

Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)

Pre-budget consultations 2012

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Responses

1. Economic Recovery and Growth

Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?

1) Invest heavily in green energy, including geothermal, solar and wind power. Please note that renewable is not necessarily green. For example, the Lower Muskrat Hydro project is not green energy because it is destructive of an important watershed. 2) Divest in unsustainable industries. The current government has cut the things that build a healthy society (like environmental protection and the arts) while horribly overspending on wasteful initiatives like fighter jets and prisons - both forms of corporate welfare for large multinationals. Spending on military hardware should be drastically cut. Spending on prison infrastructure should be drastically cut. 3) Invest in sustainable research and development. The government has inexplicably cut all of Canada's best environmental protections, via Fisheries and Oceans and Environment Canada, and made a point of muzzling scientists while insisting that only research with "practical applications" matters. But the advancement of our understanding of climate and other environmental crises is crucial, and if we are to thrive in a changing physical environment, while reducing our environmental footprint, we need to invest in green technological development. To get there, we must also invest in better scientific understanding of our current situation, and scientists should be supported, financially, in their efforts to share their findings with the general public. 4) Invest in education. An educated workforce is a more productive, lucrative one. Instead of cutting tuition support the federal government should be supporting students and making post-secondary education as close to free as possible. This will be much easier after cutting spending on military equipment and prison infrastructure.

2. Job Creation

As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?

1) Invest heavily in the emerging "green-collar" sector. This includes R&D and high-tech sustainability solutions based on renewable energy and cleantech. 2) Invest in entrepreneurship. Canada is luckily still blessed with a good education system and many innovative business people. Instead of supporting overseas-based multinationals, the federal government should be investing in small startups, where most innovation and job creation happens. 3) Protect local industries. Rather than signing international trade agreements like CETA that surrender our local protections and thus cost Canadian jobs (not to mention further eroding our remaining environmental protections), the federal government should be doing everything in its power to ensure that Canadians can buy made-in-Canada and know that they are sourcing 100 % local products and services - manufactured, distributed and sold locally.

3. Demographic Change

What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?

1) Ensure access to post-secondary education of all kinds for ALL Canadians, without debt. 2) Increase immigration for all skill levels. The increase in skilled immigrants is encouraging, but Canada also has a responsibility to refugees in need and its standards are currently far too exclusive. At the same time, there are many jobs at all skill levels, not just white-collar jobs, that have labour shortages. 3) Train employers to hire and work well with newcomers, cross-culturally. In our large immigrant centres too many white-collar employers are failing to take advantage of the available talent pool in newcomers. They need help in realizing what is there, how it will help them, and how they can overcome cultural barriers.

4. Productivity

With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada's population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?

1) Develop a major national grants program for producers of wind, solar, geothermal and other green energy sources. 2) Provide 100% financing for any household that switches to solar, wind or geothermal, or significantly improves its R value. The financing should be repayable without interest over the payback period provided by energy cost savings. 3) Cut all subsidies to the oil and gas industry. 4) Develop a major national grants program for entrepreneurial startups with approved (by, for example, the Canadian Innovation Centre in Waterloo) new technologies. 5) Cut subsidies to large multinationals so that they must compete on their own steam.

5. Other Challenges

With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?

As has been the case since Canada began, the aboriginal people on and off reserve tend to face the greatest challenges. An obvious starting point would be to meet with the leaders of every reserve in the country and figure out a plan to get every resident high-quality housing and a healthy, reliable water supply. There should be no more haranguing native leaders about business practices. The federal government can and should pay for this to happen, and stop making excuses.