

Since Ralph Klein was elected Premier of Alberta in December, 1992, he has been preaching a new path for Alberta: fiscal restraint, less government interference in business and low taxes. In short, he would like to see Alberta a little more like Hong Kong.

Klein, formerly the mayor of Calgary, was a guest speaker at a Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong luncheon on November 19, 1993 that drew more than 100 people. Clearly people were interested in hearing Klein's message.

One half of his formula to make Alberta a strong and competitive economic force, he told the audience, is to "get the basics right at home." That includes a fierce determination to cut the deficit and debt - as shown by the Deficit Elimination Act which calls for a balanced budget by 1997. As well, the health care and welfare systems are being streamlined and restructured.

Other changes are in the works as well. "We're borrowing from the Hong Kong example of privatized infrastructure," said Klein, citing examples of newly privatized companies such as the liquor store and motor vehicle registry offices. Alberta is getting out of giving subsidies to businesses, he said, and instead trying to create a climate where business will prosper: "We need to cut the red tape that causes delays and confusion for investors."



Alberta Premier Ralph Klein with Hong Kong-based Gordon Young, Agent-General, Asia Pacific: Alberta is in Hong Kong to stay.

Some of the measures, such as cutbacks to education, have drawn strong protests from Albertans. Acknowledged Klein: "We get a protest a day. But for every protest 18 Albertans say 'stay the course'."

Part two of Alberta's quest for the competitive advantage comes with Alberta's focus on other countries, in particular, those in the Asia-Pacific region. Klein said he and his ministers will be doing a lot more travelling, pointing out it has been 10 years since the last Alberta premier visited Hong Kong.

Unlike some of the other provinces which have been downsizing or closing their provincial representative offices in Hong Kong, Klein said: "Alberta is not going to be lowering its profile in Asia by shutting down its offices. In fact, we are going to redouble their focus on business. At a time when Canada needs to increase its international business dealings, I believe that you can't increase sales by cutting back on your sales force. Alberta is here to stay."

He welcomed the Asian immigrant to Alberta, and said he looked forward to increasing Hong Kong investments in that province. "Our province best reflects the free enterprise, can-do spirit of Hong Kong." ♦

Legal & Policies Committee

The first change concerns the education factor. The maximum number of points available in this criteria increased from 12 to 16. The new Regulations also differentiate between a high school education which qualifies the applicant for post-secondary education (trade school or university) and one which does not. Points are now awarded for post-secondary education but a distinction has also been made between different types of non-university, post-secondary education on the basis of admission requirements.

The purported rationale for increasing the points awarded for the education factor was to select a better educated immigrant who, it is assumed, will have a higher chance of economic success and contribute more to Canada's long term prosperity. However, if one looks at the list of occupations in demand they are "blue collar" occupations which

do not require post-secondary training at all. At most, they may require some apprenticeship.

By changing the point system with respect to education, EIC has made it virtually impossible in some cases, for an applicant whose occupation is in great demand in Canada to achieve sufficient assessment points to qualify for immigration to Canada. At the same time, those who can score high on the education factor may still not qualify under the independent category because there is no demand for their occupations and all applicants who score zero on the occupation demand factor are automatically disqualified.

The second change concerns language capabilities. Formerly, an applicant can only achieve a maximum of 12 points for fluency in speaking, writing and reading ability in both of Canada's official

languages. The new point system has increased the maximum available units to 15 to allow those applicants with fluency in both languages to obtain three additional points.

Theoretically the amendments to the language factor would enhance the language profile of an independent immigrant to Canada. However, it is difficult to see the practical benefit of this rationale when only one province in Canada uses French at all and in that province, French is the only official language. Under the new Regulations, applicants who score zero points for language ability are now also automatically disqualified from selection to Canada as independent immigrants. ♦

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