

Canada takes steps to make 'feminist' budget addressing women's post-pandemic challenges ^[1]

Author: Gordon, Julie

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EXCERPTS

OTTAWA (Reuters) - Canada on Monday unveiled an all-woman task force to ensure that its upcoming budget, set to include billions in post-pandemic stimulus spending, includes measures to get women working and address gender inequality.

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland's first budget will not come this month, but later "this spring", her spokeswoman said Monday. It will be the first full budget since before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

The Task Force on Women in the Economy will also advise the federal government on actions to address gender imbalances exacerbated by COVID-19. It will be co-chaired by Freeland and Associate Minister of Finance Mona Fortier.

"Canada's future prosperity and competitiveness depend on the ability of women to participate equally – and fully – in our workforce," Freeland said in a statement. The panel was officially launched on International Women's Day.

Since being named finance minister in August, Freeland has repeatedly spoken about a "feminist agenda," and has said a national childcare plan will be part of a stimulus package worth up to C\$100 billion (\$79 billion) over three years.

That daycare strategy is one of the social infrastructure measures the panel will consider, and members say the timing is right for Canada to finally put in place a national program.

"The issue of childcare is much more prominent today than it was before the pandemic," said Morna Ballantyne, executive director of the Child Care Now advocacy group and a panel member. "There is this consensus that the status quo is not working."

"It's going to take significant resources - financial resources - and it's not a quick project. It's going to require a commitment to sustained, long-term funding," she added.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said stimulus is needed to jump-start Canada's post-pandemic recovery.

"This crisis has created a she-cession and has threatened to roll back the hard-fought social and economic progress of all women," Trudeau said in a statement.

"To build a fairer and more equal Canada, we must ensure a feminist, intersectional recovery from this crisis."

Trudeau campaigned in 2015 as a feminist and he has maintained a gender-balanced Cabinet since his election. But he was criticized for getting rid of his former attorney general - the first Indigenous woman to hold the position - amid a dispute over how she handled a corporate corruption case.

Canadian women are more likely than men to have lost jobs in the pandemic, and three times more women than men have left the labor force entirely since February 2020. Mothers, racialized women and young women have all been disproportionately affected.

Maya Roy, chief executive of YWCA Canada and another panel member, echoed that childcare needs to be top of mind when looking at how to restart the economy.

She also pointed to the importance of tapping underemployed immigrant women who have trained for skilled work abroad, but whose training is not recognized in Canada.

"We have highly skilled doctors and nurses and respiratory techs right here in Canada delivering pizzas and driving Ubers," she said.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: feminism ^[4]

economic recovery ^[5]

women ^[6]

mother's labour force participation ^[7]

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