

Construction stakeholders urge Ontario candidates to address labour shortage

Angela Gismondi June 4, 2018



This is the second and final part of a two-part series on the election priorities for several construction associations in Ontario. In this article, industry leaders discuss the importance of addressing the skilled labour shortage and reforming apprenticeship systems no matter what the outcome of the election may be and which party is elected into power.

Improving the apprenticeship system in Ontario and attracting more people to the industry to fill the skills gap is of the utmost importance to construction industry stakeholders as the provincial election looms.

“We are starting to experience, certainly more so in some trades, a real skilled trades shortage or at least a looming shortage,” said **Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario.**

“If we do get the steady stream of infrastructure projects that we hope will be happening, that could present some problems in terms of delivery in the future.”

With the 42nd Ontario election just around the corner on June 7, stakeholders are eyeing the platforms of Premier and Liberal Party Leader Kathleen Wynne, Progressive Conservative candidate Doug Ford, New Democratic Party Leader Andrea Horwath and Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner closely, looking at what could benefit the industry.

The Progressive Contractors Association of Canada is hoping the next government will take a comprehensive look at reforming the apprenticeship system in Ontario, which would, in turn, attract more people to the trades to address the skills shortage.

“The system as it is today is underperforming compared to the rest of the country, particularly when it comes to attracting new apprentices into the skilled trades. What we’re doing just isn’t working,” commented Sean Reid, vice-president of development and member relations at the PCA.

“We need to take a much closer look at how the apprenticeship system works and where the barriers are, where the problems are in terms of not attracting enough of the kind of workers that we want and need into the skilled trades, not attracting the young people that we need, what can we do differently so that we are addressing the skills shortage that is growing.”

Patrick Dillon, business manager for the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, said the most important issue for his organization was health and safety in the industry.

“The number one issue that is not being talked about at all, by any of the political leaders, is that the health and safety system in Ontario is broken and has been broken for many years. Nothing has really improved since the ‘90s,” said Dillon.

“We think that should be a priority for whoever forms the government. We will push that agenda very hard to try and change the system. We’re looking for an independent third-party agency like we had in the early ‘90s. We’re looking to have that set up again or at the very least to have the chief prevention officer and the prevention system answerable to a workers rights commissioner, sort of like the environment commissioner.”

He added when it comes to the party leaders and labour law reform, he hopes “no one would move to change labour laws without putting the workplace parties in the room to identify what the issues are that need changing and to drive them as close to a consensus on that change as possible.”