

IMMIGRATION WEBSITE

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I would like to inform the honourable members of an important event that took place earlier this month while the House was adjourned. On March 7, at the Toronto Reference Library, I was proud to launch the Ontario government's first-ever international website portal dedicated to helping newcomers and potential newcomers start their new lives here in Ontario.

The website is Ontarioimmigration.ca. This website is a whole new way of saying, "Welcome to Ontario. Here is the information you need to get started," as it will provide potential immigrants with vital information in their source country before they even come to Ontario.

Each year, 125,000 newcomers choose Ontario as their home. We welcome more immigrants than any other province, and our province is better for it. As Ontario's population ages and our birth rate flattens, immigration becomes essential to our labour force and economy. We need the skills, global experience and willingness to work that newcomers bring.

Our new immigration website portal helps newcomers get up-to-date information about everything they need to know to start their new lives in Ontario, from starting a new business to discovering information about Ontario's vibrant communities, big and small.

It also promotes Ontario around the world online. We're showcasing our cities, towns and rural areas on this website, and we're welcoming newcomers to find out about Ontario before they choose to come here.

Newcomers can download key forms, such as immigration papers or a driver's licence application, and they can get answers to questions such as the following: "How do I enrol my children in school?" "What is the cost of housing and accommodation in various parts of Ontario?" "Where do you go to improve your language skills?" "What documentation would be helpful for a smooth transition into the labour force?"

Our new Ontarioimmigration.ca website will get people thinking about choosing Ontario. Then it will help them make the most of their new lives after they get here, so they can access all of Ontario's services, from health care to bridge training and language programs.

The website has 300 links to other Internet sites, and we're adding more. It provides convenient, one-window access to information and services from all three levels of government and from community organizations in every corner of this province. In the past, newcomers had to work to find the information they needed. This makes it much easier, whether you're in Mumbai, Lahore or Shanghai.

Ontarioimmigration.ca is a partnership with the federal government under the new Canada-Ontario immigration agreement, which I was proud to sign last November, an agreement which will see \$920 million of new federal investment in Ontario so that newcomers will be better able to reach their goals.

Municipalities are also partners in this project. Toronto, Windsor-Essex, Sudbury, Ottawa and London are the first cities to be featured on the immigration website. This will enable potential immigrants to investigate the incredible opportunities available in Ontario's great communities, who see newcomers as a source of entrepreneurship, creativity, and economic and social value. This is their chance to attract newcomers to their communities and profile themselves internationally.

You may have seen our television ads informing newcomers about services available through our website. These ads are in 20 languages to reach as many people as possible. The ads also serve as a tremendous reminder to all Ontarians about the benefit that newcomers bring to our communities and economy.

Ontarioimmigration.ca has already registered over 28,000 visits -- over 1,300 hits per day -- and we have just begun. As we move forward, we'll keep adding new information, new links, and profiling more Ontario cities and towns.

The Ontarioimmigration.ca website is an international gateway to Ontario and its many diverse towns and cities. We are helping newcomers make the most of their new lives here and helping them to contribute to Ontario, because when newcomers succeed, Ontario succeeds.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Response?

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Response? The member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The member for Kitchener-Waterloo is waiting patiently.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): On behalf of our party, I'm certainly pleased to respond to the announcement made by the minister today with respect to the Ontarioimmigration.ca website, which has been established in partnership with the federal government and that also includes our municipalities in that partnership. Our party welcomes any initiative that is going to assist newcomers to settle and integrate into communities in Ontario, so we welcome this today.

One of the issues I want to address, in a very non-partisan way -- I think it's an issue that continues to concern all of us, an issue I've heard about for the 15 years I have been here -

- is the difficulties foreign-trained professionals still have. As I say, it's a non-partisan issue; it's an issue that I think we all, working together, are trying to resolve.

There are many people who come here, including those in the medical profession who, as a result of having operated and worked in their own country of origin, want to come here and continue to work as doctors. Unfortunately, we've heard what happens when they make application. They're sometimes told, "Yes, when you go there, you will be able to continue to practise as a doctor" or an engineer or an accountant. Unfortunately, we know that is not the case.

I hope we will continue to work collectively with the federal government in order to ensure that accurate information is given to people in their country of origin so that when they arrive on these shores, just as my family did, they will know exactly what lies ahead. So I would encourage us to work together.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I just want to say unequivocally that I like the Minister of Citizenship, and it's with that in mind that I find it regrettable that the statement we're presented with here today has very little substance.

What we are talking about today is a website. What I want to say to the Minister of Citizenship is this: Are you going to include this Liberal promise in your website? This is the Liberal promise of 2003: "We will require that all Ontario trades and professions accelerate the entry of qualified new Canadians. If, after one year, the professional trade has not eliminated barriers to entry, we will act."

We are now close to the end of your third year, and while you have made some progress with doctors -- George, George -- and while we've made some progress on so many other fronts, including doctors and engineers, because I believe we could do so much more, we've done so little.

As it relates to engineers, we know for example that they insist that any engineer have one year of Canadian work experience before they work in Canada, no matter how much experience they already have. No effort has been made to deal with a profession that keeps foreign-trained, experienced engineers from getting the jobs they require -- such a waste of human capital.

What we need is a concrete plan to help, so that those immigrants who come and are fully qualified get jobs. That's what we need, not a website.