



Current events: The IMFC view of Budget 2013, the M-408 fiasco and saying no to a casino in Ottawa



On March 21, 2013, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty introduced the new federal Budget. On the very same day, Motion 408 – a statement to condemn sex-selective abortion in Canada – was quietly discarded by a parliamentary sub-committee that declared it to be “non-votable.”

On March 24, the idea of bringing a casino to Ottawa was condemned by a group of community health agencies.

Here is all you need to know about this busy week in Ottawa.

Budget 2013

BY PETER JON MITCHELL AND ELOISE CATAUDELLA

Politicians love using “family” rhetoric, but at the end of the day, there is little of substance for families in this budget. This is unfortunate.

Canadian families carry a heavy tax burden and research indicates that finances are their number one stress.¹

The Government has pledged to introduce family income splitting once the books are balanced, but according to this budget, that remains at earliest 2015. Not soon enough.

In the meantime, household debt has reached a peak and Canadian parents are bringing fewer children into the world, often citing finances as a top reason. After forty years of below-replacement birth rates, our population is aging. This means that before long, there will not be enough young workers to pay taxes to support our seniors or our social safety net.²

Of course, balancing the budget is necessary. But putting off family taxation is short-sighted. It would be smarter to empower parents who’d like to have more children to do so, by allowing them to keep more of their hard-earned money. Strong families bolster the economy in many ways.

Family taxation would also make Canada’s tax policy more equitable. Currently, if a family’s income comes disproportionately from a single earner, that family will pay more in taxes.³

Why should two families making the same total amount pay substantially different taxes?

All families struggle to juggle child care, each in their own way.

Families work as a unit, providing an invaluable service to the country. It's high time to start taxing them as a unit to allow them to function better.

The following points highlight the various family items included in the budget:⁴

- Enhancement of the Adoption Expense Tax Credit, a 15 percent tax credit for expenses incurred from the time a child is matched to a family until the adoption is complete, up to \$11,669. New for 2013, expenses occurring prior to being matched can be included.
- Increased GST/HST exemptions on publicly funded homemaker services and personal services. The definition of home care service has been expanded allowing more personal services due to age, infirmity or disability to qualify.
- \$76 million annual tariff relief on various items including baby clothing and sports apparel, reducing purchasing costs to retailers with the hope of savings being passed on to consumers. (Intent: to close the price gap between American and Canadian retailers.)
- A small amount, \$3 million over three years, to train front line palliative care providers (going to the Pallium Foundation of Canada).⁵

Motion 408

BY ANDREA MROZEK

Motion 408 requested "That the House condemn discrimination against females occurring through sex-selective pregnancy termination."⁶

Member of Parliament Mark Warawa introduced this motion on September 26, 2012.⁷ He became concerned about the issue after seeing a CBC documentary that highlighted how sex-selective abortion is occurring in Canada.

A motion is simply a public declaration on an issue. It is not a bill; it is a non-threatening way in which to make a declaration without any legislative action attached.

This should have been a motion to unify all three parties, who have each spoken out against the practice.

As with so many things in politics, what should have been... wasn't.

In order for any motion to be deemed votable in the House of Commons, it must meet four criteria: That the motion 1) not be outside federal jurisdiction, 2) not violate the Constitution, 3) not be the same as others before the House of Commons and 4) not involve matters currently on the Order Paper.⁸

Of critical note is that the Library of Parliament, a resource for all Members of Parliament when constructing motions and bills, has said that M-408 is indeed votable.⁹

Yet, the parliamentary subcommittee blocked the motion by deeming it non-votable, in apparent contradiction to the guidelines, in order to make an uncomfortable topic go away.

Mr. Warawa is appealing the decision. The subcommittee will meet again today, Wednesday, March 27 at 3:30 pm to take another look at this motion. It doesn't look likely it will pass. At that point, Mr. Warawa can take the motion to a secret ballot on Parliament Hill, allowing Members of Parliament to individually decide whether or not the motion should be votable.

It doesn't take a parliamentary expert to see that interference with parliamentary procedure is extremely problematic.

Stay tuned.

Community health agencies come out against a casino in Ottawa

BY DEREK MIEDEMA

On March 24, nine community health agencies¹⁰ throughout the City of Ottawa unanimously called on the city to say no to a new casino. Our research echoes their concern and notes that gambling addiction first and foremost hurts gamblers and their families.

Research shows that each problem gambler negatively affects five to ten people, which isn't hard to believe when we realize that gamblers are spouses, parents, children, neighbours, coworkers and more.¹¹ A 2009 study found that 3.2 percent of Canadian adults are moderately to severely addicted to gambling.¹² This means that a possible 15 to 30 per cent of Ottawa's population is already negatively affected.

Provincial and municipal governments (including provincial lottery corporations) are remiss when they downplay social costs in favour of purported profits.

Such shortsightedness is dangerous: problem gamblers' families are paying the price of their loved one's addiction.

The IMFC applauds this public call to just say no to a casino in Ottawa.

Endnotes

¹ The Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. (2007). What's at the heart of the Canadian Family? p.9. Retrieved from <http://www.imfcanada.org/issues/whats-heart-canadian-family>

² Miedema, D. (2013). 40 years below replacement. Ottawa: Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.imfcanada.org/issues/forty-years-below-replacement>

³ Mintz, J.M. (2008). Taxing families: does the system need an overhaul? Ottawa: Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.imfcanada.org/issues/taxing-families-does-system-need-overhaul>

⁴ For more complete budget highlights, see Government of Canada. (2013). Budget 2013. See section Budget in Brief. Retrieved from <http://www.budget.gc.ca/2013/doc/bb/brief-bref-eng.html>

⁵ Government of Canada. (2013) Budget Plan 2013. Chapter 3.5 Supporting families and communities. Retrieved from <http://www.budget.gc.ca/2013/doc/plan/chap3-5-eng.html>

⁶ Warawa, M. (2013). Motion 408's call to condemn discrimination against women and girls is definitely in order. Retrieved at http://markwarawa.com/media/mark_in_the_news/motion-408-s-call-to-condemn-discrimination-against-women-and-girls-is-definitely-in-order

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Parliament of Canada. (2007). Votable and non-votable items of private members' business. See *Non-votable items*. Retrieved from http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/House/compendium/web-content/c_d_votablenonvotableitemsprivatemembersbusiness-e.htm

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ These are the Centretown Community Health Centre, Eastern Ottawa Community Resource, Lowertown Community Resource Centre, Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre, Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre, Rideau-Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre, Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, Somerset West Community Health Centre and South-East Ottawa Community Health Centre.

¹¹ Productivity Commission of Australia. (1999a). Australia's gambling industries, Report No. 13, Volumes 1-3, p. 23. from http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/82552/gambling1.pdf

¹² Wood, R.T., Williams, R.J. (2009, January). Internet gambling: Prevalence, patterns, problems, and policy options. Final report for the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre. Guelph, Ontario. Retrieved from <http://www.gamblingresearch.org/content/research.php?appid=2285>