

Liberal infrastructure plans will help country out of recession

By Bill Rea

Building infrastructure is often seen as a great way to create jobs and fill needs.

So Justin Trudeau is planning to take things to unprecedented heights if he forms the next government.

Trudeau announced last week that a Liberal government would almost double the amount of money planned for infrastructure, adding another \$60 billion in planned spending over the next 10 years.

The announcement drew attention locally, as Ed Crewson, Liberal candidate in Dufferin-Caledon welcomed veteran MP and former cabinet minister John McCallum to a rally in Bolton last Thursday.

The planned investments will be in the areas of public transit, social and green infrastructure.

Crewson himself pointed out the need for social infrastructure, commenting that includes such things as seniors' housing. The need for that is going to increase, he said, as the population ages.

He also said the federal government has been retreating from housing, recalling how the need increased during the time he was chair of community services for Dufferin County.

Crewson said he's hoping there will be money for high-speed internet in Caledon.

Both Crewson and McCallum stressed it will be up to the more local governments (provincial and municipal) to decide exactly on what the money is to be spent.

Crewson also observed that funding formulas are currently very rigid, involving a lot of forms and required information.

McCallum commented that the economy is currently weak, with the Bank of Canada and other institutions maintaining the country has gone into recession. He stressed the need to expand infrastructure in order to create jobs.

It will take some effort to get the money, McCallum said, adding the Liberals are looking at two years of deficits. He said those deficits will be less than \$10 billion both years, but he added their plan is to still see a balanced budget in 2019.

"The Liberal party is the party that balances the books," he declared.

McCallum too stressed the importance of giving the lower levels of government, like municipalities, flexibility on how the money is to be used.

"We want to give the municipalities the freedom to choose," he remarked. "The needs vary according to where you live."

"We're talking about the largest infrastructure investment in Canadian history," he added. "The country desperately needs infrastructure."

McCallum commented on the recession, stating that, "Infrastructure construction is one of the most efficient ways to create jobs."

He also pointed out the economy is already in deficit. What the Grits are proposing is to extend that a couple of years.

"We're the ones with the track record on balancing budgets," he remarked.

McCallum pointed out when the Liberals came to power in 1993, the government was already running a deficit. Within a couple of years, the budget was balanced, and some of the accumulated debt was being paid off.

"We went from the basket case of the G7 to the top of the G7," he said.

"It's a perfect time to undertake these investments," he added pointing out interest rates are very low. "It makes business sense to undertake this investment at this time."

McCallum added there's no way to know for sure how long the rates will stay low, but he said most economists seem to believe it will be "for quite some time."

He also said that once people are working on the infrastructure projects, government revenues will increase, and that's how the rest of the work will be financed.

"The key word in our proposal is 'flexibility,'" he maintained, adding the feds don't know the priorities in each municipality. "We're not going to take an 'Ottawa knows best' approach."

McCallum addressed some other issues while in Bolton.

There were reports of poll results that day that indicated the New Democrats under Tom Mulcair could be poised to form a majority government.

McCallum wasn't very concerned about that.

"Polls go up, polls go down," he said, adding it's the Conservatives that should be worried, since the polling numbers gave them just 22 per cent. He said that's a big drop from the majority they got four years ago.

"We are working very hard to catch up," he declared. "We think we would make the best government for Canada. We think this country has had enough of Stephen Harper."



John McCallum and Dufferin-Caledon Liberal candidate Ed Crewson were talking to some of the party faithful at last week's event at Hampton Inn in Bolton.