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BUSINESS

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Chambers urge faster immigration approvals



Matt Marchand, president and CEO of Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, is pictured in this 2012 file photo. (NICK BRANCACCIO/The Windsor Star)

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Dave Hall

Jan 09, 2014 - 3:02 PM EST

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Businesses across Ontario are being placed at a competitive disadvantage by a federal immigration system which currently takes too long to approve legitimate applications from skilled immigrants, according to Chamber of Commerce organizations across the province.

“It’s been a long-standing competitive issue among our members and we have heard it loud and clear,” said Matt Marchand, president and CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce. “We’ve talked about these challenges with our senior levels of government and we believe the new system will help immensely in closing that competitiveness gap.”

A report released this week by the local chamber, Ontario chamber and others across Ontario provides advice to the federal government as it finalizes an expression of interest application system, a new process for selecting and processing the majority of new immigrants to Canada.

Scheduled to be introduced next year, the new system will give employers a greater, though still limited, role in selecting future Canadians through job offers which will enable many new immigrants to have employment lined up before they arrive in Canada.

It’s expected the new system will process applications within six months but many supporters of the changes believe that’s still too slow. They point out that it takes just 58 days for the Australian government to process similar applications.

“This wait is far too long for many businesses, many of whom have jobs that needed to be filled yesterday,” said Allan O’Dette, president and CEO of the Ontario chamber. “A simple, customer-focused system will attract the participation of small and medium enterprises, the linchpins of our economy.

“These employers typically do not have the time or resources necessary to navigate a complex system. Other countries are upping their games in attracting top talent and our long queues and slow processing times for skilled immigrants are hurting our competitiveness.”



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Under the new two-stage system, immigrants would file expressions of interest in moving to Canada and undergo a pre-screening process.

Then they would be selected by the federal government and the provinces based on local labour markets requirements. Only those selected would then be allowed to formally submit an application for permanent residence.

But unlike in Australia, there would be no opportunity for employers to sift through applications to find suitable candidates based on such issues as teamwork, critical thinking and analytical skills.

“While we appreciate all the work that has been done, we’re just asking for a little bit more in providing more employer engagement,” said Marchand.

“We also recognize the optics of trying to attract skilled immigrants to a community with a high unemployment rate but these would only be jobs which can’t be filled locally. These would be jobs in our local job bank which haven’t been or can’t be filled by local workers.”

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Sears Holdings Corp.'s shares plummeted in after-hours trading

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