

Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)

Pre-budget consultations 2012

David Helfand

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?

Scientific, technical, and social innovation are required for Canada to prosper in these challenging times. Innovation, in turn, is fostered by excellence in education and is enhanced by labour market mobility and opening to a globalized world. While Canada has the highest PSE participation rate in the OECD, it is in the bottom ranks of innovation. Over 96% of Canadians attend university in their home province and the vast majority of graduates do not leave, a lack of mobility enhanced by provincial programs to keep graduates in province. Fewer than 3% of Canadian undergraduates study abroad, a shocking low value. Foreign students and their advisors are manifestly confused by the strictly provincial PSE system with no national accreditation or recognition of credentials, a system at odds with the UK, Australia, the US and other primary destinations for foreign PSE students. The current system suppresses desperately needed innovation in Canadian PSE, inhibits labour market mobility, and discourages the best and the brightest from abroad from bringing their skills to 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?

It is the stated priority of both the federal government and of many provincial governments to increase foreign PSE students studying at Canadian universities. The current lack of a national system of PSE accreditation works against this priority. While there is no need to create a new federal accreditation bureaucracy -- at the least provinces with which I am familiar do a thorough and creditable job of reviewing their institutions and apportioning the right to grant degrees -- the federal government should leverage its considerable investment in PSE to force an interprovincial discussion that ultimately leads to a national standard for accreditation of university degrees and, importantly, a guarantee that all accredited institutions will accept the credentials of students with degrees from out-of-province institutions.

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?

Japan and the US offer the alternative scenarios. The Japanese economy will inevitably decline as a consequence of that society's rigid resistance to immigration, while the US will continue to thrive as a consequence of massive immigration (if its political class does not eviscerate this two-century-long tradition).

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?

As stated earlier, the federal government should initiate action to increase labour market mobility, enhance innovation in higher education, and open the doors to talented immigrants by bringing national order to a fragmented, provincially based PSE system that is facing daunting problems made worse by its fragmentation.

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?

I do not feel qualified to answer this question.