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Canadian construction industry sets out agenda for coming federal election

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With another federal election at hand, the construction industry will follow closely how each party approaches issues of infrastructure, skills development and labour mobility on the campaign trail.

“Reinvestment in infrastructure is so important,” says Michael Atkinson, president of the Canadian Construction Association. “The government has done some great stuff, such as the \$33 billion Building Canada fund — that is not chump change — but with infrastructure being linked to productivity, it is a pretty big issue.”

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities reported earlier this year that Canada’s municipal infrastructure deficit sits at \$123 billion. CCA has advocated before that sustainable and reliable funding is needed to tackle this deficit. The possible solutions to this issue presented by the various federal parties in this area will be of interest, Atkinson said.

In a recent CCA pre-budget submission to the Commons finance committee, the association called for better funding for publicly funded colleges. Improving the training capacity of Canada’s colleges is crucial to tackling skilled trade shortages, the association states. How federal parties propose to recapitalize equipment, physical infrastructure and instructors at colleges will be on the industry’s radar during the campaign, says Bill Ferreira, executive director of government relations and public affairs at CCA.

Federal backing for a recent resolution by Canadian premiers to reduce labour mobility barriers nationwide is also a key issue for construction, says Atkinson.

The premiers decided that any worker certified for an occupation, by a regulatory authority of a province or territory, is to be recognized as qualified to practice that occupation by all other provinces and territories. Also, expediting the recognition of a worker’s certification, without further material training,

examinations or assessment was part of their decision.

“How will they work with with provinces to help make that be,” asks Atkinson. “This mobility is part of a labour (shortage) solution.”

Issues such as tax-relief for employer-provided vehicles may not be hot topic for all federal leaders, but the CCA will gauge how each party will approaches the issue, says Atkinson.

“It is not as big an issue as others for some, but it is a technical issue which is important,” says Atkinson. “That tax treatment is particularly out-of-date.”

From an Ontario perspective, the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) says it hopes infrastructure funding makes it on to the agenda of all the parties, no matter how they name it. A strong infrastructure plan helps improve economic competitiveness and attract investment.

“Just as infrastructure funding is a top priority in the United States election, we hope such discussions are front and centre in debates across Canada,” says Andy Manahan, executive director of RCCAO.

Clive Thurston, president of the Ontario General Contractors Association says the primary thing his association will look for is continued funding for infrastructure in “a positive and accountable manner” so funds goes where they should.