

NEWS RELEASE

Canada's Chambers call on federal government to secure new international trade agreements

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Regina, September 19, 2016 – Canada's business leaders are calling on Ottawa to advance two international trade agreements that are pivotal to growing B.C.'s economy.

Delegates passed two made-in-B.C. policies this past weekend at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce AGM (Sept 17-19), both aimed at boosting Canada's access to major economies.

"We need to act now," said Val Litwin, CEO of the BC Chamber of Commerce. "These deals are a huge opportunity for Canada – but even more so, for B.C. specifically."

Delegates passed a BC Chamber-led policy that calls on the federal government to renew a softwood lumber trade agreement with the United States that supports the Canadian forest industry and defends Canada's rights to free trade of softwood lumber. The United States is the top market for Canadian forestry products, importing \$20 billion annually of the \$31 billion industry.

"B.C. represents about half of Canada's forest industry and the U.S. is our top export market, so this deal is really integral to driving our local economy forward," said Litwin.

B.C.'s Chambers also called for the finalization and ratification of a free trade agreement with India, one of the world's fastest-growing economies - a policy initiative led by the Surrey Board of Trade, a BC Chamber member.

"Surrey's business community has been working hard to advocate for this deal," said Anita Huberman, Chief Executive Officer of the Surrey Board of Trade. "Given our community's strong ties to India, we are deeply invested in a successful result."

Litwin added that the deal is a major opportunity for businesses right across the province.

"Given our geography, B.C. businesses are adamant about securing more access to Asia Pacific markets, and the fast-growing South Asian market represents a tremendous opportunity for us."

Additionally, Canada's Chambers have backed the following made-in-B.C. policies, calling for:

- A more competitive air policy that improves air access and allows for the free movement of labour and goods - a policy initiative led by the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade and Richmond Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the BC Chamber of Commerce, Prince George Chamber of Commerce and Whistler Chamber of Commerce;
- An affordable pension environment for all stakeholders that enables employees to increase contributions without requiring employers to contribute additional funds;
- A return to demand-driven immigration to ensure that businesses aren't struggling to meet their skilled labour needs – a policy initiative led by the Victoria Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the BC Chamber;
- Increased government support for responsible resource development in Canada – a policy initiative led by the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce and Prince George Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the BC Chamber; and
- Improved access to the Canada Job Grant for small- and medium-sized businesses that currently struggle to access funds due to red-tape – a policy initiative led by the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the BC Chamber.

But Litwin added that there's still much to be done.

“These policies have huge potential for Canada and for British Columbia – but only if Ottawa implements them. So, as Chambers across Canada, we'll be rolling up our sleeves and working hard to advance these policies to ensure our country's success.”

The BC Chamber is the largest and most broadly-based business organization in the province. Representing more than 125 Chambers of Commerce and 36,000 businesses of every size, sector and region of the province, the BC Chamber of Commerce is “The Voice of Business in BC.”

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