

May 11, 2009

Honourable Jim Flaherty, PC, MP
Minister of Finance
House of Commons
Parliament Buildings
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6



Dear Minister Flaherty,

The National Union of Public and General Employees represents more than 340,000 workers across Canada. On behalf of our members we ask that the federal government ensure that economic stimulus dollars are invested in people.

Among our members are tens of thousands of men and women working at community colleges and institutes across the country. It is these workers that will retrain workers losing their jobs in the *current* recession, as well as train the workforce of the future; providing new skills to fuel green jobs that build a 21st century economy. Investment in our public education system is investment in people.

The National Union proposes a three part plan to invest stimulus dollars in education and training:

1) Increase the dollars committed to the Canada Social Transfer (CST) beyond the meagre 2009 budget amount.

As the number of unemployed grows, colleges will need an increased capacity to retrain those out of work as well as those entering the workforce anew. The 2009 budget's modest increase in government spending on CST does not address these increasing pressures in community colleges. More is needed to create new programs that will ready our workforce for new manufacturing opportunities and retrain the growing number of people out of work.

2) Reform Employment Insurance (EI) to improve accessibility and access to retraining.

According to an April 2009 Stats Canada report, "Since peaking in October 2008, employment has fallen each month, with net losses totalling 357,000 (-2.1%)." Currently, only 40% of those unemployed even qualify for EI. Our current EI system was not designed for this economic crisis and the significant economic conversion we are seeing today. The federal government must act now to protect those laid off, and struggling to survive on savings, and make the changes that will *ensure* more unemployed qualify for EI.

In spite of this inequity, the absolute numbers of unemployed accessing EI are increasing. There is now a desperate need for those people to be able to tap into resources and opportunities for retraining. The federal government must expand the education and training options under the EI system for people to get back into the workforce.

3) Create a National Industrial Strategy that includes a just transition to green jobs.

Canada needs a national industrial strategy which renews our essential manufacturing base. In addition, the emerging green economy will not be successful without funding innovation, research and development programs at our colleges and institutes. Skills development in the trades and apprenticeship programs are the cornerstone for the new green economy. Finally, a just transition for workers moving to new jobs has to be part of a fair strategy.

The federal government must put economic stimulus dollars into these education and training components of a new industrial strategy.

Canada stands at the precipice of change. Investing in people will build Canada's productive capacity. This aim should be a top priority for the government's fiscal stimulus strategy. Our public education and training system is the perfect vehicle for investing in people and creating that productive capacity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' and 'C' followed by a horizontal line that ends in a vertical tick mark.

James Clancy
National President