

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

Previous questions largely address economic recovery and stability, yet Canada has long-standing problematic issues with its political foundations, i.e. its representative Westminster single-member plurality structures and technocratic-bureaucracy, that are in deficit as much or even more, it can be argued, than the economy. People are affected by arcane institutions that are impossible to be reformed and political parties that act purely motivated by ideology and centralization of authority. The general challenge I truly feel that is being faced in Canada at large is how citizens, as well as communities, can be included in the policy process, alongside representative and public sector

structures and officials. This is not novel. Calls for this go back decades, and MPs have harkened for more inclusive mechanisms like the referendum, the initiative, and plebiscites, among calls for proportional representation. SUFA was supposed to address the lack of civic inclusion in politics, but failed miserably, just as common consultative processes currently do now. New public management is not enough of a paradigm or practice to achieve greater accessibility, subsidiarity, or inclusion in political decision-making, especially where stakeholders in public-private partnerships predominate any consultative process, and where citizens are not only rarely included, but come into consultation after formulation of policy proposals are put forth, and have no authoritative say in implementation. Take a look at how people view politics in this country; any poll or lay discussion will give a good indicator of the apathy people have, and the 2008 all-time record low voter turnout is one indicator of this amidst others including the lack of youth engagement. Canada is unfortunately far behind the world in terms of innovative democratic inclusion, especially from a direct or deliberative angle, despite a couple examples like the BCCA or OCA occurring in the past decade. Countries world-wide, not simply OECD ones, but developing nations as well, are more (consistently) inclusive of citizens than Canada is. Suffrage might have been good enough a century ago with respect to politics, but today's industrial economy requires the inclusion of the informed voter to have a voice in politics. It is time to make a point to learn from more inclusive collaboration public sector exercises in OECD countries notably like Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands, as well as potentially even Australia, the US, and the UK, most of which utilize citizen juries and consensus conferences for example to deal with heated political and technical topics; moreover, this absolutely must go along with decentralized participatory processes utilized by developing nations that subscribe in certain regions/municipalities to adapted versions of participatory budgeting like in India, Brazil, Peru, and South Africa. The federal government can start with a committee on democratic inclusion, and seek out consultation with advocacy groups and/or randomly selected citizens, and also ascriptively select people to be representative of the broad population. Mechanisms can use subsidiarity, i.e. hold consultations in citizens Canada-wide in places where an issues and budgets are closest to the people affected, to build up confidence in the population, alongside political culture and know-how. This means a single universal plan might not be always the best case when different regions and cities requires different sorts of attention. The scope and mandate of this can vary to having greater devolved authority over certain projects in particular places, to simply consulting people prior to having committee meetings. There is no good enough reason why the committee stage of the policy process should not have some form of citizen inclusion that is serious, and not nominal. The late Peter Aucoin was notable for this suggestion in a paper for the Centre for Policy Alternatives.