

Liberals to address women's concerns in first gender-based federal budget ^[1]

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The Trudeau government's second budget will include a host of measures specifically aimed at improving the lives of women, including a plan to fund new child-care spaces, extend maternity and paternity benefits and address sexual assault.

The budget will also increase defence spending, The Globe and Mail has learned, but details won't be released until Ottawa completes a formal defence policy review later this year. And The Globe has also been told there will be a "pretty substantial investment" in affordable housing and child care, providing the first clear breakdown of its "social infrastructure" plans.

The government is not saying how it will pay for any new spending or what specific tax measures would be included in the budget. But an official said the Prime Minister believes higher income Canadians should share the heavier load of taxes.

The Trump administration in the United States has urged Canada and other North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies to boost overall defence spending to 2 per cent of GDP. Canada spends just more than 1 per cent, although the budget will not close that gap.

"Obviously with the U.S. being our biggest ally – both in NORAD and NATO – we want to make sure that there is a certain amount of complementarity between our policies and theirs, so we wanted to make sure we had a better sense of where they are going," the official said.

Finance Minister Bill Morneau will also provide the first results from a review of federal tax credits.

Another federal official said any proposals for major tax changes would not be enacted immediately and would instead be put forward for further study.

For the first time, the entire federal budget has been put through a gender-based analysis, meaning more than 60 specific measures have been rigorously studied for how they might affect women and men.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau attracted international attention for his 2015 decision to appoint a gender-balanced cabinet and Wednesday's budget is aimed at showing the Liberal government is taking concrete measures in response to women's concerns.

A senior government official told The Globe that the budget's reference to sexual assault was inspired by the paper's series highlighting the uneven approaches of law-enforcement agencies when it comes to sex-assault cases.

"We have had people looking into it ever since The Globe broke the story," the official said.

A Commons committee on Monday recommended that Statistics Canada resume tracking the national rate of sexual-assault allegations and urged Ottawa to provide training for judges and police on dealing with these kinds of cases.

The overall theme of the budget will be to show continuity with the government's existing plans and to instill confidence in individuals and businesses about their economic future. That means pairing innovation policies that support business with new skills training programs for Canadian workers.

"We think it is all about skills, attracting foreign investment and investing in innovation, and that is what the budget will be about," the official said.

On infrastructure, the Liberal Party's platform pledged \$60-billion of new spending broken down evenly among public transit, green projects and social infrastructure. Since then, some projects have been approved under the first two categories but there has been little movement on social infrastructure. Ottawa has spent the past year negotiating behind the scenes with provinces, municipalities and advocacy groups to decide how that money will be spent.

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