

Ontario construction leaders hope Liberals make good on promises

Angela Gismondi September 24, 2021



Now that the federal election is all said and done, it's time for the government to make good on the commitments they outlined in their platform, say Ontario construction stakeholders.

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau was re-elected prime minister of Canada with a minority government in the federal election Sept. 20.

“During the election campaign, all three major political parties recognized the severity of the housing supply problem and pledged to tackle the issue,” said Richard Lyall, president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON), in a statement.

“We are very much dependent on housing to support our economic recovery. The dire lack of housing is a critical issue that must be addressed, or our recovery will stall. Red tape is presently delaying construction of much-needed new housing developments and we are pleased that the Liberal housing plan includes a pledge to remove some of this unnecessary paperwork by providing tools to streamline the application and construction process as well as tackle NIMBYism.”

The Progressive Contractors Association of Canada (PCA) said it is looking to bring up the skilled labour shortage with the government sooner rather than later.

“One thing that has become even more clear over the past few months is the acute shortage of skilled trade workers,” said Karen Renkema, vice-president, Ontario with the PCA. “This is a ‘now’ issue. This is not a ‘we need to train for the next generation’ issue.”

She suggested the feds look at different strategies to address the issue such as immigration or temporary foreign worker programs.

“They have to have a look at more flexibility on letting skilled trades workers in,” said Renkema. “There needs to be some creative thinking around how to entice those moving out of other industries into the skilled trades workforce, but it needs to be done now.”

RESCON is also looking forward to hearing about the Liberals plans to “recruit and retain the next generation of construction workers and learn about the proposals to ensure labour market needs dictate immigration policies.”

They also want to know how pledged labour and immigration policies such as the establishment of a Trusted Employer System, which streamlines the application process for Canadian companies hiring temporary foreign workers to fill labour shortages, and the Labour Mobility Tax Credit will be implemented by the government.

Patrick Dillon, business manager and secretary treasurer with the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, said the election has been a positive for construction labour.

“For 30 or 35 years, we have been lobbying to take the discriminatory practices out of the Income Tax Act where a construction salesperson gets paid for their travel expense when they go to sell material but the construction worker that goes the same distance to the same project to install the material can’t write off their expenses,” explained Dillon. “The Liberals and the Conservative Party in this election both addressed that issue. We know from the past that the NDP are supportive of it even though they didn’t have it as part of their party platform. There is work to be done on that.”

The Liberals also pledged to invest in \$10 a day child care for all Canadian families, he added.

“A national child care program will be helpful to us in the construction industry particularly in our effort to attract women to the trades,” said Dillon.

While the federal government has made contributions to trades training through the provincial government in the past few years, more funding is needed to ensure there are people to build the infrastructure over the next 10 to 15 years, added Dillon.

Stakeholders also stressed the importance of having an infrastructure plan in place.

“(During the election) nobody really talked about infrastructure, it was all about the pandemic. But as we move out of pandemic response the investment can’t stop. We can’t dig a bigger hole in the infrastructure deficit,” Renkema said.

Other organizations said they look forward to working with the Trudeau government.

“We look forward to continuing our engagement with the federal government as it addresses the country’s infrastructure deficit and critical infrastructure assets such as transit, water systems, housing, roads and bridges,” reads a statement issued by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario.

“The OGCA (Ontario General Contractors Association) is excited to build on our relationships with the re-elected Liberal minority government and the incoming minister of infrastructure and minister of labour,” said the OGCA in a statement. “We will continue working with our partners, the CCA (Canadian Construction Association) and GCAC (General Contractors Alliance of Canada), to advocate for fair procurement practices, infrastructure investment and solutions to the skills deficit.”