

Budget's big plans in peril [CA]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Key measures of the government's February budget, including billions for child care, cities and the environment will immediately "vanish" if the Conservatives pull the plug on the minority Parliament, the Prime Minister's Office warns.

With speculation growing that the minority Parliament is on borrowed time, PMO spokesman Scott Reid noted that a quick election would mean the loss of all measures in the February budget because Parliament has not yet passed legislation to bring them into force.

The budget includes \$700-million for the provinces to spend on child care as part of a \$5-billion, five-year plan. It also gave the provinces 1.5 cents per litre of gas-tax money for public transit and large municipal projects, and \$5-billion over five years for meeting Canada's commitments under the Kyoto Protocol on climate change.

Also in danger are payments of \$2-billion for Newfoundland and an \$830-million for Nova Scotia related to offshore resources.

The budget bill has yet to go to committee, where the Conservatives have pledged to study it thoroughly.

In addition to budget measures, other legislation that would die if an election were called soon include bills dealing with child pornography, decriminalization of marijuana and gay marriage. In spite of being introduced as central pieces of the Martin government's agenda, those bills remain in the early stages of the parliamentary process and are several months away from becoming law.

A spokesman for Finance Minister Ralph Goodale confirmed that most measures in the budget will die if the budget bill does not become law. However, measures such as funding for the military could be approved through other parliamentary votes, he said.

Geoff Norquay, Mr. Harper's spokesman, scoffed at Mr. Reid's argument, noting that some of tax measures already are in place. Mr. Norquay did, however, agree that a Tory government would not follow through with many of the policies contained in the budget.

"That's right. There won't be money for child care the way the Liberals and Scott Reid would like to see it spent. There will be money for parents so they can have choice instead of a great big institutional child-care program that parents don't want," he said....

Opposition MPs argued yesterday that the minority Parliament is grinding to a standstill and an election may be the only way to get policies moving forward.

New Democrat MP Judy Wasylycia-Leis said MPs are frustrated at the lack of progress in the House.

"Legislation's moving at a snail's pace," she said. "Maybe the only thing that will shake them up is an election."

Liberal MP David Anderson, a former cabinet minister, said the heightened political tension in Ottawa will likely have two effects on the policy machinery, depending on the minister and deputy minister involved.

Election talk can speed up the delivery of policies officials would like to see in place while other projects are likely being shelved until events calm down or a new government is in place, he said.

"Obviously, this is a distraction from the work of government. There's no question about that," he said.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

Region: Canada^[2]

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