

Good morning.

My name is Anne Sado and I am the president of George Brown College. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the symposium this morning.

I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in the important discussion we're about to have on the workforce challenges in this province.

The significance of this issue is demonstrated by the wide range of interested groups who have come here today to join in the discussion. We have about 350 participants here representing key sectors of Ontario's economy.

There are several people here today who help make up Ontario's Workforce Shortage Coalition. I want to acknowledge and thank them for their leadership and commitment to advancing the issue of Ontario's skills shortage, and for helping to organize this morning's event.

A number of coalition members are here with us today, including:

- Terry Mundell, President of the Greater Toronto Hotel Association
- Sharon Leonard, Director of Professional Affairs and Services with the Association of Certifying Engineering Technicians and Technologists
- Tyler Charlebois, Director of Advocacy with the College Student Alliance;
- Gail Smyth, President of Skills Canada, Ontario;
- David Zurawel, Vice-President, Policy and Government Relations, the Council of Ontario Construction Associations;
- Alex Gill, Executive Director of the Ontario Environment Industry Association;
- Jane Graham, Executive Director of the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors;
- Gary Cronkwright, the Chief Executive Officer of CON*NECT;
- Gerry Fedchun, President of the Auto Parts Manufacturers' Association;
- And Stephen Bauld, the Vice-President of the Ontario General Contractors Association.

There is no longer any question that Ontario faces significant skills challenges. We know there is an urgent need to retrain workers who have been laid off in sectors such as manufacturing and forestry, while other sectors struggle to find qualified employees.

The workforce challenges will intensify in the years ahead, as more baby boomers retire and we continue to experience slowing population growth.

Even with strong immigration levels, the Conference Board of Canada estimates Ontario will be short more than 360,000 skilled employees by 2025. This will further escalate to a shortage of more than 560,000 employees by 2030.

Ontario's Workforce Shortage Coalition - which represents more than 100,000 employers and millions of employees - recognizes the urgent need to address this challenge.

The coalition has done considerable work to date to determine the extent and scope of the problem. The skills shortage has been well documented in the Conference Board report I just mentioned.

Our challenge today is to start identifying solutions. How do we meet the challenge? What are the essential elements of the strategy Ontario needs to address the skills shortage?

As I mentioned, the Conference Board report indicates that the shortage of skilled workers will intensify in the years ahead. The report underscores the need for a co-ordinated, long-term strategy that looks out over 15 to 20 years. The work of developing that strategy begins today.