

Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)

Pre-budget consultations 2012

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

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?

Inuit Nunangat, the Inuit homeland in Canada, makes up approximately a third of Canada's landmass and half its shoreline. This area, governed by five Constitutionally entrenched modern treaties (land claims agreements), contains much of Canada's non-renewable and other natural resource potential. The Government of Canada is relying heavily on resource development projects to propel economic growth, including increased wealth, expansion of employment, and improved levels of productivity. Inuit are open to projects at a scale and rate that strikes an appropriate balance between economic development, social development, cultural continuity, and environmental protection. A guide to contemporary resource development in the Arctic can be found in the words and spirit of A Circumpolar Inuit Resource Development Principles in Inuit Nunaat. The specific measure required to bring about this balance, and this economic growth, is the active engagement with Inuit, and partnership with Inuit. It is noteworthy that, in recent months, provincial leaders and prominent business executives have made widely publicized statements indicating that active and constructive partnership with Aboriginal peoples in Canada is critical to creating a smooth and reliable path for major resource development projects approvals and implementation.

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?

In addition to the measures outlined in response to the previous question, another key area where federal government actions could enhance the extent to which Inuit contribute to Canada's overall economic performance, and associated job creation, is Inuit education and training. Inuit, and Canada, need the concerted, focused and creative use of federal jurisdiction and funds to radically improve levels of Inuit education and skills acquisition. Notwithstanding widespread, but ill-informed, assumptions to the contrary, Parliament and the federal government have ample authority and capacity to take far-reaching and imaginative measures to bring about greatly improved Inuit education and training outcomes. This authority and capacity is drawn from a variety of Constitutionally anchored sources, including Parliament's powers to make laws in relation to Inuit under heading 91.24 of the Constitution Act, 1867, in relation to the implementation of modern treaties (land claims agreements) with Inuit, special federal powers in the territories and over such things as marine areas, fisheries, and cross-boundary matters, and also including Parliament's unqualified spending powers. A radical improvement in Inuit education and training will not be achieved without the use of targeted federal funding. The scope of what is needed is large. In 2006, a federally appointed conciliator reported during the process of updating the implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement that even a short, five-year effort aimed at making some modest headway in Inuit participation in the Nunavut workforce would require \$100 million in federal funds. The financial resources of lower levels of government in Inuit

Nunangat are not sufficient to meet such costs out of existing funding sources. A National Inuit Education Strategy, called First Canadians Canadians First, was launched in 2011, and is ready to be implemented.

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?

In addition to the response to the first question, it will be important for Parliamentarians to recognize that the overall trends affecting the Canadian population are not playing out the same way with respect to Inuit and other Aboriginal peoples. The Inuit population in Canada is much younger than the population as a whole. While fertility rates are gradually declining, the number of Inuit in the prime employment cohort (20 to 60) will show steady growth in coming decades. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a challenge in that public-sector policies and private-sector initiatives will need to be fashioned so as to generate adequate employment and other economic opportunities for Inuit, particularly young Inuit joining the workforce for the first time. It is an opportunity in that successfully attracting and sustaining optimal Inuit participation in employment can contribute in tangible and important ways to both Inuit economic self-reliance and Canada's overall economic performance and well being. There is one other aspect of Arctic demographics that needs underscoring. This aspect is effectively summarized in the text of A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development Principles in Inuit Nunaat (Inuit Circumpolar Council, May 2011): "10.3 Inuit are committed to safe-guarding Inuit culture against excess adverse pressures and impacts that could be brought on by an overly ambitious, ill-timed, or poorly planned and implemented staging of resource development projects, particularly insofar as such a scenario precipitated a major influx of non-Inuit while failing to impart the technologies, skills and training, and business opportunities needed by Inuit."

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?

The response to this question is outlined above. However, to elaborate, Inuit are among Canada's youngest citizens, with a median age of 22 – nearly half the Canadian median age of 40. The bulk of this population is now moving through the education system, yet too few are graduating. The stark reality of Inuit education today is that roughly three-quarters of children are not completing high school, and many who do find that their skills don't compare to those of non-Aboriginal graduates. Low educational outcomes are associated with adverse social implications, including greater unemployment, greater numbers of youth entering the criminal justice system and greater incidences of illness and poverty. Existing socio-economic conditions will worsen unless more Inuit children graduate from high school with opportunities to succeed in post-secondary education. The vision set out in First Canadians, Canadians First: The National Strategy on Inuit Education (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, June 2011) is to graduate children who speak the Inuit language and at least one of Canada's two official languages, and who possess the skills and knowledge to contribute with pride and confidence to the 21st century.

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?

There is a long, graphic and unhappy list of well documented economic and social development indicators revealing the pronounced and enduring gaps in basic well being between Inuit and other Aboriginal peoples on the one hand, and Canadians as a whole on the other. These gaps are not made less painful by the reality that they have been a feature of Canadian life for considerable time. Indeed, the absence of steady and substantial progress makes them more painful, and their consequences for Canadian society more unpredictable. Given the special responsibilities that the Parliament and Government of Canada have toward the Aboriginal peoples of Canada – Constitutional, legal, political, moral, and historical – the Parliament and Government should make the ongoing problems faced by Aboriginal peoples, communities, businesses, and households a high and central priority in all federal economic policy making and policy administration. The growing international interest in the rights, interests and conditions of indigenous peoples, as a key component of international human rights architecture, gives the Parliament and Government of Canada added incentive to improve the economic circumstances and infrastructure of Inuit and Arctic communities as a core reference point in determining and measuring the satisfactory or unsatisfactory economic circumstances and performance of Canadian society in its entirety.