

September 2015 Business Voice column

Mayor Mike Savage

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As I write this, summer is in its full glory in Halifax, our streets bustling with visitors, tables a precious commodity on downtown patios, and many folks enjoying a little time away from the hectic schedule of their working lives.

But, with fall comes a refreshed new start, and what a fall it will be for Halifax. This, after all, marks the beginning of the most visible work at the Irving Shipyard which has spent the last number of months hiring the skilled tradespeople and others who will cut steel for the massive multi-year ships contract.

This work is a significant contributor to our city's rosy economic forecast for 2015. The Conference Board of Canada projects that Halifax will lead GDP growth, along with Toronto and Vancouver, and our performance will remain strong throughout 2016.

Looking around at the bustling shipyard assembly hall, all of those cranes dotting the skyline on both sides of the harbour and the Nova Centre rising steadily from the heart of the entertainment district, one could be forgiven for forgetting to take in the horizon.

But, failing to look beyond today's good news would be missing the opportunity to take full advantage of the current Halifax momentum to plan for long-term prosperity in this city and province. We need only consider the landmark Ivany Commission report on the Nova Scotia economy or the more recent June release of the Halifax Partnership's Halifax Index gut check for the city economy to better inform our views.

Both reinforce case that what our city and our province needs more than anything else is people – people to fill our need for skilled labour, to drive a knowledge economy, to spark innovation, to pay taxes and to create wealth for all of us. It's time to double down on our efforts to attract new people from new countries to our shores and to work harder to make Halifax the city of choice for well-educated, talented young workers.

This fall we will be broadening our efforts with post-secondary presidents to make greater connections between international students, new graduates and the workplace. Again, my office will host a reception for first year international students to demonstrate that they are welcome residents of our city, a simple yet important statement by our municipal government.

If you are in business in this city, you too can help create the economic conditions for the long-term financial success of the place where you make your living. Think about what you can do to attract or retain talented workers before their career options lead them elsewhere.

Fred Morley, chief economist for the Partnership put it this way in an editorial in The Chronicle Herald: "Eliminating net youth out-migration would double Nova Scotia's GDP growth rate and make us the fastest growing province in Canada. Solve youth retention and you solve our economic growth problem."

If you still have your doubts about the benefits of immigrant attraction take a few minutes to read this issue's coverage of the Partnership's report on the impact of Halifax's Lebanese community, a multi-generational group that is literally building the Halifax of today and tomorrow.

We have a wonderful city, and it is entering a period of strong growth. Bringing people to our community helps everyone and will sustain our success, not just today but into the next generation.