

COMMENT

“The students are the ones who have the most at stake here

Foreign workers still a viable solution for B.C.

CHRISTIAN CODRINGTON
and KELLY POLLACK

The recent and regular exposure of abuses against workers, primarily in lower skilled jobs, doesn't mean that the Temporary Foreign Worker program is taking jobs away from Canadians. It does mean that there are employers who are prepared to take advantage of vulnerable workers, and there is no room for employers who abuse any program at the expense of its employees.

Taking advantage of vulnerable workers simply because they don't have the same protections as Canadian citizens or — worse yet — on the chance they do not voice their concerns, is disgraceful. It is simply bad management. The changes that are necessary to the TFW program should ensure adequate protection for workers and harsh penalties for employers abusing them.

What often fails to be discussed, however, as public discourse pressures sweeping sus-

pensions of programs like the Temporary Foreign Worker program, is that B.C. will not have enough people, domestic or foreign born, to grow our economy.

According to a recent article in *The Economist*, the worldwide “old-age dependency ratio” — the ratio of seniors to those of working age — is increasing. In 2010, the world had 16 people aged 65 and over for every 100 adults between the ages of 25 and 64, almost unchanged from 1980. However, by 2035, it is expected to nearly double to 26 per cent of working adults.

Projections for B.C. are consistent. According to research institute Urban Futures, it is estimated that B.C.'s population of 65- to 74-year-olds will increase 66 per cent, while the working-age population (25 to 64) will decline.

Urban Futures notes that labour-force participation among women in all age categories has nearly doubled since 1976, while the participation rate of men has declined. With higher rates of participation by women in both post-

secondary education and in the labour force, birth rates in most developed countries have fallen. In fact, only South Asian and African countries have high birth rates. If current trends continue, by 2031 there will be more deaths than births in B.C. — population decline.

Against this significant shift in demographics are projections for the B.C. economy — one million new jobs in the next 10 years. Whether that projection proves accurate or not, B.C. is a resource-based economy and growth will be driven by extraction of energy, lumber, fossil fuel, infrastructure building and construction — industries in which jobs have traditionally been filled by young men.

Temporary foreign workers are not taking jobs away from British Columbians. In fact, there aren't enough trained British Columbians in several parts of the province to fill many of the current and anticipated jobs that will underwrite our province's future growth. According to Citizenship

and Immigration Canada, in 2011 there were nearly 70,000 TFWs in B.C. More than 70 per cent were classified as Workers — Canada's Interests. This means that these workers are not displacing Canadians. These include people working on reciprocal agreements with other countries where a Canadian is working in the TFW's country in return, spouses of foreign workers or students allowed to be in Canada, or company transfers. That leaves about 15,000 TFWs in B.C. out of a workforce of nearly 2.4 million.

B.C.'s future prosperity needs a young, physically capable and mobile workforce. We are competing against every other developed nation, as they too face similar aging demography issues. B.C. and Canada stand to lose some of the best and brightest talent to other provinces and countries, which are all in a fierce competition for skilled people.

While dealing with this looming crisis, there should be no room to quibble over a program that accounts for only 0.6 per cent of

B.C.'s labour force. We must be opening our doors to both temporary workers as well as permanent residents from around the world.

The discussion must change to find solutions. Otherwise, we will be a stagnant province unable to support our population because the working tax base is too small. Business leaders and human resources practitioners around the province are already decrying an inability to find the right talent to fill the roles currently vacant. The future of B.C. requires advances in productivity, support for young working families, more contributions from an age cohort set to retire and a healthy influx of skilled young immigrants, prepared to move throughout beautiful B.C.

Christian Codrington is senior manager of professional practice of the B.C.-based Human Resources Management Association. Kelly Pollack is executive director of the Immigrant Employment Council of B.C.

LETTERS

All B.C. students should stage a walkout

Re: “Teachers consider full-scale strike, board favours employers on pay cut,” June 5.

I have two kids in the public education system, one in Grade 10 and one in Grade 8. Both were going to participate in the student walkout but were told that they would be marked as skipping out if they participated. If there is another walkout, I will be sure my kids are there to exercise their right to protest, just as the governments and the union have done.

The reason both parties tried to keep kids from participating in the walkout is a desperate attempt by both parties to make sure the students don't show the so-called adults how to get things done. The students are the ones who have the most at stake here, yet they have no voice. Every student in B.C. should walk out on the same day.

A student walkout could show the government that the kids are the ones that are going to have to deal with the mess created when Christy Clark was education minister. Their walkout could also show the B.C. Teachers' Federation that they are the future the union will have to deal with and they are not happy with the status quo.

The current situation is not a very good way to show our kids how democracy works, or to encourage them to participate once they are old enough to vote.

Aaron Sigurgeirson
Sidney

Government is like a deadbeat spouse

Re: “Students' walkouts draw small crowds,” June 5.

With respect to the student walkout, and its comparison of the teacher/government fight to the fight between two divorcing parents. To me, a more realistic comparison is this: The government is the deadbeat spouse, the teachers are the spouse asserting his/her rights and his/her children's rights, with full backing of the Supreme Court of B.C.

The teachers and the government are far from being different faces of the same coin.

