

### **Is Canada Closed for Tourism?**

Tourism is a powerful economic driver that employs over 300,000 Ontarians while generating over \$23 billion for our economy. It is for this reason I am deeply disappointed in the failure to resolve the job action between Members of the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers and the Government of Canada.

The Government of Ontario continues to partner with our tourism industry to establish Ontario as a premier travel destination. Strategic investments include: over \$233 million to support 4,200 marquee festivals and events in every region of the province; over \$104 million to attract large scale conventions to conduct their business here and \$40 million to the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation to proactively market our unique offerings.

Estimates indicate international tourism will increase by 3.3% per year, equalling 43 million more visitors entering the tourism market annually. The World Economic Forum lists Canada as one of the world's top 10 tourist destinations with Ontario leading every region in the country. Our investments have attracted increasing numbers of international visitors and spending – jumping by 3.6% to \$18.3 billion with tourism receipts rising by 4.3% totalling \$23.6 billion. Our international visitors are staying longer and spending more.

Slashing funding for the Canadian Tourism Commission from \$100 million to its current \$57.8 million has eliminated advertising from traditional markets like the United States, jeopardizing the largest share of Canada's international tourists. As American visitation numbers decline it is clear that withdrawing from the advertising market is the wrong move. It directly impacts our presence in the global market place and significantly lowers our profile.

Making matters worse, our international image is tarnished with a strike that seemingly cannot be settled.

With profoundly delayed processing times for visas, the current job action by PAFSO is now in its second month during the height of Ontario's prime tourism season. Canadian Officials in foreign countries are directly encouraging potential tourists to boycott Canada as a destination that will significantly impact tourism in every region of the province and the local economies they support.

As we approach the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games, over 200 international dignitaries from the PASO family of nations will be convening in Ontario for their Annual General Assembly. Based on their experiences in securing the visas necessary, these delegates could dissuade nationals from visiting Ontario for the Games, seriously affecting our ability to drive

foreign tourism to Ontario. We cannot afford to continue a narrative that Ontario – and Canada – is not open for travel.

The Tourism Industry Association of Canada estimates that the strike will cost the Canadian tourism sector over \$280 million this year alone.

As the country's largest tourism market – we suffer the most.

Inaction to resolve this matter is unacceptable. With a newly named Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, it is my hope that Minister Chris Alexander's first order of business is reengage the PAFSO in negotiations to ensure that Canada remains open for business. I have written to him personally to raise his awareness of this serious concern.

Michael Chan

Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport

Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games