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) to approximately 9,000 annual nominees for 2018, and ensure that additional space is allocated to Entry-Level and Semi-Skilled (ELSS) occupations. This will allow foreign workers to more swiftly become contributing Canadians and join the permanent workforce – it will also encourage employers to invest more significantly in these candidates vis a vis training and settlement support.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

WHAT IS WHISTLER DOING TO ATTRACT CANADIANS AND REDUCE DEPENDENCY ON FOREIGN LABOUR?

WORLD CLASS TRAINING FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Whistler boasts a community-wide, customer training program powered by the University of Victoria's Gustavson School of Business. It makes executive level training available – and affordable – to small business to help them attract Canadian workers. Since it began in 2014, this certificated program (featured in Forbes Magazine) has trained nearly 20,000 members of the workforce and is seen as a unique benefit to individuals interested in gaining a world-class skill set.



PETER B. GUSTAVSON
School of Business
Executive Programs
The world looks different from here.

Forbes

ATTRACTING FIRST NATIONS WORKERS

Whistler businesses are putting special efforts into recruiting, training and hiring First Nations workers in the Sea to Sky corridor. For example, the Whistler Chamber of Commerce hosts – in Partnership with the University of Victoria – the “Eight Ways of the Thunderbird”, a customized First Nations service training program that helps build their capacity and expedites their transition into the local workforce.



BEST-IN-CLASS HOUSING SOLUTION

Whistler houses just over 76 % of its workforce in the resort – compared to other North American mountain resort towns that house only 40%. The Whistler Housing Authority continues to maintain and augment its inventory of resident restricted housing so that both rental and ownership accommodation are available and affordable for local income earners and retirees in perpetuity.



BETTER BENEFITS FOR STAFF

Whistler knows strong benefit offerings give its businesses a statistical advantage when it comes to attracting Canadian workers. Resort businesses have historically subsidized or paid entirely for their team's ski passes – but our recent summer labour survey shows 65% are now adding additional health benefits, 56%* are enhancing performance bonuses, 23%* are now offering staff housing and 24%* are matching RRSP contributions.*



DEEPER RECRUITING TACTICS

Whistler businesses rigorously monitor the success of their recruiting channels and the strategies are getting more sophisticated – especially for small businesses. Forty-five percent of those businesses we surveyed this summer posted for positions provincially and nationally, 23%* participate in or host live job fairs, 56%* advertise on Facebook and LinkedIn and 15%* use a regional or national recruitment agency. *DATA TAKEN FROM 2016 SURVEY*



**The Whistler
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Chamber**