



MEDIA Release

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Manitoba: lower unemployment, greater wage parity But wages an issue, and education a challenge

Manitoba made important gains in the percentage of people working, and improved the relative pay levels of men and women over the five years ending in 2003, according to the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Manitoba (ICAM).

In the final instalment of its annual review, *MB Check-Up*, ICAM noted a 4.4% gain in wage parity, and a .5% gain in the employment rate over the past five years, both exceeded only by British Columbia among the five provinces measured.

ICAM CEO Gary Hannaford said the favourable numbers are tempered by weak performance in real wages, which fell 2.2% during the period from 1998 to 2003. He noted, however, that all jurisdictions studied showed some loss in real wages, and that Manitoba's decline was the smallest.

He said the performance in wages is compounded by a poor record of job creation. "While 38,000 new jobs were created in the service sector over the past five years in Manitoba, we lagged well behind all other jurisdictions studied except Saskatchewan", Hannaford indicated.

Mr. Hannaford also pointed to underperformance in educational attainment, where the province ranked fourth of six jurisdictions between 1998 and 2003. Manitoba's gain registered at only 5.2%, well behind Saskatchewan's 10% and Ontario's 9.5% increases over the five years. In absolute terms, Manitoba ranks last in terms of 18 to 54 year olds who have completed some kind of post-secondary education, with only 54.3% holding a post-secondary diploma or higher.

Population figures reflect Manitoba's middling results, he indicated. Over the five-year period, Manitoba attracted 87,000 people to the province – but 108,000 residents chose to move out.

"Population is a reliable indicator of how opportunity is interpreted at the street level. We have succeeded in drawing record numbers to come to our province. Unfortunately, even more of those already here are choosing to leave."

To help offset the loss of Manitobans to other provinces, the Manitoba government has been very proactive in trying to attract immigrants to the province. The effort has shown positive results over the past couple of years. In 2003, total migration to Manitoba was a greater than those leaving the province after taking international migration into account.

Like rural Saskatchewan and parts of the American Midwest, Manitoba's farm communities are suffering from out-migration. Agriculture lost 7,800 jobs over the five years.

The Chartered Accountants believe an important element in ramping up Manitoba's results is accelerating the rate of improvement in education level.

"In a knowledge economy, a well-educated, highly skilled workforce is critical. Future job creation hinges on how well we prepare people today," Mr. Hannaford said. "Once educated, we then must find opportunities to keep them here."

He suggested that the College Expansion Initiative that created 2,000 more student positions in the new Red River College campus in downtown Winnipeg is a step in the right direction but we have not yet seen the benefits of this effort.

MB Check-Up is published each year by ICAM. It provides an independent factual comparison of the four Western provinces, together with Ontario and the Canadian average. The report uses 15 key indicators applied to all of the measured jurisdictions, creating a profile of each as a place to *live*, a place to *work*, and a place to *invest*. The full report, as well as further details from the research documents, is available on the Internet at www.icam.mb.ca.

This instalment of the report, dealing with Manitoba as a place to work, is the last of three to be released.

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