

News conference, Thursday, December 18, 2014
Federal Pre-Budget Consultations

Our organizations represent New Brunswickers from all walks of life. In our mandate to promote the economic and social well being of our members, it's imperative that our voices be heard by all levels of government.

The Federal Minister of Finance, Joe Oliver, announced on November 25, 2014 a Canada wide pre-budget consultation for the 2015 Federal Budget with a series of roundtables including one in Moncton on December 18, just before the Holidays.

Despite numerous phone calls and emails to Conservative MP's offices and the Department of Finance, we could not find out where the meeting was taken place, who were invited to attend and not able to get an invitation

We live in a democratic society based on principles of direct active citizen participation in the political decision making process. To that end, the Federal Government's secrecy and lack of proper consultations is making a mockery of our democratic process, not to mention the lack of accountability, transparency and respect for the population it serves.

How can the Minister of Finance, Joe Oliver, be serious in saying he wants to consult Canadian citizens on one of the most important decision any government makes, the elaboration of a budget, when he is giving us just two ways to do it; one via the Internet and the next one by extremely restricted consultations in just eight cities in the country?

It is a sad day for voters in New Brunswick where we have eight (8) elected Conservative members of Parliament and so few ways of making our voices heard.

That is why we have chosen to go public with our recommendations

Each will make a short statement and then will be open for questions.

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The NB Common Front for Social Justice

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the House of Commons adoption of an all-party resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000. It is also the 5th anniversary of the unanimous adoption by the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly of its poverty reduction plan.

It is estimated that there are 4.8 million people living in poverty in Canada and close to 100,000 in New Brunswick. Child poverty has increase in the last 25 years both in Canada and New Brunswick.

There is certainly a real deep financial cost to poverty, but more importantly, there is a human cost that is sometime difficult to measure in dollars and cents but is not less real.

Provinces have put in place Poverty Reduction Plan, It is now the time for the Federal government to do the same

Recommendation

The Government of Canada should introduce a federal action plan with targets and time lines to reduce and eradicate poverty in consultation with provincial and territorial government, Aboriginal governments and organizations, non-governmental organizations and people living in poverty. Secured in legislation, this plan should identify key roles for all levels of government and recognize the particularities of how Québec pursues social policy in the Canadian context. Source- Campaign 2000, 2014 Report card on child and family poverty in Canada,.

The New Brunswick Federation of Labour

The Employment insurance program is an integral part of our social safety net, but changes by the Federal Government have made it practically impossible for unemployed workers to qualify for Benefits.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer reported that in 2007, 46.6 % of unemployed workers qualified for benefits. That figure has gone down to 38 % in 2014.

Having only 38% of Unemployed workers qualifying for an insurance that they paid into all their working lives, believing benefits will be available if they lose their job through no fault of their own, is totally unacceptable and it is hurting the local economies in many communities.

The EI Fund continues to be a cash cow for the Federal Government. With both the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the chief actuary in the Office of the Superintendent of financial Institutions reporting that the Federal Government takes in Billions more in EI revenue than necessary to cover the cost of benefits.

The EI fund belongs to those who contribute to it – the employees and employers – and should not be used to balance the federal budget.

Recommendations:

- Provide regular benefits on the basis of 360 hours of work, no matter where workers live and work in Canada.
- Raise benefits immediately to 60% of earnings calculated on a worker's best 12 weeks.
- Increase the period for which benefits can be collected to a maximum of 50 weeks.
- Invest part of the EI surplus on better training and labour adjustment programs.
- Expand support and funding for work-sharing arrangements under EI to reduce layoffs, and build links between work-sharing and training programs.

Association francophone des aînés du NB

Seniors

We are well aware that, by 2030, the number of seniors will have increased significantly and the aging population will require more and more services. If we want people to stay in their homes as long as possible, we must act now.

We know that we will not be able to build enough nursing homes for all these seniors. We also know that the provincial budgets will not be able to meet all the needs.

