

## Immigration as a Function of National Demographic Policy

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Sir Wilfrid Laurier had a demographic policy for Canada. He wanted to create a super power north of the 49th parallel, with a population of 100 million by the end of the Twentieth Century. One hundred years later, we are only 32% of the way there; and, we spend most of our energies talking about how to make the system work more efficiently.

He expressed confidence that Canadians would accept "never-ending change" as a defining characteristic of an emerging society. Most people, though, see immigration simply as an issue of "more of them and less of us", and tailor their views accordingly. The latest "initiative" of the current federal government reflects a rejection of Laurier's confidence.

As a Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, I believed in Laurier's "growth model". My approach was to **Recruit, Invest and Manage**. Canada's economy needs people as never before; but now, potential immigrants have many destination choices. For me, politically motivated approaches that tied the Minister and the department to "targets" based on "classes", "categories", "sub-categories" or "formulae" to preserve some "historical" character were passé and a recipe for failure.

Rather, an aggressive demographic policy would keep Canada competitive and growing. I asked my senior officials to change the character of the Department into one of Recruitment, Integration, and Retention, by answering three simple questions: Whom do we want? What do we have to do to get them here? How do we keep them here? Simply put, the success of people staying would burnish Canada's image as a place to go and grow.

Cabinet allocated the investments for a 5 year plan and I used my Ministerial authority to execute it. To make the plan work, we set about taking measures to restore confidence in the system; building unanimity of purpose and direction with the provinces and territories; and, establishing partnerships with business, labour and community organizations. We need all three stratagems to succeed.

We invested \$88 million in enhanced language training and Foreign Credentials recognition. The "best and the brightest" we were recruiting were not being adequately absorbed into our economy - to our great loss! Some 350,000 immigrants who arrived between 2001 and 2006 had earned at least one university degree to their credit. It would take Canada 22 years and cost at least \$50 billion to "home grow" that talent.

Concurrently, we targeted the expansion of the student visa program worth just under \$2 billion annually. By investing a further \$10 million in this program we aimed to draw an additional 40,000 young people, ones who would self-finance their education while filling unused capacity in our academic institutions. In order to keep them here, we allowed off-campus work and work permits for up to two years upon graduation.

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We provided our provincial partners \$1.2 billion dollars to establish integration and retention programs while we concentrated on providing the department with instruments and flexible tools to address changing demographic patterns and market conditions in an expeditious and timely fashion and, we allocated some \$700 millions for this initiative to "fix" and "ready" the system.

Our immigration policies have often appeared too rigid to handle the challenges presented by an aging (and close to retirement) "blue collar worker" population, along with the loss of its "skill sets". Fortunately, willing immigrants find their way to Canada to fill these positions, and more, through a variety of ways: guest worker programs, live-in-caregivers, visitors, refugee claimants etc. Having found work, usually through complicit employers in need, they are reluctant to leave; fall "out of status" and into the ranks of the "undocumented".

Using a special Ministerial authority and permit, we proposed to normalize their circumstances with a strategy to "land" those who would file a special "In Canada Class" application and submit to some rigorous tests measuring suitability.

Once the operational "minutiae" and "problems" of the department were "resolved", we aimed to increase immigration by 100,000 over the 5 year period - a target too low relative to our needs, but consistent with our renewed capacity to process and accommodate.

Immigration is a small department with few friends yet, notwithstanding its size, its policies have implications on virtually every other department of government.