

Federal Budget draws mixed reviews from opposition candidates

By Brock Weir

The Election is on! Okay, so the 2015 Election Campaign won't truly be underway until the Governor General says so, but as far as local Federal candidates are concerned, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has fired the opening salvo.

For Yvonne Kelly, Newmarket-Aurora's candidate for the Federal NDP, last month's Budget, handed down by Finance Minister Joe Oliver, was both expected and a blueprint of what to expect in the weeks and months ahead.

"I am sad to say it is not very different from what we expected because, going into it, [the Conservatives] were saying it was going to be a balanced budget after years of deficit budgets," says Ms. Kelly. "Also, in an election year, it is not a great leap to expect a government such as this to balance their budget. That was a commitment, and I think to balance the budget, in spite of everything that is happening economically [makes this] an election year budget."

Ms. Kelly was named Newmarket-Aurora's Federal NDP candidate earlier this year. In her view, some tenets of the 2015 Federal Budget are things the NDP had been advocating for, including extended compassionate care benefits.

"That came from our platform," she says.

The Government, she added, also "responded to the NDP's platform" in expanding workplace benefits for unpaid interns and in extending accelerated capital cost allowances for manufacturing, which she says is a "boon" for businesses large and small in terms of the economy.

But, with the good comes the bad. The NDP has been looking for ways to boost the economy, build small businesses, and create good jobs. In this respect, Ms. Kelly says the budget falls short in addressing the needs of middle income families, as well as "working class families who have lost traction" under the Conservative government.

"I think balanced budgets, in and of themselves, don't have to be a bad thing," she says. "It is whom you balance them on the backs of and I would say this is largely balanced on the backs of the middle class: things like income splitting, increasing the limits for tax free savings accounts [TFSA] that really benefit the most wealthy people, the top 15 per cent income earners in Canada. In Newmarket-Aurora, I don't know that that is going to benefit a lot of people. We have some high income earners but, for the most part, [it is] the middle class, those who have been hit hard by this economy, who are having an increasingly difficult time accessing EI benefits, which people all pay into."

"To say they are investing in families, yeah, a certain proportion of families, but not 85 per cent of the families and Canadians we're talking about."

Support for affordable housing is also an area that was lacking in the budget, from Ms. Kelly's perspective. The NDP never thought such support would be in the offing, she says, but this kind of boost, along with supports for healthcare, are what she says are high priority items.

"These are things that should be concerning Canadians and should be concerning Newmarket-Aurora," she says. "[People in this riding] are just like people everywhere else in Canada. A lot of middle income people, working class people, people who have been pushed out of the economy, people who have, through no fault of their own, whether it is an ability issue, or just the ability to live on precarious types of work, which is all we see these days being created by governments that aren't putting full-time good, middle class jobs at the centre of their platform."

This view of the budget underscoring economic gaps is one shared by Newmarket-Aurora Liberal candidate Kyle Peterson. Although he says any supports for the manufacturing sector always help Newmarket-Aurora "to a certain extent?", more investment is needed in things that "actually create jobs as opposed to rewarding the wealthy."

‘As our population ages, people are going to have to take time off work to look after their sick and aging parents,’ says Mr. Peterson, giving a thumbs-up to compassionate care provisions. ‘Anything we can do to not put their jobs at risk while they are taking time off to look after their family is beneficial to anyone who needs that. [But], some dedicated municipal funding is [also] important for Newmarket-Aurora.

‘Municipalities have what we call a deficit in infrastructure, so I think they want to be able to advance certain projects and be confident the funding will be there, with the Federal government being a partner in these projects. It is not just transit, but bridges and all sorts of municipal infrastructure. We’re lagging behind and municipalities like Newmarket-Aurora are prime examples of those who could use some help from the Federal government in catching up with the infrastructure budget.’

Mr. Peterson adds his hopes for Budget 2015 were ‘pretty low’ and that it delivered.

‘Things like capital cost allowance being continued I think is good for the manufacturing sector, so I was happy to see that, [as well as] the extended and compassionate care, which is something I think is a positive for our community, but overall there weren’t too many surprises. It is a political document, as opposed to a fiscal document, meant to buy the votes of people with their own money. That shouldn’t come as a surprise because that is how Mr. Harper tends to operate.’