

Throne Speech initiatives leave Finance Minister little flexibility [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Prime Minister Paul Martin's first two days in Parliament have put his Finance Minister, Ralph Goodale, in a straitjacket.

The Throne Speech on Monday and the response yesterday put forward more concrete promises than most, but the Prime Minister's agenda puts much of the onus on the Finance Minister to make good on the promises.

And with little available spending money in the fiscal year that will start in April, at least a dozen Throne Speech promises hanging over his head, heightened public expectations and an election on the horizon, Mr. Goodale is left with very little flexibility.

Still, when asked for details about their new initiatives yesterday, cabinet minister after cabinet minister pointed to Mr. Goodale and said that he would provide the details in the next budget, expected in six or seven weeks.

For most initiatives announced in the past two days, it's promise now and pay later. Determining the cost is in the hands of the Finance Minister and his department, who will have to come up with a plan that doesn't create a deficit.

The surplus for next year, however, is only \$3-billion, all of which is eaten up by the contingency reserve set aside for emergencies. Officials hope the surplus number will be larger, but can't say for certain right now.

And a promise to create 60,000 new daycare spots will be expedited, as long as provincial and local partners agree. New money will likely have to be added. But again, more details will come in the budget.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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