

July 26, 2006

Dear Editor:

Despite the claims of opponents to B.C.'s improved apprenticeship program ("Loss of program caused skills shortage," July 26), progress is being made to meet the demands of a growing provincial labour market.

The fact is B.C. is experiencing unprecedented economic growth. Today, twice as many large-scale construction projects are planned or underway than just three years ago. With this construction comes the unrelenting need for workers.

In 2004, after extensive consultations, we revamped the provincial apprenticeship program to help meet industry demands and enable the system to respond faster to the changing economy. As a result of the changes, in two short years the number of apprentices has nearly doubled – from 14,676 registered in 2004 to 28,315 now.

Despite critics' claims, counting the number of trades tickets issued isn't necessarily the only way to measure a program's success. It's dependant upon the number of people who register and when times are good, like they are now, many workers find it hard to go back to the classroom when they have such an abundance of work.

With continued economic growth expected and one-million jobs predicted over the coming twelve years, our government continues to take action. We've boosted the budget of the Industry Training Authority to \$90 million each year; we're working to get more young people interested in the trades through programs like ACE IT, YES2IT and the Secondary School Apprenticeship program; and we're implementing \$90 million in tax credits, over three years, to support training.

B.C. isn't alone in its quest for skilled workers, it's happening across Canada. The reality is, here in B.C., through a series of measures, we're tackling the issue head-on and already seeing improvements.

Sincerely,

Colin Hansen
Minister of Economic Development
and Minister responsible for the Asia-Pacific Initiative and the Olympics