

Thoughts on Manitoba Immigration and Proposed Changes

April 15, 2012

1. In which ways does the Manitoba PNP program differ from the overall objectives of Canadian immigration?
 - a. It has demonstrated success in finding employment relevant to the skills of the immigrant
 - b. Skills of arrivals are very relevant to the employer requirements of Manitoba
 - c. Success in supplying skills and people to a variety of urban and rural settings
 - d. Demonstrated flexibility to meet the demand of the diversified Manitoba economy with many small and medium-size employers
 - e. Demonstrated satisfaction of immigrants to Manitoba as a destination as evidenced by retention rates
 - f. Personal/family success as evidenced by exceptional rate of home ownership
 - g. Virtually universal support of program from great variety of political, social, economic and regional groups
2. Does the proposed new federal program speak to the requirements of a province like Manitoba or is it designed to address a different problem in another part of the country?
 - a. Diversity in Canada has many faces that are well-known and can change over time. How will standardization address this reality? Will Quebec be standardized? Should Alberta be standardized and modeled after a region like the Atlantic Provinces or vice versa?
 - b. Is there any way in which the proposed immigration program changes will produce a superior outcome for Manitoba?
 - c. Does the fact that a program is universally considered a great success matter?
3. Canada has been an international poster child for its immigration success in spite of limitations. Within that national reality Manitoba has been seen as uniquely successful. Do we place that reputation at risk?
4. Which problems does the Federal Government seek to address or correct?
 - a. Too many total immigrants? If the goal is to really have 10% less then cut the PNP program by 10% along with all others programs.
 - b. Change the mix of immigrants? What changes are desired? In the absence of any pushback by Manitoba society in what way should the mix be altered and for which reasons?
 - c. If the Government believes we are accepting too many refugees then that can be a totally separate debate and has nothing to do with the PNP programs.
 - d. If there are too many family members joining successful immigrants through family unification programs – that can also be a subject of debate and policy adjustment –but has nothing to do with the initial immigration arrival under the PNP. Is there any evidence that PNP arrivals create more or less or different pressure on adding family?
 - e. The federal program for skilled workers is not currently resulting in the arrival of trades and middle skills and this is given as one reason for policy change. The Manitoba PNP program is much more successful in achieving this desired mix – why not change the federal program to look more like the Manitoba program rather than potentially damage the Manitoba program?
5. Language requirements
 - a. Enhanced language requirements push the qualifications more in the direction of advanced education which has been a historical problem. Skilled or semi-skilled trades are less likely to have the language skills from many good source countries – and yet those skills are the goal of the new program.
 - b. The focus on language skills excludes a number of unique and excellent populations. Given the skills they bring plus the linkages to communities and families there is no demonstrated evidence in Manitoba that the absence of language skills has significantly affected employability or integration.
 - c. Language training becomes the responsibility of the province – in the context of demonstrated high retention rates - why not allow them to determine the degree to which language is an issue?

- d. Language skill tends to be measured at the level of the oldest member of the arriving family – yet the younger members are much more likely to have language skill and the ability to acquire language more easily.
6. Delivery of services to newcomers
 - a. Is it too expensive? There is no indication that the change in who delivers will save money.
 - b. Manitoba has a locally nuanced policy that reflects close alignment with the communities, employers and ethnic groupings. While possible to duplicate many elements of a program administered from a greater distance - it can hardly be expected to have that degree of local touch and feel.
 - c. The Manitoba program of service delivery is touted as a model – why disrupt it?
7. Non partisan: This has been a cornerstone of immigration policy in Manitoba and has contributed to its success. It is the strong desire of all elements of Manitoba society to keep it that way.
8. Temporary Foreign Worker Programs: These programs have merit in limited and specific applications like seasonal agriculture and specialized skills in some remote locations but are less than ideal as an immigration program. The experience of Germany and other jurisdictions provide enough evidence of programs that were based only on worker demand and failed to take the full social dimension into account. There is a place for such programs but they should not be the centerpiece of Canadian immigration.
9. Political risk. Any disruption of the Manitoba PNP program as it affects employers, towns and cities, ethnic communities will be blamed on the authority operating the program. Given that the current program is universally applauded as very successful any change will undoubtedly result in greater dissatisfaction and criticism. Why would the Federal Government seek to become the target of such criticism? On the other hand if the Federal Government wished to create more visible alignment with the program success and its immigration policy this should be possible with minor adjustments.

The Manitoba economy has performed exceptionally well in recent years and this is often attributed to its geographic alignment with the West and its resource development. We need to be clear that Manitoba has had only minor direct benefit from the Canadian resource boom. The success of Manitoba has been based on the health of thousands of smaller and a few larger firms. The visible dynamism in Winnipeg and certain smaller centers is based on new housing, commercial development, incremental growth of local industry and a few major projects. If the population dynamics had remained as they were in 1998 when the PNP program started we would have experienced a completely static population, no new housing, limited ability for Manitoba enterprises to grow and almost certainly no major developments like the airport and the return of NHL hockey. The Manitoba immigration program based on families that participate immediately in the economy through employment and secondarily by creating demand for a home, for schools, for services of every kind have been a very critical part of the economic success of Manitoba. The arrival of a family that is able to integrate likely creates as many jobs as it fills and this has been a critical element of the recent success of Manitoba. We need a skilled worker program but more important Manitoba needed and has created a population program that achieves healthy and organic growth. We tamper with this successful formula at great risk.