

Bossio sees benefits in Canada's Budget 2018



Hastings-Lennox and Addington MP Mike Bossio says Budget 2018 includes benefits that will help support rural residents in his riding and the middle class. / FILE PHOTO

By Sarah Sobanski

"There were lots of things in here that benefit rural Canadians and my riding in particular," Hastings-Lennox and Addington MP Mike Bossio said following the release of Canada's 2018 budget.

The Government of Canada laid out plans to expand workers' benefits, parental leave and employment insurance in Budget 2018. It also promised to help small businesses and begin the process of rolling out a national pharmacare plan.

The budget was released the last week of February. It's expected to run an almost \$18 billion deficit totalling around \$311 billion. As a part of Budget 2018, the federal government is introducing the Canada Workers Benefit, an upgraded Working Income Tax Benefit, which it will replace. According to the government, it will "offer real help to more than two million Canadians who are working hard to join the middle class, raising around 70,000 Canadians out of poverty."

"Something that's going to benefit rural Canada and my riding in particular is Canada's worker benefit - increasing that so that individuals have more in their pocket at the end of the year... especially in my riding where so many are working on minimum wage, so many are in precarious work and so many that aren't even making minimum wage," said Bossio.

The government announced an "enhancement" of the Working Income Tax Benefit as a part of upgrades to the Canada Pension Plan in 2016, costing \$250 million. Last year's Fall Economic Statement saw the government promise further enhancements at \$500 million annually - bringing the total to \$750 million, budget documents stated.

The benefit will increase "both maximum benefits and the income level at which the benefit is phased out." Someone earning \$15,000 can get almost \$500 a month starting in 2019. The government also suggests low-income earners will see benefits when filing their taxes and an additional 300,000 low-income workers will now receive the benefit. It promised to invest \$1 billion in new funding a year to help "low-income workers get ahead."

Budget documents said "using the funding announced in the [fall statement], the government proposes to increase maximum benefits under the CWB [Canada Workers Benefit] by up to \$170 in 2019 and increase the income level at which the benefit is phased out completely. The government also proposed to increase the maximum benefit provided through the CWB disability supplement by an additional \$160."

The Canada Child Benefit is also getting an upgrade; "the government will strengthen the CCB to make sure it keeps up with the rising cost of living, starting in July 2018."

"We're not talking about massive amounts of money but it's going to put a little extra into people's pockets and help them be able to live a better life," said Bossio suggesting such benefits will be spent locally helping the area's economy grow. "There's a multiplier effect of that money going into people's pockets who need it the most."

A focus of Budget 2018 is to address the gender wage gap. It claims "today, women earn 31 per cent less than men on an annual basis, and on average about 12 per cent less in the hourly wage paid for full-time work." It promised to table a "proactive pay equity regime... later this fall... within the federally regulated sector."

"Pay equity is long overdue. I can't believe it's 2018 and we're still talking about pay equity. Now this will be federally legislated and implemented," said Bossio. "I'm really proud that we're taking this step."

The government predicts these steps could add up to \$150 billion to the economy by 2026.

Canada also plans to spend \$6.7 million over five years, starting this year, and \$600,000 "per year ongoing, for Statistics Canada to create a new Centre for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics. The centre will maintain a public facing [Gender-based Analysis Plus] data hub to support evidence-based policy development and decision-making."

Part of the "gender-based budget," as Bossio calls it, will include a new Employment Insurance Parental Sharing Benefit. This "hits a little closer to home" for area residents, he said. It will give parents five extra weeks of leave when caring for new family members should they choose to take leave.

"Use it or lose it, right. You can get that extra five weeks but only if another parent who hasn't taken any leave time takes it. To me that's a positive step, once again, to put that gender balance into everything we look at," said Bossio.

The new benefit will cost \$1.2 billion in the first five years and \$344.7 million per year after that, according to budget documents. It'll be available in June 2019.

Plans to extend "Working While on Claim provisions to maternity and sickness benefits so that mothers and those dealing with an illness or injury have greater flexibility to stage their return to work" are proposed.

"The EI Working While on Claim pilot project allows claimants to keep 50 cents of their EI benefits for every dollar they earn, up to a maximum of 90 per cent of the weekly insurable earnings used to calculate their EI benefit amount," according to budget documents. "This pilot project is scheduled to expire in August 2018."

The government proposed to make "pilot rules permanent" at a cost of \$351.9 million over five years and \$80.1 million per year ongoing.

It aims to better regulate EI for those in seasonal industries. With \$80 million this year and \$150 million next year "through federal-provincial Labour Market Development Agreements," the government will "co-develop local solutions that can be tested to support workforce development... [to] help ensure that unemployed workers in Canada's seasonal industries have access to the supports they need when they need them most."

Expansions will also come for youth entering the workforce. The government plans to double work placements through the Canada Summer Jobs program 2019-20 and introduce a new incentives for apprenticeships in trades for women and under represented groups. The latter will cost more than \$107 million over the next five years.

Area small business owners will want to look out for the government's promise that they'll "have more money to invest and grow thanks to the proposed reduction of the small business tax rate from 10 per cent... to nine per cent."

Businesses that are just starting out may need a startup tax advisor to help them at first so they keep on top of all financials, incoming and outgoing. After the enterprise is set up and is going well, business owners would need to always plan ahead about the future of their business in case of any unfortunate scenarios such as severe illness, disability, or death. A proper business succession or a key person insurance for the owner from reliable companies like www.keypersoninsurance.com could prove essential in such times.

Bossio, previously a small business owner himself, said "every little bit helps."

Finally, the government will also look at advancements in health care.

Last March, Hastings Prince Edward Public Health issued a press release stating fentanyl had been found in the area. Budget documents said more than 2,800 Canadians died of opioid overdoses in 2016. Ontario had 867 opioid-related deaths, second only to B.C.

The government will put an additional "\$231.4 million over five years, starting in 2018-19, with \$1.9 million in remaining amortization and \$13.5 million per year ongoing, for additional measures to help address the opioid crisis."

Also in health, Budget 2018 included creating an advisory council to implement a national pharmacare plan. Bossio said this is important because he's heard from area residents who need help with their medications.

"There were so many people that I ran into that said, 'Look I can't afford my medication so I'm cutting my pills in half or I'm cutting back on purchasing healthy food because it's cheaper to buy cheap processed food,'" he said of when he campaigned for election.

Bossio named keeping people healthier longer as a priority. He said acute care is the most expensive on Canada's health-care system. He said health care should be referred to as health and wellness care instead.

Twenty million dollars over five years, starting this year, will "support community-based projects that address the challenges of dementia" through the Public Health Agency of Canada. It will fund an additional \$4 million into the agency each year after.