

Publication: The Province

Date: August 23, 2006

Priority processing offered

IMMIGRATION: Pilot project to aid B.C.-bound entrepreneurs

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It just got a whole lot easier for foreign entrepreneurs to immigrate to B.C.

That will be the impact of a memorandum of understanding between the federal and provincial government to "fast track" the applications of entrepreneurs wanting to immigrate to the province.

"This pilot project will help British Columbia get the entrepreneurs it needs, faster," Citizenship and Immigration Minister Monte Solberg said yesterday in Burnaby.

Solberg said the applicants will be steered to B.C.'s provincial nominee program for "priority processing."

Colin Hansen, B.C.'s Economic Development Minister, joined Solberg on the podium at Tekion, an energy-technology company owned by Allen Born, a U.S. entrepreneur who set up his business here under the Provincial Nominee Program business entrepreneur category.

Hansen said his ministry will be hiring extra staff so that "we have the capacity to truly fast track these applications."

"What's going to happen as a result of this announcement is that the immigration officials in the field, working in the embassies and consulates around the world, will help us to identify candidates who would benefit from this program," he said.

"This pilot project will allow B.C. and Citizenship and Immigration Canada to identify people who have already applied to come to Canada as entrepreneurs," said Solberg.

Solberg said there are about 4,000 entrepreneurial applicants currently waiting in the system, with about 1,000 of them indicating that they'd like to relocate to B.C.

"Then they would get priority processing and could become landed much more quickly than if they sat in the current system," said Solberg.

He termed Tekion "a Canadian success story that was only possible because of the entrepreneurial spirit and determination of people such as [Born]."

Solberg said the ability of Canada "to attract entrepreneurs is clearly important to our economy."

Hansen said "hundreds" of entrepreneurs will benefit from the one-year pilot project that should be in place by next month.

Born hopes to have his landed immigrant status within the next few months which will make it easier for him to operate and expand his fledgling fuel-cell business that employs 75 people.

"This is where the [talented] people are," he



Canada's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Monte Solberg (left) listens to Tekion chairman of the board Allen Born at the firm's Burnaby headquarters yesterday. RIC ERNST — THE PROVINCE

said. "The Lower Mainland gave us this pool of technical genius that we couldn't find anywhere else.

"You've got here things that the world can envy

as far as the engineers and scientists. I mean these people are great.

"And that's why we're here."

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