Missing the mark: Federal midterm report card [1]

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Introduction

October 19, 2017 marked the two-year point since Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party won a parliamentary majority, unseating Stephen Harper's Conservative Party after a decade in power. The Liberals ran a hopeful campaign with a progressive platform that energized voters eager for change. Across the country, Canadians bought into the promise of a new era of progressive governance grounded in the principles of fairness, environmental sustainability, and growth for the middle class.

At the CCPA, we were encouraged to see gender equality, climate change, tax fairness, and other oft-overlooked areas of public policy take centre stage in the campaign. Ideas and principles we'd long supported appeared to break new ground, such as an enhanced Canada Pension Plan. Among other positive signs, the winning platform of the Liberal party contained meaningful overlap with the Alternative Federal Budget (AFB), our benchmark for progressive policy in Canada.

After more than 200 sitting days in Parliament, the "new" government has had plenty of time to advance its legislative agenda. Unfortunately, last week's federal fiscal update was the latest missed opportunity for the government to make its promises a reality. Halfway through the government's mandate, the signs are not encouraging. On electoral reform, for example—a core Liberal platform promise and call-to-arms for many progressive voters—the government executed a stunning reversal. It spent millions of dollars and thousands of hours on cross-country consultations, then rejected its own findings and opted to preserve the status quo.

The government's disappointing about-face on electoral reform and discouraging missteps on "tax fairness," highlight the need for closer scrutiny of their other commitments. With two years left in the government's term, now is an opportune time to take stock of the government's accomplishments and missteps and, moving forward, consider just how progressive their agenda really is.

In this report we discuss and assess the federal government's progress over the past two years in 16 policy areas. While it is not an exhaustive survey, the report covers a representative sample of the most important policy issues from a progressive perspective.

In each area, we grade the government on both their promises (the talk) and their policies (the walk) as measured against the CCPA's expectations for truly progressive governance (see box). We summarize major developments in each area and make concrete recommendations for policies the federal government could undertake in the remaining two years of its term.

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