

Quebec budget gives tax breaks to families, low-income workers [CA-QC] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Families will get a cheque from the Quebec government four times a year starting next January as part of a budget Tuesday aimed at returning \$1 billion to taxpayers' pockets.

Finance Minister Yves Seguin's 2004-05 budget also eliminates the provincial sales tax, beginning Wednesday, on diapers, baby bottles and items used for breast-feeding.

Seguin was not as vitriolic as his Parti Quebecois predecessors in lambasting Ottawa but he did admonish the federal government for failing to part with money he said belongs to the province.

Seguin rejected accusations he had failed to deliver on Premier Jean Charest's promise in last year's election campaign to give Quebecers \$1 billion in direct tax cuts in this year's budget.

Most of the \$1 billion in tax relief -- \$547 million -- will come in the form of quarterly cheques for parents of children under 18.

Another \$243 million will be spent on supplementing low-income earners and encouraging people to get off welfare, while there will be \$219 million in tax reductions when Quebecers file their annual returns next year.

The finance minister projected a balanced budget on spending of \$54.1 billion. That includes \$20.1 billion in health-care spending, up \$1 billion from 2003-04.

The provincial debt was projected at \$116.4 billion at the end of 2003-2004.

Quebec pays \$8 billion in interest on its debt every year, which Seguin said is the province's third-largest expenditure after health and education.

Seguin said the family measures will return money to low- and middle-income earners.

That means a family with two children and an annual income of \$25,000 will receive \$2,224 a year more than now.

Cheques can be bigger for families with more children.

The government also announced measures to help parents pay their child-care expenses.

Instead of claiming a tax credit worth up to \$5,250, parents will get a quarterly cheque.

The work-premium program, meanwhile, is designed to help low-income earners and get people off welfare.

- reprinted from Canadian Press

Region: Quebec ^[2]

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