

Written Submission for the 2021 Pre-Budget Consultations

By: Braeden Soltys (Toronto, ON)

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 1:** Provision of an additional \$55 million to the Canada Council for the Arts with specifications to aid in the recovery of the live performance sector.
- **Recommendation 2:** Creation of a \$900 million relief package for live performance workers should lockdown measures be reinstated.
- **Recommendation 3:** Creation of an immediate municipal relief package to assist in the elimination of municipal deficits.
- **Recommendation 4:** Implementation of a wealth tax of 2% for wealth over \$20 million, 4% over \$200 million, 6% over \$1 billion, 8% over \$5 billion, and 10% over 10 billion.
- **Recommendation 5:** Exemption from the general tax reduction for corporations earning a net profit of \$500 million or more per year.
- **Recommendation 6:** Implementation of a federal buyer's tax on the purchasing of multiple properties by a sole individual or company beginning at 10% for the 3rd property, 20% for the 10th, 35% for the 30th, 50% for the 100th.
- **Recommendation 7:** Implementation of a foreign buyer's tax of 20% on the sales of property to non-Canadian residents.
- **Recommendation 8:** Increase funding of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation by \$1.5 billion to be used specifically for the Investment in Affordable Housing program.
- **Recommendation 9:** Reestablishment of a federal minimum wage at \$16.5 an hour and the creation of municipal wage zones that would set the minimum wage at \$18 an hour for major metropolitan cities, both of which would increase annually at the rate of inflation.
- **Recommendation 10:** Amendment of the Canada Labour Code to define full-time work as 32 hours per week.
- **Recommendation 11:** Federal capping of rent to not exceed 30% of the amended full-time hours described in **Recommendation 10** set at the suggested federal minimum wage put forth in **Recommendation 9**.
- **Recommendation 12:** Immediately freeze the Treasury Board's \$266.4 million appropriations for new RCMP programs.
- **Recommendation 13:** Reduction of the RCMP's budget from \$3.5 billion to \$2 billion.
- **Recommendation 14:** Reduction of the Department of National Defence's budget from \$23.3 billion to 2016 levels of \$17.8 billion.
- **Recommendation 15:** Reduction of Canadian Security Intelligence Services budget by \$100 million.

- **Recommendation 16:** Reduction of Canada Border Services Agency's budget by \$200 million.
- **Recommendation 17:** Reduction of Correctional Service of Canada's budget by \$200 million, and redistribution of funds to the Transforming Federal Corrections in addition to the \$43.2 million Treasury Board appropriations.
- **Recommendation 18:** Redistribute funds from **Recommendations 12** through **17** to the Departments of Health, Employment and Social Development, and Indigenous Services for non-law enforcement approaches in crime reduction.
- **Recommendation 19:** Eliminate all public financing of oil and natural gas extraction and refining, and redirection of said funds to the Green Infrastructure programs under the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change.
- **Recommendation 20:** Increase investment into the Green Infrastructure programs by however much is necessary to convert the Canadian electrical grid for sole reliance on renewable energy by 2030.
- **Recommendation 21:** Establishment of a pan-Canadian Cooperative Investment Plan modeled after the Quebec provincial plan.
- **Recommendation 22:** Increase of the Department of Health's budget by \$9.5 billion over 10 years for implementation of universal dental care, and \$15 billion for implementation of universal pharma care.
- **Recommendation 23:** Investment of \$30 million for research on the treatment of endometriosis.
- **Recommendation 24:** Reinvestment of \$150 million to the Emergency Treatment Fund to aid in fighting the opioid crisis.

ATTN: STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE – RE: 2021 BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has taken a toll on all of us. Millions of Canadians have lost employment during this unstable period. I am part of the two hardest hit industries that the lockdown has impacted: live entertainment, and food services. As of August 2020, the GDP of these two sectors have shrunk 56.5% and 63.7% respectively compared to this time last year. As an actor, and bartender between contracts, this double hit has been devastating. On top of my lost job, I have also lost my home.

I lay this out, not for pity, but to explain the state of thousands of culture workers across Canada. Most of us live in major metropolitan cities where expenses are much higher than elsewhere in the country. This is the framing through which I wish for you to see these recommendations. We work hard, we experience an overwhelming amount of rejection, yet we are able to still wake up and see the possibilities that are out there. I hope that you take from our example.

RECOMMENDATION RATIONALE

The 24 recommendations I have put together are divided into 4 overall categories: **Pandemic Recovery, Economy, Justice Reform, and Health**. This list is not exhaustive to say the least. Were I to have known about this consultation prior to two days before the submission deadline, and had access to a whole team of researchers, this list would be much longer.

PANDEMIC RECOVERY

As previously mentioned, I am part of the arts and culture industry. Since the very beginning of the pandemic, theatres were one of the first to close their doors and will likely be one of the last to reopen. The original federal investment of \$55 million to the Canada Council for the Arts was a terrific step in preserving the entire culture sector, however many other areas are beginning to restart operations while Canadian theatrical seasons have been cancelled, and performance spaces remain closed.