Carolina Tudela
Victoria

Budgets are political, not fiscal, decisions

Re: “Massey Tunnel replacement good for us,” June 4.

Les Leyne raises an interesting issue regarding the building of a new Massey Tunnel and the fact that Vancouver Island can expect very few “goodies” from this Liberal government.

I thought that in a democracy, all taxpayers, regardless of how they voted, were treated equally. Leyne evidently does not believe it, as he says: “B.C. Liberals view the Island as a barren rock, since they hold just two seats out of 14.”

This comment also proves that budget decisions are not made on fiscal but on political grounds. The letter-writer who states that teacher/government bargaining should occur “within a finite budget,” assumes that budgets are written in stone (“Bargaining should occur within a finite budget,” letter, June 4).

On the contrary, budgets are based on the Liberals' political agenda and what they view as their priorities — the Massey Tunnel and the infamous stadium roof, to name two. These are clearly seen



ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

Vic High students hold picket signs on Fernwood Street as students took part in a walkout on Wednesday over the teachers' dispute. A letter-writer suggests students across the province should stage a co-ordinated one-day walkout to urge action on contract talks.

as higher priorities than the provision of a high-quality education for British Columbia's children.

Geoff Mills
Sidney

Do you know where that salmon has been?

Re: “Long outfalls better than land-based treatment,” letter, June 3.

The letter got me thinking. How many supporters of the “outflow option” also prefer wild salmon to farmed salmon? Don't they wonder where their dinner has been hanging out before it arrived on their plate?

Steen Petersen
Nanaimo

Opposition should make positions known

Re: “Long outfalls better than land-based treatment,” letter, June 3, and “Scientists pan Northern Gateway report,” June 4.

B.C. seems particularly vulnerable to environmental degradation by our current combination of federal and provincial government policies rejecting all negative scientific evidence in favour of a policy of profit and jobs at any price.

It is high time we heard from opposition parties about their position on these matters of sewage and liquefied natural gas proposals. Are you in favour? Yes or no? This province cannot wait until after the next election.

Alex Green
Victoria

We should prepare for climate change

Re: “No silver bullet for climate, study says,” June 5.

They are wearing me down here, but I will give it another try. What caused all of the prehistoric ice from 15,000 years ago

to melt away and how can they be so sure that this natural process has stopped and that we have taken over the task with a vengeance?

Could it be we are just experiencing the final stages of this event, and naturally the last bits of ice melt faster than the first bits did? If so, then all that money we are spending would be better employed in preparing for the consequences, yet I notice no interest in building further away from rising seas, for example.

Because, of course, Al Gore and his ilk are going to stop that warming, aren't they? But how, when they don't even know what caused it?

Patrick MacKinnon
Victoria

Tutu should focus efforts on Africa

Re: “Tutu deplors oilsands 'filth,’” June 1.

I have always admired Archbishop Desmond Tutu. However, I feel his stand on the oilsands is unfair and uninformed.

I would rather see him direct his influence and energy to the many horrible living conditions and social problems affecting the lives of millions living in the African continent.

Richard Newman
Victoria

Carbon-fuel impacts outweigh the benefits

Re: “Tutu deplors oilsands 'filth,’” June 1, and “Tutu clearly shows he is not an expert,” letter June 3.

As we consider oilsands expansion, Archbishop Desmond Tutu's comments are of great service to Canadians, inviting us to look in the mirror, by suggesting “the fact that this filth is being created now, when the link between carbon emissions and global warming is so obvious, reflects negligence and greed.”

Carbon-intensive fuels provide short-run revenues and minor incremental jobs, but with extensive infrastructure life, they also lock society into the long-run, cascading effects from an unstable

climate, and unacceptable spill risks to our coasts.

The effects from export-bound carbon-intensive fuels exceed their benefits. For example:

- Per capita senior government tax revenues for Enbridge and Kinder Morgan pale in comparison to existing and projected government disaster aid, infrastructure repair, insurance and food cost increases due to severe weather events;
- Canada imports half of its domestic energy;
- Impact to B.C.'s economies and ecosystems from a single moderate oil spill would be severe;
- Provincially funded B.C. Green Economy reports identify that scaling-up of low-carbon industries provide more jobs and economic diversification relative to carbon-intensive alternatives.

Transitioning to low-carbon fuels will not happen overnight, but every decision we make influences the energy supply mix, and its associated long-run economic, social, and environmental impacts. From society's perspective, the business case for export-bound oilsands expansion no longer exists; the science, risks, social responsibility and comparative job potential are clear. It's time to transition our policies and actions to low-carbon fuels and a green economy.

Deborah Rasnick
Brentwood Bay

Cat owners shouldn't put pets in danger

Cats have had it rough of late, one killed by a cougar in Courtenay, two or more snatched by eagles in Campbell River and now a family pet killed by an arrow on Pender Island.

Our precious feline has safe outside options via her patio (cat patio), where her nocturnal needs are met without disturbing our sleep. We provide water and outdoor latrine, no food. We know she is safe, as are our gardens and those of the neighbours.

If cat owners still wish to put their pets at risk, at least bell them to save birds and bats, plus when they get lost they won't be considered a stray.

Gord Byers
Parksville