



Friday » June
9 » 2006

A job for nearly everyone

Colleen Silverthorn

Leader-Post

Friday, June 02, 2006

Saskatchewan has reached the near-mythical position of "full-employment" where everyone who wants a job has one. That is, unless you're aboriginal.

According to the latest labour market survey released by Statistics Canada, Saskatchewan's employment rate -- the percentage of the workforce that is employed -- hit 64.6 per cent in 2005, the highest it's been in 30 years. At the same time unemployment averaged 5.1 per cent.

Alberta led the country with an employment rate of 69.8 per cent.

According to Doug Elliott, publisher of statistical newsletter Sask Trends Monitor, the high employment and low unemployment in Saskatchewan means the province has almost reached the point where there's a job for every person who wants to work.

"The people who want to work and are unable to are few and far between."

Elliott added that the employment rate of 64.6 per cent in the province includes people 15 and over, which means a lot of seniors fall into the category.

"If you adjust that for people in the working age group, 20 to 60, it's even higher, around 80 per cent."

For aboriginal people, however, the numbers were much less encouraging.

Employment among Saskatchewan's aboriginal people living off reserve was the lowest of all the western provinces at 52 per cent, while the unemployment rate was the highest --16.1 per cent.

Statistics Canada only measured aboriginal employment in the West and did not have similar figures for the rest of Canada.

Elliott said Alberta might have a better employment rate for aboriginal people (64.2 per cent) because of that province's booming economy. He also noted that Manitoba, where 58.3 per cent of the aboriginal workforce is employed, has a high number of Metis people, a group that is traditionally "better off" than First Nations.

"All I'm doing is making excuses here. Fundamentally we're just not doing a very good job," Elliott said.

"I don't know whether it's First Nations' fault for not getting the education up, or our fault for not hiring them."

Guy Lonechild, second vice-chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, blamed employers and the provincial government for failing to hire aboriginal workers.

"I think one of the biggest barriers to economic growth and labour market participation is the stigma and also the stereotypes in the minds of business people," Lonechild said.

"We have to look internally and do some soul searching in terms of what we feel our priorities are in Saskatchewan. The message is somebody has to show some leadership."

Meanwhile, employment in Canada hit a 13-year-high last year, the longest stretch of employment gains since the 1970s.

In 2005, 63.4 per cent of the Canadian population 16 and over was employed.

At the same time, the national unemployment rate dropped to an all-time low of six per cent.

© The Leader-Post (Regina) 2006

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2006 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.