

Good evening Mr. Chair, councillors, staff, and members of the public. My name is Hugo Chesshire, and I am the director of policy and government relations at the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce. It is my privilege to address you tonight in support of the staff recommendation that the Regional Municipality of Niagara join the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities, and dedicate resources in support of a diversity, equity, and inclusion action plan.

There are many delegations here tonight who will speak to the need for this initiative on social and compassionate grounds, and I am confident that they will do so far better than I could.

Instead, I will answer the question that is doubtless on many of your minds: why would a Chamber of Commerce back this initiative, and why did we call for the municipal governments of Niagara to join the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities in our 2018 municipal policy proposals?

The prosperity of Niagara's business community requires a thriving economy, a thriving economy requires a growing population, a growing population requires immigration, and immigrants require a welcoming and inclusive community.

There are several reasons why we should seek to grow our population. The first is to increase our base of skills. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce consistently finds that the most pressing challenge for Ontario's businesses is finding talent, and this is just as true in Niagara. An immigrant workforce is the quickest way to close that talent gap, since Canada's immigration system prizes education amongst applicants.

As of the 2016 census, 4 in every 10 immigrants aged 25-64 held a bachelor's degree or higher, as compared to the Canadian-born population of the same age, where less than a quarter hold the same qualifications. Over half of newcomers – immigrants who landed within the last five years – held a bachelor's degree or higher. The percentage of immigrants with graduate degrees is more than twice that of the Canadian-born population, and for newcomers, the proportion is more than three times their Canadian-born counterparts.

The second reason that we should try to grow our population is because our population is aging, and aging faster than Ontario. Over the last two decades, Niagara has not only remained older than the Ontario average, but is growing older faster.

Over that time period, practically all of Niagara's population gains have been made in people aged 45 or older, with net losses in teenagers and children alongside a near-doubling of the population aged over 75. This is unsustainable. Niagara's population aged 65 and over is now 21% of the total population. When that census was taken, there were only three countries in the world with a retirement-age population above 20% of the total: Germany, Italy, and Japan. All are facing major problems associated with their aging population.

Aging populations exacerbate skill shortages as skilled workers retire with no skilled young people to replace them. They increase healthcare costs, as demand for healthcare rises with age, meaning that a heavier tax burden must be levied on working-age people, or that healthcare services must be cut. There is a higher dependency ratio generally, with more people drawing on pensions, for example, and fewer people working-age people paying taxes into government coffers.

Thirdly, immigration is desirable because growth begets growth. Population growth means economic growth, as there are more people working, more people spending and consuming, and more people paying taxes. There is additional demand for goods and services, creating more economic activity and jobs in meeting those demands. Among economists, this is known as the accelerator effect, and it is why we can confidently lay to rest the idea that immigrants take net jobs from Canadian-born workers.



A ten-year study by Statistics Canada found that immigrant-owned firms represented 17% of companies, but 25% of net job creation. Immigrant-owned private companies were 30% more likely to be high-growth firms. 12% of immigrant-owned businesses exported goods beyond the US, compared to 7% of all other businesses.

This is why we need growth, and why we need immigrants. The problems are that our growth is slow, and that Niagara is not attracting its share of immigrants.

Niagara's population growth rate is less than half that of Ontario's. We have consistently missed provincial population growth projections and are already behind those made only a few years ago. Growing populations produce economic growth, but stagnant populations produce economic stagnation. Obviously, this is of great concern to us as a business organization.

We are also failing to attract our fair share of immigrants. Niagara's proportion of immigrants is about half that of Ontario's. The picture is worse when it comes to newcomers, where we have less than a third the proportion of Ontario. Given the high qualifications and educational attainment of newcomers, it is particularly important that we attract them in order to build a workforce that is, in turn, attractive to businesses.

To be economically prosperous in the future, Niagara needs population growth, and that requires immigration. We require skilled talent, and the easiest way to access that is to attract immigrants. We can do that by creating employment opportunities, offering strong public services, a good pace of life, and the other amenities which anyone considering moving to a new community looks for, but there is something else, and it is something which non-immigrants can overlook because it is simply not in their own lived experiences.

Niagara must be a welcoming place. Immigrants are looking for a new place to call home, so Niagara must make immigrants feel at home. This is not something we can easily quantify, but it is important. Immigrants seek places where we feel wanted and included. We want to be part of the community.

This is an area where messaging and symbolism are hugely important. What we do, and what we devote funding to, speaks to our true intentions. If we fail to allocate any resources to attract, welcome, and integrate immigrants, we undermine our attempts to attract the immigration that will develop our economy.

This is why we called for all of Niagara's municipalities to join the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities in 2018, and it is why we are now calling on you to accept the staff recommendations laid before you. Let us help to build the future prosperity and economic growth of Niagara by working to attract the skilled talent and the young newcomers we need to do it.

The advantages of the Coalition go beyond the symbolism and messaging of joining. The tools that the Coalition provides to its members have been tested by the 77 other member municipalities across Canada and proven to work. We can select and customize those tools to suit Niagara. We feel that the cost of \$144,000 per year over two years is not only relatively small in terms of the municipal budget but is likely to offer a good return in attracting skilled talent and helping build the workforce that Niagara needs for its future prosperity.

For these reasons, therefore, I am here to ask you to adopt the staff recommendations as laid out, and to assure you that you have the backing of the GNCC in so doing. Thank you for your time. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.