

Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)

Pre-budget consultations 2012

Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC)

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?

Canada's Heavy Urban Search and Rescue (HUSAR) teams require federal funding to maintain the necessary capabilities to sustain their essential operations. In April, Public Safety Canada notified the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) that federal contributions for emergency preparedness projects under the Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP) will end in 2013, including federal funding provided under JEPP for Heavy Urban Search and Rescue (HUSAR) and Critical Infrastructure. Funding remains in place for projects submitted for consideration in 2012-13. The loss of JEPP funding is a lost resource for many fire departments and regions. In particular, the planned termination of federal

funding for HUSAR will result in a significant reduction in capacity to respond to large scale emergencies across Canada, and Canadians who may be in need. The CAFC is committed to working with our federal government partners to determine how the Government of Canada plans to mitigate this loss in capacity. Together we must ensure that this loss in funding will not result in insufficient capacity to respond to large scale emergencies and protect Canadians and our communities. Heavy Urban Search and Rescue Emergency Services across Canada and the United States have assumed a major role as primary responders to all types of emergencies that involve, among other things, structural collapse, trench cave-in, confined spaces, industrial and agricultural machinery, water related emergencies and persons trapped above or below grade level. Across Canada HUSAR Teams have been or are being developed within a National Programme to respond to these large scale emergencies. Vancouver was Canada's first deployable Team, certified in 2001. The recent emergencies caused by the mall collapse in Elliott Lake, ON and mudslide in Johnsons Landing, B.C., are tragic reminders of the vital service provided by these specialized teams. An Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team is defined nationally as "a group of specialized rescue skills supplemented by search, medical and structural assessment resources combined in a mobile, highly integrated team." Public Safety Canada PSC defines Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) as "the capacity to rescue victims from major structural collapse or other entrapments. It can range from lightly equipped teams to self-contained, fully mobile Heavy USAR (HUSAR) teams." • Locating people trapped in collapsed structures using search dogs and sophisticated electronic equipment • Breaking through or shoring up structural components such as walls • Removing debris using heavy equipment such as cranes • Extricating and treating victims It should also be noted that support for HUSAR is of concern not only for the Canadian Fire Service, but also for the equivalent national paramedics and policing associations. Federal Financial Support Critical to HUSAR Teams The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs has informed Public Safety Canada that it takes approximately 1.4M annually to manage Vancouver's HUSAR Team, Canada Task Force One (CANTF-1). On average, the federal government has provided approximately 450K annually, or approximately 1/3 of the total annual costs with the City of Vancouver providing the majority of the annual operating and capital costs. In most cases, provinces contribute an additional 1/3 of funding for HUSAR operations. Representatives of the four heavy teams (Calgary, Manitoba, Toronto & Vancouver) have requested that the federal government provide similar, consistent funding, not necessarily under JEPP. At a minimum, full funding is required through 2013 to allow the four teams to look at other funding opportunities and/or to deconstruct the current level of operations. To maximize the federal government's return on this strategic investment in public safety, the CAFC proposes that funding to the heavy teams be constructed in such a way that it encourages regional and provincial medium and light urban search & rescue teams to align under the heavy Canada Task Force. This would allow for standardization in policies and procedures, similar organizational functions, contact references and a minimum of one mutual training exercise annually (heavy, medium, light). This would reduce costs which we appreciate is a legitimate concern to the government. If the Government of Canada removes itself as one of three funding partners (municipal, provincial, federal) with the mandate to host a national heavy urban search & rescue program, it will only be a matter of a few years before the teams can no longer exist as a multi-functional, self-contained heavy rescue service aligned nationally and certified internationally. The existing heavy teams have shifted in training and tooling from primarily structural heavy lift rescue teams to an all-hazards response teams capable of responding with the technical components of each team to a disaster. The recent deployment of CANTF-1 to the massive slide in British Columbia's Johnsons Landing is an example of this diversity. Disassembly of teams will also come at a cost; either in dollars as other Federal organizations such as the military may be required to provide the services HUSAR presently provides, or potentially the cost of lives if service ceases to exist in times of need. Recommendation: The CAFC strongly recommends a continuation of federal financial support for Canada's Heavy Urban Search and Rescue teams either through existing funding programs or through

the creation of a new approach, which would maintain current annual federal funding for HUSAR. The CAFC would like to request the opportunity to elaborate on this recommendation during the Finance Committee's hearings as part of its pre-budget consultation.