

Federal budget is good news for Aurorans, says MP, but more work needed on housing crunch

The 2023 Federal Budget, introduced in Parliament on March 28, has many benefits for the residents of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, says MP Leah Taylor Roy, but there are some files she says that need some additional attention.

Among the key areas that MP Taylor Roy cites as a benefit to local residents include a new Grocery Rebate which will provide up to an additional \$467 for an eligible family of four to help make ends meet, the expansion of dental care, financial assistance for students, a crackdown on ?predatory lenders? and lower transaction fees for small businesses.

?I think, overall, the consensus is health care was really important to address and clearly that's a large part of our budget and it took up a lot of resources we had,? the MP tells The Auroran of the feedback she's received from residents. ?I think there's an understanding of that and we had to contribute to provide some supports while things are really difficult and ongoing. The grocery rebate and the dental care, I got positive feedback about that. I think the one thing people have commented on was more about housing and I've heard that?even some of the details about healthcare like a broad base is very good, but how is it going to roll out? How are we ensuring the provinces are going to actually do their part and roll out what we said?

?I heard a range of things on the size of the deficit and debt. The majority of people have said it's not the time to be focusing solely on the deficit, and making sure that we're still in the post-COVID economy, there are still a lot of things to do; we have to be cognizant and we have to be aware of it, obviously, but that they think the right balance was met. There are some who feel it is a concern. I agree that long-term it is ? and I kind of agree with both sides. Right now, we're still in a post-COVID economy, we're still dealing with that in terms of not only supports and trying to deal with inflation and interest rates which, of course, are related to that post-COVID economy but also, our GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is lower this year because of the slowing and trying to fight inflation. Let's say the Debt GDP ratio is maybe not exactly where we want it to be, but there are reasons for that.

?Yes, [the deficit] is a concern and we're aware of that and working on it, but it's not the time, as the Opposition parties and Pierre Poilievre [want] to make the main focus. Healthcare is very important; We're at a juncture right now where the global economy is transitioning in a couple of important ways. One of those is with the shift to a green economy and the other is? to the whole concept of friend shoring, which is economies looking for democracies like their own to actually engage and trade with. We have to also realize that we're in a pretty critical juncture where we need to ensure / invest in green technology and encourage businesses and private investment in Canada to take advantage of those changes because, quite frankly, in the long run that is going to be important for the future of Canada and we can't sacrifice the long-run positioning of Canada for a short-term desire to get that number right back where it needs to be.?

As MP, she says a number of things she was advocating for inclusion in the Budget made the cut, and in policy going forward, was the new agreement on the Canada Health Transfer of \$150 billion over the next 10 years, and another \$48 billion which she says will be distributed to the Provinces and Territories through bilateral agreements.

?That is something I feel is very important and I have been wanting ? it's not just handing the money over to the Provinces carte blanche but rather to say, ?Here's the extra money and this is what we want it to go towards.' I think there are certain things that all Canadians have been asking for which have not been delivered.?

These include getting more family physicians, shortening wait times, an increased emphasis on mental health, as well as more focus on ?the human resources side of the health care sector,? such as making sure Personal Support Workers are paid more and that the mental health of doctors and nurses are ?taken into consideration.?

?One area I am hopeful for but, again, it is going to depend on what the provinces do, is making sure that medically-trained people in Canada, as new immigrants, or returning and have been practicing elsewhere in Canada, that they are able to get into our healthcare system and practice more quickly,? she says. ?Even if we were looking at training more Canadians, expanding our

medical schools and facilities, it is at least five years or maybe more to get new people into the system. Right now, we have medically-trained individuals, many in Canada, thousands in Canada, who aren't working in the field. This is one of the things in the bilateral agreements we asked the Provinces and Territories to expedite and to change the way that these individuals are getting licensed and get them into our system because the need is here now.

?One of the things is expanding medical training and more facilities to bring more nurses and doctors and have them trained in Canada, our youth. I think a lot of young people in Canada are leaving the country to get training and some don't return. I think we really need to do better at that and I think another area when it comes to health care is really related to our senior population, which is the aging from home initiative. I think there are some progress being made in this budget; I think we can do more because with the changing demographics of our country and the cost of long-term care homes, as well as the fact that most seniors would prefer to age at home and maybe downsize their home and be able to stay there as long as they can. We need to have more supports for our senior adults in our communities to stay at home and we need supports for family members who are often taking care of seniors who can no longer take care of themselves but still want to stay at home.?

But ?home? in a housing crunch and affordability crisis might be aspirational. All levels of government need to be ?moving in the same direction? on affordable housing, MP Taylor Roy contends, and there has to be a ?real balance in getting the housing we need while protecting our green space, our Greenbelt, and our farmland and conservation areas.

?Housing is essential and I think perhaps we have to build more housing and government has to start building more housing themselves again,? she says. ?I am not sure that even with the incentives in place and that developers are going to build enough of the kind of housing we need on their own; the profit just isn't there. I think we're either going to have to mandate more or build it ourselves. In the 70s, 80s and 90s, we built housing. The situation is such right now that we may have to start doing that again and build more purpose-built housing.

?[We need] organizations, not-for-profits, social enterprises, co-op housing, that are able and willing to move forward on some of these projects that really aren't designed and geared to address our needs, not simply adding on and 10 per cent is going to be affordable of another development because we're not going to get there that way.?

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