

Farmers left out of Federal budget, says MP

This week's Federal Budget, as laid out by Finance Minister Bill Morneau, was billed as a budget for Canada's 'middle class,' but local MP David Tilson questions what this might mean for rural ridings like Dufferin Caledon.

Following Tuesday's budget speech, the first for the new Trudeau government, Mr. Tilson said no mention of agriculture and farming made him concerned.

'There's no dollars for farmers,' he tells the Shelburne Free Press. 'Quite frankly, the money is going to bureaucrats in Ottawa. If anything, the amounts [to farmers] has decreased. If you start analysing what the farmers got, I guess [the government] is sticking to their guns because the agricultural community wasn't mentioned in the Throne Speech and it is not mentioned in the Budget.'

'They were quite proud of the fact they have enhanced EI, they spent a lot of time on that, but employers will have to pay more and that is an issue. Employees could say, 'Well, that's too bad,' but it is not too bad because if it is too big, employers won't be able to pay their employees. There is no question that when they enhance the EI that it sounds good, but there will be a cost to employers.'

As an opposition MP, Mr. Tilson says it is his job to keep the government's feet to the fire on promises made, promises kept and promises broken, but also to ensure there is equity in how the government distributes their infrastructure dollars, a platform plank that was a key tenet of both their election platform and this week's Budget.

He's hoping ridings like Dufferin Caledon will get their fair share, and he says he 'would like to be positive' but the Budget document itself was 'scarce' on details.

'It remains to be seen what sorts of infrastructure we are going to get,' says Mr. Tilson, noting significant spending within the Budget, and a deficit of approximately \$30 billion, significantly over the previously forecasted \$10 billion deficit. 'The municipalities don't have a lot of funding for that and the Province certainly doesn't have a lot of funding for that. On the one hand, we look at this tremendous debt that is piling up and, on the other hand, we do need money for infrastructure.'

'They have indicated there will be funding for infrastructure, but they were vague on what that will be. They promised that during the election and hopefully that will be honoured.'

In Mr. Tilson's pre-budget consultations carried out through the riding with constituents, municipalities, and local chambers of commerce, topping the list of infrastructure asks, even above roads and bridges, was access to high speed broadband, which would be a boon to local businesses.

'It's a voluminous document and I haven't gone through it with a fine tooth comb as of yet, and even after that, I will be pursuing the issue of how much rural ridings are going to get. Are they giving monies to Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver for housing and subways, or are the rural communities going to get their share of infrastructure funding? Hopefully they won't just look at the big cities and say that is where all the infrastructure money should go.'

HAVE YOUR SAY: What are your thoughts on this year's Federal Budget? What do you see as high priorities for Shelburne? Send your views to shelburnefreepress@outlook.com.

By Brock Weir