

## **BRIEFING NOTE FOR THE MINISTER STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT ON RAISING ADULT LITERACY**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this briefing note is to inform the Minister of the June 12, 2003 tabling and issues related to a Standing Committee report on Raising Adult Literacy. The Minister may receive questions from the media and/or in Question Period.

### **Background**

The Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities has been conducting hearings on the problem of Adult Literacy in Canada. On June 12, 2003, it will be tabling its report, Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need For A Pan-Canadian Response. The report outlines the following:

- In 1988, a Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy estimated the annual cost of illiteracy in the workforce at \$4 billion and the cost to society at \$10 billion.
- In 1987, the National Literacy Secretariat was founded to fund literacy initiatives and provide an infrastructure to support literacy activities across Canada.
- In 1997, the federal government increased to \$30 million the annual allocation of the NLS.
- In 1999-2000, most provincial and territorial governments expanded policy statements on adult literacy, however, activity and funding did not increase in most parts of the country.
- The federal government in the January 2001 and September 2002 Throne Speeches pledged to increased commitment to literacy, but no federal policy was announced. .
- Participants at a November 2002 National Summit on Innovation and Learning recommended establishment of a pan-Canadian literacy system, supported by federal, provincial and territorial governments, to improve literacy and basic skills.

### **Discussion**

It is anticipated focus will be on three findings of the report:

1. The government is not doing enough or demonstrating leadership to address the national problem of illiteracy in Canada.
2. The social and economic costs of illiteracy are an estimated \$10 billion annually, according to the 1988 Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy report.
3. The federal and provincial governments should develop a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development.

While recognizing provincial/territorial and private sector responsibilities, the Committee concludes that the federal government has not demonstrated leadership in this “national” problem.

The first of 20 recommendations is that the Minister of Human Resources Development Canada meet with provincial/territorial labour market and education ministers to develop a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development. The Minister will likely be asked whether, and when, he proposes to follow up on this recommendation.

According to the report, provinces and territories should have primary responsibility for education and labour market training, with established joint funding levels and funding duration.

The report will likely be well received by provinces (except Quebec), territories and literacy service providers as an opportunity to leverage for more federal funding.

### **Next Steps**

A Question Period card is being prepared for the Minister. Questions & Answers are also being prepared in anticipation of possible media scrums.

The official government response will be developed in the form of a Memorandum to Cabinet. Until such time as the official government response is developed and approved by Cabinet, the following tactical approach could be considered in response to questions:

- Thank the Standing Committee for its work (the government will study the Report closely and respond officially to its findings and recommendations).
- Point out that the Committee acknowledged the more than \$30 million the federal government gives annually to the National Literacy Secretariat as well as the government's targeted funding on family literacy, workplace literacy and new technology.
- Remind inquirers of the government's Throne Speech commitment to build on our investments in human capital, including literacy.
- And reiterate that the government will continue to work with all partners to address the problem, although provinces & territories have constitutional responsibility for education, and private and volunteer sector organizations and employers also have a role to play.