

A Balancing Act

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All of us enjoy watching a skilled acrobat balance on the high-wire or seeing those amazing individuals who have been able to excel in the hand-eye coordination we know as “juggling,” sometimes singly or in pairs. In fact, the range of intricate and difficult feats which human beings—by natural gifting and intensive training—are able to perform is truly mind-boggling, whether in the area of sports and athletics, business and finance, literature and philosophy, or politics and diplomacy. Whether balancing on a high-wire or balancing the books, it’s clear that skill, determination, and confidence are necessary to success.

By the time you read these words, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty will have spelled out the details of the federal budget, long anticipated and already heralded with a number of expectations. While all the details are not yet known, it is virtually guaranteed to be labelled a “balanced” budget or at least a budget that will result in a “balanced budget” next year, shortly before the next federal election.

The characterization of this budget as “balanced” (or at least leading to “balance”) is critical to the Conservatives as they prepare to face the electorate in October, 2015.

Following the last election in 2011, they promised a return to fiscal balance by 2015 or maybe even by 2014. So what does that mean?

For a great many Canadians, a “balanced budget” would seem to indicate that our fiscal house is in order and that our debts have been repaid. To the average Canadian, a “surplus budget” (look for that at least in 2015) would mean we have some extra money to spend on government projects. If only that were so. In terms of federal budgets, “balance” simply means that we avoid—for one year—making the debt worse.

It means Canada can make it through the year without using our national credit card to pile up even more debt. With a “balanced budget,” the *\$617 billion* mountain of federal debt still stands as a monument to the lavish expenditures of successive governments, including the current one. With a “balanced budget,” the government will continue to spend \$30 to \$40 billion of hard-earned taxpayers’ money each year just to service the debt (at today’s interest rates).

Still, Mr. Flaherty’s promise to “get back to a balanced budget” is one that taxpaying voters will remember. They may have forgotten Mr. Harper’s promises during the 2008 election to “not go into deficit spending.” They may have not noticed that the following year, the Conservative Government ran the highest deficit in Canadian history. They may have forgotten that the size and cost of the federal government has grown by 42% since Mr. Harper has been Prime Minister. They may not have realized that the net impact of this government has been a net debt increase in excess of \$130 billion, wiping out the first few years of “surplus.” But they will remember the words “balanced budget.”

At the CHP, we also have a responsibility to maintain our “balance.” We need to be fair in our assessments of those in office (although holding politicians responsible for their own actions and words does not seem

to me unfair). When the first CHP MPs take office, we will also expect them to be held accountable for their campaign promises. In a nod to our Conservative friends, it's easy to acknowledge that our federal debt would likely have been even higher under an NDP government but that's just the point! The Conservatives did not run on an NDP platform. Mr. Harper ran on a platform that promised fiscal restraint, smaller government, and a commitment to eliminating the debt. Instead, in just eight years, the cost of government has risen, the debt has grown dramatically, a number of fiscal promises have been broken and backbench Conservative MPs have had to confront their own Leader on the right to debate important issues in the House. These are cold hard facts. The future is better predicted by reviewing past performance than by relying on unproven promises.

So where's *our* balance? Let's give credit where credit is due. We'd like to offer a note of thanks to our Prime Minister for some of the things he's done right. He does, after all, carry a tremendous weight of responsibility, often with grace and skill. While we are disappointed in the extravagant expenditures that have added to our onerous debt load, while we are concerned about his muzzling of backbench MPs and his attempts to ignore the abortion issue, we want to thank Mr. Harper for his strong and principled stance in support of Israel. His leadership on this important issue is both courageous and unique. We also commend him for his willingness to apologize to First Nations for the damage done by the residential schools and his efforts to improve the criminal justice system. I'm sure there are many other specific initiatives for which he deserves credit.

However, when we look at the failure to control spending, the failure to defend innocent human life, and the failure to protect the free speech rights of his own backbench MPs, we find the scales are not balanced at all but call for massive change. The government will be crowing about balancing the budget but an honest assessment will still say, "weighed in the balance and found wanting."

For a government committed to paying off the national debt, committed to protecting innocent human life from conception to natural death, committed to protecting freedom of speech and free votes for all MPs, join CHP Canada¹. Visit www.chp.ca today.

Footnotes

¹ www.chp.ca/get-involved