

Quality of life for middle class the focus of Vaudreuil town hall meeting^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Vaudreuil-Soulanges MP Peter Schiefke hosted his sixth town hall meeting and invited federal parliamentary secretary to the finance minister, François-Philippe Champagne, to share the podium at Château Vaudreuil last Friday.

Despite the gorgeous weather and it being the start to the weekend, the room was full. A number of young parents had their children in tow. While the little ones got their faces painted with whimsical designs, their parents munched on snacks and waited to hear what the two politicians had to say about the 2016 federal budget and how it will help the middle class.

“We have travelled across the country and we have listened,” Champagne said. “We heard the middle class say they worked hard, but felt their lot was not improving. They asked for help. The first thing we did (in Dec.) was cut taxes for the middle class. The average tax cut for a single person is \$330. The average tax cut for a family is \$540.”

The Canada Child Benefit program was a source of pride for both politicians.

Beginning in July, it replaces the Canada Child Tax Benefit and the Universal Child Care Benefit.

“The program will lift 300,000 children out of poverty,” Champagne said.

Tax-free payments are based on family income, and number and age of children.

A single parent with an income of \$30,000 and one child under 6 years old, for example, will receive tax-free benefit payments of \$6,400. A family with an income of \$90,000 and two school-age children will receive \$5,650 in tax-free payments.

Schiefke and Champagne talked about the federal government’s ambitious investment plan — billions invested in infrastructure and innovation, clean energy and wireless access to all Canadians.

“If you want people to stay in the regions, make sure they are connected,” Champagne said. “Make sure they have Wi-Fi so the kids can do their homework at home or mom or dad can work from home.”

During a session with reporters outside the town hall, the two tightened the focus to discuss how the riding of Vaudreuil-Soulanges could benefit from the budget.

“Support for young families (like the Canada Child Benefit program) is important in this riding,” Schiefke said. “Ten years ago, this was farmland. But now young families are moving here in droves because they can afford to buy a home. The population in the area has exploded.

“The problem is, (public transit) infrastructure is not built to support the population. There is a bottleneck every morning as people try to drive across the bridge.”

Schiefke said the light-rail system project on the horizon for the Montreal area would “change people’s lives” in the region.

“I don’t imagine it’s in the plans to expand the line off-island, but with the government investing 3.4 billion in public transit,” Schiefke said. “I want to focus on finding a way to make sure that there are enough buses to get people from this riding to the nearest station — in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue. And parking will be an issue. We have to have space to park possibly thousands of cars so people can take the buses.”

Schiefke, who is also parliamentary secretary for the minister of youth, spoke briefly about spending this fall touring Canada to encourage young people to apply for one of 30 spots on an advisory committee, which will meet with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau up to four times a year.

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