

# NDP would scrap Conservatives' income-splitting plan <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

OTTAWA-The New Democrats are hoping to boost their profile - and their chances - ahead of the federal election campaign by changing up their team and fighting both the Conservatives and the Liberals for the middle class.

"Canadians want a new prime minister, a prime minister who is ready to put Canada on the right path," NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair said Thursday in his opening speech to a two-day winter caucus strategy session on Parliament Hill.

The campaign-style speech laid out the key messages the orange team plans to push throughout the months leading up to the federal election campaign: that Prime Minister Stephen Harper has mismanaged the economy, that Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau is ill-prepared to lead the country and that the NDP has some specific proposals to make a difference in the lives of average Canadians.

Opinion polls reveal a challenging road ahead, showing the NDP in third place well behind the Liberals and Conservatives and reducing their chances of remaining the official Opposition after the election, never mind forming government.

"The NDP has always been lower going into election campaigns and the Liberals have been higher. That's just a fact, but what I think has impressed Canadians is the substance that Tom Mulcair offers," NDP House leader Peter Julian said Thursday.

Mulcair pushed the theme of substance in his speech by reiterating major policies the NDP has decided to roll out well in advance of the fall election campaign, including creating one million child-care spaces costing parents no more than \$15 per day, bringing in a federal minimum wage, and allowing people to once again qualify for Old Age Security at 65 after the Conservatives raised the age to 67.

Mulcair also confirmed the NDP would get rid of the Conservatives' income-splitting plan if they formed government, which, along with raising corporate taxes, the party says would help pay for their expensive promises.

"We'll invest that money in middle-class families instead," said Mulcair, adding he has no plans to reverse increases to the Universal Child Care Benefit or the Child Care Expense Deduction.

NDP finance critic Nathan Cullen said the strategy session included a presentation on polling data and focus group work on the appeal of their platform.

"It was reassuring that Canadians understand and Canadians, in the middle class in particular, see the NDP as allies and advocates for their interests and needs around the issues of affordability and protecting jobs and actually growing the economy," Cullen said.

Trudeau has made an appeal to middle-class voters a major theme of his tenure as leader and an NDP source said the repetitive use of the phrase in the speech by Mulcair was new and deliberate.

Mulcair criticized Trudeau for not announcing policy ideas, but attacked the eldest son of the late prime minister Pierre Trudeau personally as well.

"Justin Trudeau still believes that he can just inherit power without proposing a thing," Mulcair said in his speech, adding: "My family story is that of millions of Canadian families."

Mulcair also announced some major changes to his team, including replacing chief of staff Raoul Gebert, who managed his leadership campaign, with lawyer Alain Gaul, who was chief of staff to Mulcair when he was the Quebec environment minister.

Gebert will turn his attentions to Quebec.

Michael Balagus, who is currently chief of staff to Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath, will be running the Ontario campaign.

Brad Lavigne, who directed the national NDP campaign for former leader Jack Layton in 2011, has returned to a volunteer position as a senior campaign adviser.

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** funding <sup>[4]</sup>

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