While the companies themselves have been struggling, at the end of the day it is the artists behind the company that are impacted. CERB was a lifesaving program for virtually all of us, but with the industry still being on lockdown actors, designers, musicians, technicians, and others remain without employment. Should further waves of the virus hit, we will once again have to go into a prolonged dark period and the life-raft of CERB will be needed to help us weather those storms.

A good deal of us culture workers are fellow Torontonians. The city has been one of the regions hardest hit by the virus. Estimates have placed the city's deficit to be potentially \$1.35 billion. Municipalities cannot legally run deficits and so either property taxes will skyrocket, or dramatic cuts to services will be implemented, if not both. The relief package sent to the provinces have helped stop some of the hemorrhaging, but there are still big holes that need to be filled.

ECONOMY

The definition of “affordable rent” is 30% of one’s monthly income. It should be noted that this is before considering additional costs such as electricity, heat, food, internet, transportation, student loan payments, etc. For Ontario, this would mean that a minimum wage worker (such as myself) working full-time should only pay \$672 a month in rent. Since losing my home in June, the absolute cheapest 1-bedroom I have seen in Toronto is \$1300.

Our laws derogate the dignity of our lowest-paid workers who are the backbone of the economy. This primarily occurs due to the predatory nature of the housing market. **Recommendations 6, 7, and 11** are designed to facilitate a massive yet necessary overall in our relationship to land ownership. This isn’t just an issue of good morals, but also of good economics. When people have disposable income, they spend it. Freeing up thousands of dollars per year for a single individual scales up to a massive reinvestment into the economy. As the price of homes plummet, access to home ownership will skyrocket. Gone will be the days where 1.34 million homes sit empty while thousands sleep on the street.

A change in our relationship to capital is equally as vital. When the 86 richest Canadian families have as much wealth as the poorest 11 million people something isn’t just wrong, something is fundamentally broken about how our economy functions. **Recommendations 4, 5, and 21** will be a necessary first step in changing the ways in which we value wealth and who benefits from its creation.

Adjusting wealth distribution and homeownership is all well and good, but while 10% of the population remain unemployed it is a moot point. This is where **Recommendations 19 and 20** are important. The fossil fuel sector is dying and is taking the planet with it. The good news is that the effort required to replace it has historical precedence in the endeavours of the hugely successful American “Works Progress Administration” of the 1930s.

JUSTICE REFORM

On May 25th, the world changed. George Floyd was murdered at the hands of police and sparked a global outrage. From Whitehorse to Charlottetown, hundreds of thousands of Canadians have marched in solidarity with American protestors as we recognized the violence perpetrated by law enforcement in our own communities.

A lot of the injustice addressed in my section on economy runs much deeper for Black and Indigenous people. Canada has a lengthy history of oppression towards these communities. This history has driven many into an inescapable cycle of poverty leading to crime, addiction, and a plethora of other difficulties; however, law enforcement has not been a means of solving these problems. Instead, agencies like the RCMP and the Toronto Police Service have been used to target and govern over these communities like an occupying force.

The goal of **Recommendations 12 through 18** is simple: reform. Violence at the hands of the state is the same as violence at the hands of private citizens and should be treated as such. When there is a repeated pattern of behaviour, it is proof that the way these agencies have been structured isn’t working and that change is necessary.

HEALTH

COVID-19 has demonstrated the importance of a robust public health system. Were it not for the structures we have in place, countless more would have died. As impossible as it feels to think back to a time before the pandemic, doing so makes me appreciate this system even more. However, two main components are still missing: universal dental care and pharma care.

Approximately a third of Canadians have a dental care need, and about half of those cannot afford to address it. When one also takes this into account along with the 40% to 50% of Canadians with prescriptions priced 25% higher than the median of OECD countries, this compounds into an affordability crisis. **Recommendation 22** sets out to tackle both issues by completing the vision of healthcare as a human right.

While universal dental and pharma care alongside the recommendations laid out in the **Economy** and **Justice Reform** areas of this brief address the root causes of poverty-related illnesses, there is still an opioid crisis ravaging the country that needs immediate attention. This issue is personal for me as over the past few years, I have lost two family members on both sides of my family to the crisis. Provinces around the country have funding for programs that are doing immediate and on the ground work which necessitates **Recommendation 24**.

CONCLUSION

We are living in great and tumultuous times. In decades to come we are going to look back on this point in history as a pinnacle moment. With crises surrounding us on all sides, we have a unique opportunity to drastically reshape the way we want society to function. Business as usual has failed the vast majority of Canadians, and the people are ready and hungry for change. Will we be brave enough to seize this perhaps once-in-a-generation chance?

I have the benefit of youth on my side to see the affects of your choices, but also the potential burden of what they will cause. I am not naïve enough to think this one document will be enough to change the fate of the country, but I hope it sways some of you to think harder about what is possible. I genuinely want all 24 of those recommendations to be implemented and to act as the baseline from which future changes start from. Now, though, it is up to you. I hope you make the right choices.

Sincerely,

Braeden Soltys