

Remarks by: The Hon. John Milloy,
Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities

To: Ontario's Workforce Shortage Coalition

Date: March 4, 2008

- Thank you, Anne, for your introduction.
- I am very pleased to be here this morning to discuss the work of the Coalition and the need to create training opportunities for Ontarians.
- I want to congratulate members of the Coalition for the discussion going on here today – it is very timely – especially in light of concerns about the economy.
- Overall, Ontario's economy remains resilient and the past four years have produced about 400,000 new jobs.
- But there's no question that there are a number of factors that are challenging our province, particularly in the manufacturing sector, and in turn Ontario families that rely on those jobs.
- Our shared responsibility, as I see it, is to help.

- There are lots of things government has no control over:
 - the price of oil
 - the value of the US dollar
 - globalization
- But there are things we can do to make sure Ontario can compete in the new, global marketplace.
- For one, we can make sure our business tax structure is competitive.
- And despite some rhetoric recently on the topic, Ontario has introduced a number of tax relief measures.
- The difference between our government and the one in Ottawa is that we see tax cuts as just one part of a larger strategy.
- A strategy that also includes significant investments.
- Like investments in industry.
- And investments in innovation, so we can build the next generation of manufacturing jobs and the next economic base for this province.

- And investments in infrastructure. Many of you may have noticed my tour – just wrapping up – of capital announcements for our colleges and universities.
- We're also investing in roads and bridges and municipal infrastructure.
- These bricks and mortar investments are improving the quality of life across Ontario and creating jobs.
- But one of the key pieces in keeping Ontario competitive going forward is having the best skilled and most highly educated workforce anywhere.
- A workforce that keeps learning and upgrading its skills.
- And that's what makes what this group is talking about today so important.
- Our government has done a lot in the last four years to develop a competitive workforce – and we've had a lot of success.
- During our first term in office, Premier McGuinty told us how important it was for us to concentrate our efforts on education and training – particularly post-secondary education and training – if we want Ontario to compete globally
- The result was our Reaching Higher plan – the most significant investment in post-secondary education and training in 40 years.

- We added to that with other investments aimed at training and apprenticeships.
- We're investing in tools and equipment for training centres and other programs to encourage apprenticeship – like extending the apprenticeship training tax credit.
- As a result, we've got 86,000 more Ontarians attending college and university than we did five years ago.
- About 60 per cent of Ontario's adult population has postsecondary education, including apprenticeship, making us among the most educated populations in the world.
- Last year, we set a record in Ontario for the number of new apprenticeships in skilled trades, registering 26,000 new apprentices.
- And we're on track to exceed that number this year.
- For example, 24,000 high school students signed up for our youth apprenticeship program this school year.
- In fact our initial plan to increase apprenticeships by 25 per cent was so successful, we've pledged to boost them by another 25 per cent over the course of this mandate.

- Is there still more work to do? Of course.
- We're going to continue to be very aggressive on the skilled labour file.
- In December, Premier McGuinty announced a new Manufacturing Council to look at long-term needs for this key sector.
- We look forward to hearing back from the council.
- At the same time, our government is already at work on an enhanced skills strategy that will help drive Ontario into the future.
- We've heard from the Ontario Workforce Shortage Coalition. We know of your concerns regarding our province's skilled workforce.
- We've heard from a number of sectors with concerns about skills shortages now – and in the future.
- At the same time we are acutely aware of the need to help those who have lost their job in Ontario to get back on their feet - as well as provide opportunities for those who traditionally face challenges in fully participating in the job market.
- And one thing I can tell you about our future direction is that it will focus very much on the individual - and removing obstacles that stand between them and obtaining the skills they need to get meaningful employment.

- For too long, government has been too much about programs and services and eligibility criteria – and not enough about the specific needs of each individual wanting to enter or re-enter the workforce.
- Don't get me wrong – there are some wonderful success stories – in Windsor, for example, when Ford announced a layoff of about 300 workers, we put in place an action centre to provide support and assistance.
- What became apparent to those running the centre was that a significant number of laid off workers had the basic skills that could potentially lead to certification as an industrial maintenance mechanic – a profession for which there was high demand locally.
- Working with St. Clair College, a program was designed that built upon workers existing skills and helped them to get the training they needed to obtain this certification and move back into the workforce.
- We need to replicate this approach – we need to focus on the individual and have a clear understanding of their unique abilities and potential – as well as an equally clear understanding of what skills are needed in the local job market.

- We've got some pretty impressive tools to help us already.
- We've got the Labour Market Development Agreement that allows us to co-ordinate federal and provincial employment assistance programs.
- And now we've got a new Labour Market Agreement with the federal government that will allow us to provide more and better services to those who couldn't get them before because they were not collecting Employment Insurance – such as new Canadians, the disabled and older workers.
- We've got rapid response capabilities to help workers in a mass layoff situation.
- These are all important building blocks - but I would argue that there is more that needs to be done to ensure that our efforts are truly focused on the individual as well as the needs of the economy.

- Government can't do this alone.
- It's going to take all of us – educators, employers, unions, government – working together to build a training and employment system that works.
- To help every individual succeed, and to remove the obstacles that would hold us back.
- I must stress, however, that this can't be the age-old government-community consultation where you give me a wish list; I fund part of it and you criticize me for not doing enough.
- Ontario needs more from us than that.
- Working together, we CAN overcome the economic challenges that face us.
- Let's seize this opportunity to work together to build an Ontario that will continue to prosper.
- Thank you.