

## Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)

### Pre-budget consultations 2012

## Tina MacKenzie

### 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?*

It's time to shift the paradigm and think laterally. Canadians deserve this and count on our elected leaders to try. For our society to not only recover but flourish economically (and in many important ways) in the long run, we need to support the arts and education. Devaluing the arts, in particular, and failing to recognize the far-reaching value of analytical and lateral thinking as well as creativity at all levels (through recent deep cuts arts and education funding) will continue to reduce the intellectual and creative ability of Canadians. RECAP: As a "specific federal measure" we will have to put the money back into arts and education programs to foster our thinkers and leaders, our cultural depth, our international respectability, our global influence and, yes, our ability to grow economically (and in all important ways). At some point, we will have to shift the current federal paradigm from scarcity and reduction to growth and expansion at a broader fundamental thinking and creative level, and the longer we wait the harder it will be.

#### 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?*

Although this question seems prescriptive, perhaps written for political and business executives and stakeholders and not the somewhat disenfranchised Canadians to whom it may be most pertinent day-to-day and bill-to-bill, it's a great question. So many Canadians are unemployed, under-employed and/or under-paid, living hand to mouth. A wise federal body might examine its recent cuts to training, youth, education and arts programs. We may have already harmed ourselves with short-sighted and fear-based reductive thinking. We may have undercut our own ability to be self-sustaining from within. Canadians have always been self-sufficient, and even in this global marketplace in these challenging economic times, I would hope that our leaders recognize the value of supporting the professional development of individual Canadians in all sectors, in a balanced and equitable way. Creating an environment of knowledge, expansion of ideas, energy and growth from within will lead to job creation and national economic stability and expansion.

#### 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?*

I don't see major skill shortages as much as short sightedness. I see many recent graduates and experienced middle-aged workers and professionals, who are unable to find permanent work or not being valued, utilized appropriately, communicated with adequately, or trained skillfully on the job. Often companies view their employees as temporary or expendable. In some case, the experienced workers or professionals who might be expected to train others are heavily overworked themselves,

doing the work of two people because of cut backs, Companies are demanding more, paying less, and failing in management, resources and support within their corporate or organizational structures. If companies feel the pressure and sting of a demographic shift, it is a signal they need to change what they are doing ASAP to attract, recruit, train and value the individuals in their work force. This is an issue for companies to resolve from within by building a thriving corporate culture. The federal government could offer funding assistance and opportunities to youth, and Canadians over 30, who want training in a particular field. There should be additional federal funding assistance to post-secondary students and adults in training programs, even if it takes innovative measures. Perhaps in-kind contributions to colleges and universities, where the contribution is transparent, could be passed along to mature students as bursaries and scholarships. Value people. Train people. Extend opportunities to people.

#### **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 people I know are extremely productive at work, although this isn't necessarily recognized or appreciated by employers. I view the question you pose mainly in terms of stress impacts on Canadian employees. Because the cost of living in Canada is very high and because we are highly taxed and work very long hours to simply pay the bills, many Canadians cannot keep pace, not with the cost of living and not with ongoing cuts and the ever increasing productivity demands of employers. This will continue to have a significant impact on not only productivity but on stress-induced health concerns of employees. Nationally, health care costs are rising with the aging population and we cannot afford it. Looking to the future, we need to foster a healthier population and workforce, nationally. The stress of simply trying to make ends meet takes on a toll on individual productivity and increases the cost of health care exponentially and pervasively nation-wide. I think we will have to reduce the cost of basic living expenses and taxes to reduce stress levels, which will subsequently reduce the cost of healthcare and bolster productivity. This can't be accomplished overnight or even in one term of office, but federal leaders should think beyond the ego, beyond their current term of office, and service of the Canadians they represent and in terms of the future. We can reduce and reassign federal spending in Canada. I remember, specifically, that both income taxes and GST were supposed to be temporary measures. Canadians haven't forgotten this. When will we see an end to them? There are other ways to save money internally. Perhaps we could bring federal salaries in line with national averages. Also, many of us question the intrinsic value of the antiquated Canadian senate. It's a relic. And, it's one of the most obvious and irrelevant federal financial extravagances. Many Canadians are opposed to the increases to military funding. We do not want to want to be war poor. Does the federal government and its employees have the ability to operate as efficiently and productively as individual Canadians?

#### **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?*

Urban centres in Atlantic Canada are experiencing high cost of living, relatively high unemployment in many sectors, high taxation, and low salaries as compared to the national average. The recent graduates, under-employed workers, and under-paid professionals in this region continually leave searching for employment elsewhere. As you are aware, this is not a region with big industry but it is a region rich in culture and artistry. The recent federal funding cuts to youth, arts, education and entrepreneurial programs and organizations have cut deeply at many levels. Low-income families, recent graduates and single parents, in particular, are struggling more than ever and sadly (and

predictably) violent crime is increasing in a beautiful and friendly region.