

It's a sprinkle of cash for all: Conservatives have worked hard to placate voters [CA] ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

This is a budget that aspires to "stronger, safer, better Canada." Above all, though, it aspires to a Canada governed by the Conservative party.

Jim Flaherty contended that the plan will help turn Canada into "a model society -- a shining beacon in what can be a dark world."

In reality, it is less bold than Mr. Flaherty's Churchillian rhetoric would have you believe.

"What will future generations say of us and our actions? Let them say we had the courage, the commitment and the confidence to bring Canada to its rightful place on the world stage."

They are more likely to say that this government has used yet another whopping surplus to firm up its vulnerable flanks and thinly sprinkle some cash on groups of voters who might be persuaded to vote for it.

Still, the plan is hard not to like, even if no one is going to love it. You might call it the Norah Jones effect -- very pleasant in places, particularly if you have kids (three million Canadian families will get \$310 per child).

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There is nothing in here to make you proclaim undying loyalty. Yet neither is it offensive enough to create a united front among the opposition parties -- a requirement, since it would take all three of them to vote against it to trigger an election.

As Canadians emerge from snowbanks into sunshine and an economy that is humming along nicely, this mix of targeted tax cuts and social spending will probably be as welcome as birdsong.

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Other potential sources of dissent have also been bribed into silence. The Status of Women Canada group had its \$5-million federal funding cut for ideological reasons last year, but saw the cash reinstated this month after the opposition parties painted the Tories as anti-women. With an election possibly in the air, Status of Women will now get an extra \$10-million a year.

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Ultimately, this budget will probably firm up Conservative support and nudge its polling numbers marginally higher in some key areas of the country, particularly rural Quebec and suburban Ontario. Whether it's enough to persuade Stephen Harper to go to the polls will become apparent in the coming days. We merely note that inoffensive sells -- Norah Jones flogged 20 million copies of her first album.

- reprinted from the National Post

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