

Maiden Tory budget wins Commons approval [CA]^[1]

Author: CTV News

Source: CTV News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 10 May 2006

AVAILABILITY
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EXCERPTS

The minority Conservative government survived its first major confidence test Wednesday night as its maiden budget passed easily in a House of Commons vote.

Despite opposition from the Liberals and NDP, the Tories' fiscal agenda was virtually assured approval because of the endorsement of the separatist Bloc Quebecois.

The budget passed easily in a vote of 175 to 113.

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Despite the budget winning approval in principle, the battle over its details will likely continue with legislation to implement specific measures still to come.

Those measures will need to pass not only the Commons but also the Liberal-dominated Senate later this year.

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The Liberals have been criticizing the Tories over their decision to end funding to the provinces for a national child-care strategy crafted by the Grits, and replace it with their \$3.7-billion, two-year child-care allowance, which will provide families with \$1,200 in pre-tax funds for every child under six.

NDP Leader Jack Layton also pledged to keep fighting that move, repeating his intention to sponsor a bill that would entrench federal day care funding in law -- in the same way the Canada Health Act does for medicare.

"We think it's time for that kind of initiative," said Layton. "Had the Liberals brought in child care legislation, Mr. Harper wouldn't have been able to tear up the agreements they signed (with the provinces)."

Bloc Leader Gilles Duceppe, who expressed his support for the budget last week, said Tuesday that he would continue to support the fiscal agenda.

He added, however, that the only reason he's backing the budget is the Conservatives' pledge to address the so-called fiscal imbalance between Ottawa and the provinces.

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