

GST/HST break announced by PM at independent market

By Brock Weir

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was in the area last week to deliver an early holiday present to Canadians: a four month break on GST and HST on a number of staples and products.

Trudeau made the announcement November 21, at Vince's Market, a staple in Sharon, Newmarket, Tottenham, and Uxbridge, alongside Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland and area MPs.

Beginning December 14, and expected to be in place until February 15, 2025, a tax exemption will be applied to: prepared foods, including vegetable trays, pre-made meals and salads, sandwiches; restaurant meals, whether dine-in, takeout or delivery; snacks, including chips, candy, and granola bars; beer, wine, cider and pre-mixed alcoholic beverages below 7 per cent ABV; children's clothing and footwear, car seats and diapers; children's toys, including board games, dolls and video game consoles; books, print newspapers, and puzzles for all ages; and, given the upcoming season, Christmas trees.

"As the holidays approach, families, especially parents, are particularly worried," said Trudeau at the independent grocery store. "Canadians have been through a lot, they work hard, we see that. We have been able to get through the past couple of years; everyone had to tighten their belts a little bit. Now, we're going to be able to give a tax break for all Canadians. For two months, starting December 14, we're going to remove the GST, HST from groceries. 100 per cent of groceries? We're going to remove the GST from restaurant meals, take-outs, fast food. Removing the GST from beer and wine, removing GST for essentials like kids' clothing, footwear, diapers and toys - all tax free. For two months, Canadians are going to get a real break on everything they do.

"We also know that there is more that we need to do, particularly for working Canadians. If you worked in 2023 and earned up to \$150,000, we're going to be sending you a cheque for \$250 in just a few months. Our government can't set prices at the checkout, but we can put more money in people's pockets: the Working Canadians Rebate, which will be sent to people in April, is going to give people the relief they need, and a tax break over the next two months is going to help them with the cost of everything as we approach the holidays, get into the New Year. These are things that recognize people are squeezed and we're there to help. Money that will help people buy the things they need and save up for the things they want."

Throwing down the gauntlet, however, Trudeau noted, "I really hope all parties in the House can get behind this so we can pass this quickly, so Canadians get this relief as soon as December 14."

Additional relief was reiterated by the Federal government elsewhere last week, including a new National School Food Program, which will allocate \$1 billion over five years to provide meals for up to 400,000 more kids each year. They project the program will save the average participating family \$800 per year in grocery costs.

Speaking following the Prime Minister at the event, Freeland recounted a chat earlier in the morning with Vince's partner Giancarlo Trimarchi, alongside Trudeau, Van Bynen, and Vaughan MP Francesco Sorbera, on how money spent at the cash register can be a barometer for how Canadians are getting by.

"It was such a valuable window into the life of this community and also into the lives of Canadians," said Freeland. "What Giancarlo does, you can see what has been happening in the Canadian economy, at the checkout counter here at Vince's. He talked about how things were really hard for Canadians at the beginning of this year, that inflation was coming down but interest rates were still high. That was really biting in the pocket book and he saw it with what people were able to afford to buy.

"One thing he told us that I really loved is he said he could almost measure the trajectory of interest rates by what people were doing at the cash register here. As rates have come down, people have been coming back in to Vince's and have been able to spend a little bit more."