

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?

The first steps the federal government should take are to reduce the growing socioeconomic inequality in Canada, since much research indicates that inequality is not only bad for the economy, but bad for other social factors such as happiness and peace. To do so the government must support and enlarge the middle class, reduce tax breaks to large corporations and raise the taxes of those in the uppermost income brackets. This money could be used to provide assistance to those in the lowest brackets in accessing education, stable housing, and services for mental health or drug/alcohol addictions in order to help them access and retain good-quality jobs and thus raise their standard of living. It is also important that the federal government help to diversify the Canadian economy, by supporting more localized economic initiatives so that different regions may prosper equally based on their specific contexts. With rising food costs, small-scale agriculture should be supported, with a focus on permacultural and organic methods which help to preserve the land and surrounding ecosystems and require fewer economic and energy inputs over the long-term. Furthermore, if Canada is to continue to engage in resource extraction such as mining or forestry, then those industries should include more of the value-added step of the process rather than simply shipping out the raw products. Student debt can be incredibly debilitating and prevent people from engaging with the economy after graduation. The federal government should support the provinces and territories in reducing tuition fees, as well as regulate loans providers to keep interest rates on student loans at a bare minimum, so that they can be fully repaid as soon as possible. I believe it is worthwhile to question the necessity of economic growth in general, particularly if it is not actually benefitting the entirety of the population. The focus right now should be to raise the standards of living for our most marginalized communities. This includes our Aboriginal populations, and we must help find ways for them to engage with the economies of surrounding communities in a way that remains respectful of their connection to their traditional territory.

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?

One of the first steps to promote job creation and job attainment is to ensure that all members of the population have equal access to quality education. Primary and secondary schools must be given adequate resources so that they can support more vulnerable students, such as those with disabilities or whose socioeconomic situation makes it harder for them to excel. First Nations education must also be supported, and the federal government can do so by helping to provide infrastructure for good-quality schools in communities so students aren't required to leave their homes. The federal government can also earmark more transfer money to provinces and territories in order to reduce tuition fees and increase availability of bursaries and grants. The federal government could also renew its scholarship

program such as the Millenium Scholarships to assist more students in accessing funding for school. Currently, it is very difficult as a student to gain employment in ones own field unless one is engaged in a co-op program or takes on an unpaid internship. The federal government could help students or those recently graduated by providing positions in the public sector or by collaborating with other partners to provide interships which actually pay a salary so as to be accessible to students of all income levels. Job creation can also come with a more diverse economy. Resource extraction such as the tar sands and mining may provide high paying jobs in the short term, but they are inherently unsustainable. The federal government should support the transition to renewable energy, particularly since this is an industry which is not regionally specific and can take advantage of manufacturing expertise. Climate change and rising energy prices are causing increased food insecurity. Local, small-scale agriculture should be supported across the country, not just in certain regions. Community-sector work must also be supported, since this an important source of employment as well as services to the members of the community. Non-profit organizations should continue to be funded by goverment programs to allow this continue.

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?

One of the primary concerns associated with an aging population is healthcare. The shortage of medical professionals in Canada is a serious problem, so measures should be taken to help new immigrants with training in the medical sector to transfer easily into working in the Canadian healthcare system. Prevention is key to reducing the burden on the health system, so programs which encourage an active lifestyle for adults could be supported. Nutrition is also key to this, so ensuring that fresh food can be accessed by all sectors of the population is highly important. This includes the North, where fresh produce in remote communities is incredibly expensive. The federal government should take steps to keep those products affordable. In terms of the skills shortage, there should be more emphasis on skills and trades during the entirety of the education process. In secondary school, for example, students should have a chance to explore different trades sectors to encourage them to take one on. Canada's Indigeous population includes many young people. First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities must be supported by the federal government to ensure that their young people have access to quality education while staying connected to their respective cultures. The federal government should grant more power to those communities to provide training that suits the needs of the communities, while also supporting those who wish to leave their homes and become employed elsewhere in Canada.

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 federal government should takes steps to ensure that employees in all sectors of the economy are working in conditions which allow them to be both productive and happy. This includes ensuring that the minimum wage is also a living wage, and that workers are able to provide for themselves and their families with a maximum work week of 40 hours so that they need not take on other jobs which could lead to exhaustion and poor health. Furthermore, the federal government must respect the rights of workers to unionize and strike, if their working conditions are not adequate. The federal government should also do more to help engage more vulnerable members of the population in the workforce, such as those with disabilities or mental illnesses. Job-training programs as well as adequate support and supervsion could be implemented across the country. Productivity could also be increased by ensuring

that new parents are able to return easily to the job market following parental leave. The federal government should support affordable, high-quality child-care to relieve the current severe shortage which exists. Daycares close to workplaces should also be encouraged, since long commutes for parents can add to exhaustion and stress. Finally, making sure that workplaces are accessible to their employees is essential. This includes taking more measures to prevent harassment and discrimination. It can also include more support for new immigrants to assist them in entering the workforce, such as skills and language training. Transit services in all communities must also be available, and the federal government should engage with provinces, territories and municipalities to come up with a national transit strategy and provide affordable public transit across the country.

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?

One of the biggest challenges facing our generation is climate change. Steps must be taken immediately to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and transition from a fossil fuel-based economy. Current government support for oil and gas extraction, such as the \$1.4 billion in subsidies to companies working in that sector, should be repealed immediately and transferred to develop renewable energy. The government's blatant promotion of the Alberta oil sands to countries around the world should stop, and instead begin to focus on other, sustainable sources of energy production. Our environment is not separate from our economy. Without a healthy environment and stable climate, our economy will be severely negatively impacted. Increasing numbers of extreme weather events, such as droughts or floods, will have serious effects on food production across the globe, including both agriculture and fisheries. Infrastructure can be threatened, particularly in the north as permafrost melts, leading to instability of roads and buildings. We are at an important moment in the history of the planet. No other challenge has ever existed which is impacted by humans so directly which will have as long of impacts for the global community. Canada may benefit temporarily from high prices of oil in exporting bitumen from the tar sands, but it is a short-sighted, narrow economic focus to have. Our budget should take into consideration long-term planning which can benefit not just this generation, but all future generations. That is what true leadership and governance are all about. I urge all government decisions to take into account the fact that this is a crucial time, and that this is a chance to either change the course we are on and help us build a sustainable world that can truly last into the future, or continue down this path that could lead to consequences no one can predict and which we may not be able to truly adapt to.