

Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)

Pre-budget consultations 2012

Canadian Secular Alliance

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?

Given the global economic environment and the fiscal constraints for budget 2013, government has a pressing obligation to demonstrate value-for-money with respect to all its expenditures. Since our organization's mandate is limited to advancing church/state separation and the neutrality of government in matters of religion, the only specific major existing expenditure we are free to comment on is the policy to extend charitable status for the "advancement of religion". In our view, financing the promotion of religious opinions fails to demonstrate sound management of public funds and is a flagrant misuse of taxpayer dollars. We recommend that the Government of Canada remove "advancement of religion" as an eligible charitable activity. Data we have obtained from the Canada Revenue Agency reveals that in the 2007 tax year, there were over 26,000 registered charitable organizations that declared no programs other than those aimed at "advancing religion" on their T3010 Registered Charity Information Return. These charities accepted \$3.6 billion in tax-receipted gifts, costing the government over \$1.18 billion in foregone tax revenue. This represents a transfer of wealth from non-religious Canadians to the religious majority. Redistribution of wealth according to religious affiliation and participation is arguably a violation of equality rights. Nor is there any evidence that the promotion of religious opinions, in and of itself, builds social capital or social cohesion. We recognize and applaud the many religion-affiliated charities that engage in legitimate charitable activities (i.e., alleviating poverty, advancing education, or engaging in some other activity that results in public benefit). Indeed, removing "advancement of religion" as an eligible charitable activity will not affect these organizations, as they will be eligible for charity status under one of the other charitable purposes. Though we vigorously defend the fundamental right of religious groups to freedom of expression and freedom of religion, we reject the premise that the state should be financing them. Religious groups should compete for followers in the marketplace of ideas without the advantage of public money, as all other ideologies must do.

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?