Consequently, one of the solutions is implementing home support programs in order for our seniors to remain in their homes as long as possible.

Proposal:

Create a new federal transfer to the provinces for home support and for supporting natural caregivers, and without any modification to the total amount of the health transfer.

Association acadienne des artistes professionnel.le.s du NB

The Association acadienne des artistes professionnel.le.s du Nouveau-Brunswick strongly asks that arts and culture be an important pillar in the next federal budget. The Association would like the government to increase the funds allocated to the Canada Council for the Arts, and restore funding to CBC-Radio-Canada, the National Film Board of Canada, and Telefilm Canada which

were subject to major cuts these last years. The Association also asks that arts and culture contribute to increasing the presence of Canada on the international scene, and that a digital cultural strategy be developed to foster the creation of online Canadian cultural content, facilitate its dissemination, and encourage participation.

Child Care in Canada: Daring to Dream

When it comes to child care in Canada, here is what is needed:

- A range (full-time, part-time, preschool and drop-in) of quality programs are available to families, regardless if parents are in the paid workforce or not.
- Programs are for the most part publicly funded and expansion happens in the public and non-profit sectors only.
- Parent fees and educator salary levels are publicly regulated.
- A Canada-wide policy framework oversees child care, allowing Provincial and Territorial Governments as well as Indigenous communities to receive federal funds dedicated for this purpose.

Here is what Canada currently has:

- There is no national program, leadership or strategy. The current federal government has moved us further away from a pan-Canadian approach.
- Poor access, high fees and unequal quality.
- Poor rankings when compared to other wealthy nations.

Here is what we are asking of the Federal Government:

- Create a national policy framework based on the principles of universal entitlement, high quality and comprehensiveness.
- Adopt a long-term sustainable funding plan. The goal should be to reach the internationally recognized minimum benchmark of 1% of GDP for children aged 0-5.

Canadian Labour Congress

The Canadian Labour Congress is proposing to double future Canada Pension Plan benefits. It would gradually phase in over seven years a fully-funded increase in CPP replacement rate, from the current 25% to 50%. In 2014 terms, the maximum monthly CPP retirement benefit would be \$2,076.66 rather than the current \$1,038.33. In order to double all CPP benefits (retirement benefits, disability benefits, survivor benefits, and death benefits), the CPP contribution rate for workers would rise by 3.2 percentage points or 0.46 percentage points per year for seven years. For a New Brunswicker earning \$20,000 a year, this is equivalent to saving an extra \$1.10 a week in the first year, or 4 and a half Timbits. For a worker in New Brunswick earning \$50,000, it means setting aside an extra \$3.09 a

week in the first year, about 12 and a half Timbits. If we only wanted to double future CPP retirement benefits

while covering operating expenses, workers' CPP contributions would need to rise 2.45 percentage points, or 0.35 percentage points each year over seven years.

New Brunswick Health Coalition

The Health Accord of 2004 was an agreement between the provinces, territories and federal government. The Accord was very important as it provided the provinces with stable funding and set national standards in health care. The 2004 Health Accord not only increased the federal share of health care funding by injecting \$41.2 billion of new monies over the next 10 years, it was also a time of renewal for federal-provincial relationship. It stabilized our health-care system by setting goals and objectives to improve the quality, accessibility and sustainability of our public health care system. This Accord expired on March 31st, 2014.

The federal conservative government has imposed a funding agreement without any negotiations with the provinces that will reduce funding by \$36 billion nationally and by \$715 million to New Brunswick, over the next 10 years.

Canadians want a new health accord between the federal, provincial and territorial governments with the following elements:

- a continuing care strategy that would integrate home, facility-based long- term, respite and palliative care services ;
- a Pharmacare program that provides universal and equitable access to safe and appropriate medication for all Canadians.
- adequate and stable funding including a 6 per cent escalator.

In addition, the federal government must enforce national standards in the Canada Health Act, including the ban on user fees and extra billing, and enforcement of reporting requirements.