

Hard on families, light on crime: Some thoughts on the Throne Speech ^[1]

Behind the Numbers: A blog from the CCPA

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Excerpts:

The Throne Speech had a lot to say about Canadian families. The Government promised to make "the right choices" for Canadian families. Just like the choices it has made so far. The Government promised safety and security for Canadian families. Not to mention lower cable bills.

How do those promises measure up against reality?

First, let's be clear about which Canadian family we are talking about. The Throne Speech, like the 2013 Federal Budget, claimed that the "average family" was now saving an additional \$3220 in taxes as a result of specific tax measure introduced in the past 5 years. Measures like the reduction in GST and new child tax credits. However, the Government's math on this one is a little tricky. So is their definition of "average."

Assuming the "average family" in the Throne Speech is the same "average family" in the Federal Budget, that family is defined as two parents with two children. However, not all two-parent, two-children families are created equal. Depending on how many parents are working and which parent is working, average family incomes can range from \$37,500/year to \$136,700/year. The only way the Government's tax math makes sense is if the family in question is a two-earner, two-parent family with an average pre-tax income of \$115,000/year, ruling out the 73% of Canadian families who earn less than that.

Here is a little more tricky math for Canadian families: in order for that particular double-earner family of four to save that extra \$3220, they have to spend \$2000 on fitness and art classes for their children (to get the maximum \$300 tax credit) and they will have to spend a whopping \$50,000 on taxable goods and services (to save \$1000 from that 2% reduction in GST).

The final irony is that with two working parents and two children, this "average" family will certainly need childcare. For a government that claims to understand "the daily pressures ordinary Canadian families face," they seem to be significantly underestimating the pressure of finding affordable and safe childcare spaces. The government has done nothing to increase the number of safe, affordable childcare spaces available to working parents, and the Universal Child Care Benefit, at a maximum of \$1,200/year, doesn't come close to the cost of having two children in childcare (which can exceed \$24,000/year depending on where you live).

The majority of Canadian families are left out of this picture. Not to mention the majority of Canadians. While the Government promises to be guided by the choices families make in its own economic policies, those policies have consistently left the female half of Canadian families out in the cold.

The Throne Speech, like the Economic Action Plan, concentrates on creating jobs in sectors where women are not: extractive industries, construction, manufacturing. Job creation in these fields will surely benefit some Canadians, but without a parallel investment in social infrastructure jobs, in sectors where women's jobs are concentrated, women will see little benefit. Further, the repeated emphasis on cutting public sector jobs and increasing private sector jobs will mean that the women who can find jobs will have to take a further haircut on their wages. In the private sector, women make \$2000 less a year on average and see a 28% gap between what they earn and what their male co-workers earn (compared to 20% in the public sector).

Maybe this is why families in which women are the sole income earner make up the largest group of Canadian families living in poverty.

So much for supporting Canadian families. Now, how about the other half of that promise: to protect Canadian families?

The Throne Speech introduced several measures related to the sentencing of violent criminals, particularly criminals who commit crimes against children. The "tough on criminals" approach, however, is not the same as a "tough on crime" approach. This is particularly the case with respect to violence against women and girls. Less than 1% of the incidents of sexual assault and domestic violence are prosecuted and sentenced. This means that the new measures introduced will have little impact on the other 99% of the crimes that 1 in 4 women in Canada will experience in her lifetime.

If the Government would really like to make a difference to the "millions of women and girls [who] continue to be brutalized by violence," it might be worth spending more than .03% of the federal program expenditures on addressing that violence. This is also a fiscally responsible measure. Violence against women currently costs the Canadian economy \$334/person-comparable to another Throne Speech priority, the use of illegal drugs, which costs an estimated \$262/person. Being tough on crime doesn't have to be tough on the budget.

The Throne Speech is a statement of priorities. While I find the cost of my cable bill high, that extra few dollars a month doesn't come close to the 28% discount I, and every other working woman in Canada, take on my wages. While roaming fees are annoying, they aren't exactly in the same ballpark as not being safe on the streets and in my home. My priorities? Personal and economic security for all Canadians. Because we can do better than average.

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