

Budget's business supports welcomed by Mayor, but MP cites 'missed opportunities'

By **ROB PAUL**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

On April 19, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland released the federal budget, 'Budget 2021: A Recovery Plan for Jobs, Growth, and Resilience.' With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of the budget was put on helping Canada bounce back as the country works to economically recover.

The themes of the budget were job creation, small business and growth, women and early learning and childcare, climate action and a green economy, and young Canadians.

'Budget 2021 is a plan to bridge Canadians and Canadian businesses through the crisis and towards a robust recovery,' said Department of Finance Canada. 'It proposes to extend business and income support measures through to the fall and to make investments to create jobs and help businesses across the economy come roaring back. It will support almost 500,000 new training and work opportunities including 215,000 opportunities for youth; support businesses in our most affected sectors such as tourism and arts and culture; and accelerate investment in digital transformation of small and medium-sized businesses.'

'Budget 2021 is a plan that puts the government on track to meet its commitment to create 1 million jobs by the end of the year.'

Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson was happy to see businesses continuing to receive help from the federal government as many of them continue dealing with the financial impacts of COVID.

'The federal budget is clearly focused on COVID recovery,' said Thompson. 'I am especially pleased that supports for businesses will be extended because so many Caledon local businesses have been devastated financially and they need all levels of government to do what they can.'

Likewise, Dufferin-Caledon MP Kyle Seebach pointed out the subsidy's businesses continue to be eligible for as one of the few positives he saw in the budget.

'I'm really happy that they've extended CEWS (Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy) and CERS (Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy) until September 25, 2021,' Seebach said. 'I think that's really good news for business.'

Although he's glad the subsidies will continue, Seebach said he doesn't think enough was done with the third wave continuing to hit Ontario hard and the specifics around the subsidies being flawed.

'There's a bunch of things I would have liked to see,' he said. 'Even with respect to the wage subsidy and the rent subsidy, there's a sliding scale where those numbers are going to go down. They go down in July to 40 per cent and 20 per cent towards the end of August and we don't know where the pandemic will be at that stage or where the business re-openings and capacities will be. With those aspects of the wage subsidy and the rent subsidy, I think they should have waited to work out those details or had a little more flexibility.'

More than ever, healthcare in Canada has been pushed to its limits with the pandemic and Seebach says the lack of investment in that sector is alarming.

'Stuff we didn't see, there's no extra money for healthcare for the provinces and we've just gone through and are still in the most challenging health crisis the provinces and the entire country has faced in a hundred years,' he said. 'Yet, there's no extra money for

healthcare for the provinces and I find that to be shocking, to be frank. It's something the provinces were calling for even before the pandemic hit.?

More specifically with his riding, Seeback sees nothing of particular interest and thinks municipalities deserve more attention on a federal level.

?Something I've been advocating for is a small municipality infrastructure fund,? he said. ?We sort of get lumped in with pro rata shares with large urban centres, but often we'll have small municipalities within Dufferin-Caledon that have very small amounts of tax revenues but can have big repairs?things like rural bridges. I think we should be addressing this; we should be looking to the federal government to address that and nothing like that is in there.?

As housing issues in Ontario continue to plague younger generations, Seeback would have liked to see some effort put towards addressing affordable housing going forward.

?The really big one for me is, we're going through a bit of a housing crisis right now and there's absolutely nothing in the budget to address housing affordability or finding a way to deal with the skyrocketing price of house.?

Overall, Seeback sees the federal budget as a miss from the Liberal government and doesn't see a clear path towards economic recovery for the businesses that have affected by COVID-19.

?I think it's a huge missed opportunity,? he said. ?There's not a lot of money in the budget that's actually going to be there to spur growth and productivity in businesses that have been very hard hit as a result of COVID-19. There are some small programs here and there?there's a hiring credit?but nothing that's really going to help businesses grow and recover from this. If I were to grade the budget, I would give it a D+.