

POSTAL NEWS

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1. Liberalize postal service, reform EI: OECD

By QMI Agency

Last Updated: March 10, 2010 4:29pm

Canada must enhance competitiveness, especially in telecoms and postal services, as well as reform E.I. to make it a post-recession global economy, the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation said in a report released Wednesday.

“The global recession has left deep scars,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría.

“The only way to begin healing them is by taking effective action now to help our economies recover their lost potential.”

In its 30-nation report entitled Going for Growth, the OECD said economies in general must replace crisis management tactics with new-found competitiveness and taxation measures.

Governments, including Canada’s, have already started to wind down stimulus measures turning their attention instead to debt repayment.

The report said high unemployment will persist and that investments will be riskier as the cost of capital rises. The jobless rate in Canada hovers around the 8% mark and at around 10% in the U.S.

The recession has eroded the potential output of OECD economies over the medium term. It estimates a Gross Domestic Product loss of 3% on average for these countries.

Canada’s priorities, according to the OECD, include reducing barriers to inter-provincial competition, opening the doors to foreign ownership, boosting competition in network industries, wiping out work disincentives in the income support system, furthering tax reform, making changes to the employment insurance system and restraining growth in public health costs.

Restrictions on foreign direct investment are higher in Canada than in other OECD countries, particularly in the telecommunications, broadcasting and air transport industries, it said.

In its latest Throne Speech, the federal Conservatives signalled the floodgates to foreign ownership in the telecom market could soon be opened.

Canada's postal services also need to liberalized, it said. This can be done by "eliminating legislated monopoly protections and privatizing Canada Post."

It also suggested scaling back access to E.I. for seasonal and temporary workers.

Significant progress has already been made on tax recommendations, including the elimination of general capital taxes and the introduction of harmonized sales taxes in B.C. and Ontario.

But the OECD pointed out that minimal and in some cases no progress has been made in the other areas.

It also said Canada exhibits a modest gap in living standards when compared to the upper half of the OECD. This is "entirely due to lower labour productivity," it said.

In regards to promoting greener business, the federal government has been slow to raise the price of carbon emissions leading three provinces to introduce their own cap-and-trade systems.

On a more global scale, it said prudent banking reform can be achieved without undermining competition. Central bankers from G20 countries recently met in Basel, Switzerland to hash out the latest draft of proposals with measures reportedly ranging from higher capital requirements and limits to a financial institution's size.

"Strong supervision even appears to reduce the cost of credit for firms and households, as it helps to level the playing field. This is yet another reason why governments should resist allowing current financial sector reform proposals to be watered down," the OECD said.

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2. 'Shorter working hours' for postal workers

Submitted by Tim Chambers on Wed, 10/03/2010 - 10:47

Postal workers have agreed a new pay deal with Royal Mail that will allow them to work shorter hours, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) has said.

After staging a series of strikes over last year in October and over the Christmas period, the workers have secured themselves a 6.9 per cent pay increase over three years.

The CWU also said postal workers will receive lump sum payments and weekly basic pay supplements.

Staff will receive a payment of £400 when the deal has been ratified by the 121,000 members and a further £1,000 linked to the delivery of changes in the workplaces, according to the Times.

Maternity and paternity paid leave has been increased for postal service staff too, with mothers receiving 26 weeks rather than 18 weeks and fathers gaining an extra week on their statutory leave, meaning they can take two weeks off.

Royal Mail chief executive, Adam Crozier, said the deal was "good news for customers" as it will bring stability to the service over the three years, which should mean there are no strikes.

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3. U.S. Postal Service faces uncertain future

Posted: Mar 10, 2010 7:32 AM

Eau Claire (WQOW)- With volume down, and debt up, the post office faces an uncertain future.

Bob Colaizy, Postmaster in Menomonie, has been in the working in the postal service for 37 years. He says the business has changed in ways he never would have imagined, "We're running about 15 to 20 percent decrease in volume from about the same time last year. It's a big number, a big number."

Because of that Bob says they don't need as much help to get the job done. "We still stop at every single residence in the county, every single day. "It's just that people aren't mailing as much to those customers." Less work translates to fewer workers. Bob says his staff has been cut from 9 full time mail carriers to 7 and a half full time positions. "Nationwide they've gotten rid of thousands of full time positions." Last year alone the postal service experienced a nearly 13 percent decline in volume. "If we don't react to the volume decrease we're going to be in big trouble" continued Bob.

So what can be done? The biggest decision rests with congress. "We're mandated by congress to deliver mail six days a week to keep all the small post offices open," said Bob. "Even though a lot of them don't bring in enough to cover the wages."

If things don't change, small post offices could be closed and congress could eliminate the six-day mandate, giving the post office the flexibility to end Saturday delivery. Something Bob says is a good idea. "It definitely will save us money, whether it's gonna happen, that's another thing."

The Postmaster General says the switch could save the postal service around \$3 billion per year.

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Updated: 03/09/2010 9:54 PM KSTP.com
By: Tom Hauser and Becky Nahm

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4. TRACKING YOUR \$: Is the latest Census alert a waste?

Some are calling the government's latest attempt to convince people to participate in the U.S. Census a waste of taxpayer money.

For weeks, television and radio ads, news conferences led by politicians, and other promotions have been urging people to participate in the U.S. Census, which begins later this month.

This week 120 million homes received a one-page letter containing the same message.

No one at the Census Bureau could be reached to tell 5 EYEWITNESS NEWS what it cost to send out the letter. But the envelope says it is pre-sorted, first-class mail.

According to the U.S. Postal Service web site, pre-sorted, first-class mail costs 41 cents per letter, which means postage alone probably cost \$49 million.

Phil Krinkie from the Taxpayers League of Minnesota said, "Sending me a letter saying, 'check the mailbox next week, there's going to be another letter,' just strikes me as an utter waste of taxpayer money."

Minneapolis residents who received the letter seemed to echo Krinkie's comments.

Alton Harper said, "I don't think it's a worthwhile expense. It's a waste of money when they could have just sent it all in one shot."

Another Minneapolis resident, Robin Russell, said, "I don't think it was necessary. I read the first sentence. I thought it was the form we were going to fill out and that's why I opened it. And, it went straight in the trash."

A spokesperson for the Census Bureau defended the decision to send the letter. The Census Bureau said market research indicates by sending out a letter in advance of a survey greatly increases the response to the survey. And if they have to follow-up with phone calls or knock on your door, that can cost \$75 per household.

The cost of the census has grown from \$10 per person in 1990 to \$45 per person in 2010.

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