



MEDIA RELEASE

Association of Canadian Community Colleges

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COLLEGES AND INSTITUTES SAY BUDGET OVERLOOKS KEY AREA OF SKILLS DEFICIT

Does not address capacity crunch

Ottawa, February 26, 2008 – Today’s federal budget fails to address a key contributor to a skills shortage that risks hobbling the economy and our country’s capacity to compete world-wide, says James Knight, president of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC).

While welcoming enhanced financial support to students, including Aboriginals, displaced and older workers and apprentices, Knight said colleges and technical institutes are already turning away thousands of fully qualified students, they are already operating at capacity. He said the budget invests in demand but overlooks supply.

“The skills needed to keep our economy running are developed and honed in colleges and technical institutes across the country. But these institutions face chronic underfunding that limits their capacity, says Knight. “With both the private and public sectors crying out for more nurses, pilots, construction specialists, medical technologists, and many other categories of highly skilled workers, it is unfortunate that the issue of technical training capacity was overlooked.”

“Canada’s deficit in technical skills is an economic power outage that must be addressed head-on. Unlike the fiscal deficit that was erased from the country’s books in the 1990s, the technical skills deficit is largely hidden from view but has the potential to be just as crippling to our country’s economy. Today’s budget simply overlooks this situation,” says Knight.

In the construction sector alone, 250,000 skilled workers are needed over the next seven years to fill the positions of retirees and meet new demand. This shortage drives up costs and shuts down construction sites. While the challenges related to the Alberta oil boom are well documented, these same problems are slowing down construction sites from coast to coast.

A recent Canadian Apprenticeship Forum and Construction Sector Council study demonstrates that colleges and technical institutes need approximately \$609 million just to upgrade their construction trades equipment so that at least 80 percent of it could be considered modern and up-to-date.

Space shortages across the country are forcing colleges and technical institutes to turn away thousands of qualified students. “Equipment is out of date. Colleges and institutes badly need an infusion of new capital to maintain and expand facilities, and to acquire leading-edge technology for teaching purposes,” says Knight.

Knight added that his Association was looking forward to working with the Government in getting the second part of the skills equation right.

“I look forward to working with Minister Solberg and his colleagues to ensure that beginning next year, there is sufficient supply to meet the added demand today’s budget creates,” said Knight. “More money will not help a prospective student if there are no spaces for him or her in our colleges and technical institutes.”

ACCC has long advocated federal investments in colleges and technical institutes. Most were built in the 1960s with considerable federal financial support and with a projected life span of 40 years.

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