

The State of Federal Public Services and How To Fix Them

Howie West

ON ELECTION NIGHT, prime minister-designate Justin Trudeau told Canadians: “You built this platform... You told us about the kind of country you want to build and leave to your children... You told us about the kind of government you want.” This last point is inextricably aligned with views about the public service and its ability to operationalize government priorities. For many people the public service is the face of government. When Canadians voted for change, they also voted for a positive change in the ability of the federal public service to address their needs in a timely and high-quality manner.

The Liberal platform recognizes this reality in several reasonably detailed, progressive proposals. It promises to improve the quality of public services in a number of ways that will demand a concerted effort from a strong, healthy, and respected public workforce. This is ambitious and will not be easy to achieve. Over nearly a decade, the previous Conservative government depleted legislation, eviscerated regulations, and recklessly downgraded the capacity of the public sector to provide



quality public services. The new Liberal government will need to rebuild this capacity through strategic investment to implement its platform promises.

This paper examines those promises that pertain to public services, how the capacity of the public sector will need to be increased to meet them, and some of the ways these goals can be improved. The new federal government will need to reject external and internal pressure to embrace a conservative mantra that says public services are too expensive or better left to the private sector. Voters clearly chose a different vision in the last election of a stronger, proactive public service. They have every right to expect this is exactly what the new government will deliver.

Quality Public Services

The Liberal platform promises to work with the public service to provide the quality of service Canadians expect and deserve. It includes creating new service performance standards, streamlining applications, reducing wait times, offering “money-back guarantees,” and expanding in-person service. Platform documents say improvements will begin within departments administering employment insurance (EI), benefits for veterans, immigration decisions, and EI and Canada Pension Plan (CPP) appeals.

Elsewhere the platform commits to improving the quality of services delivered by the Canada Revenue Agency, Parks Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Environment Canada, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, which all saw drastic cuts under the Harper government. In general, the problems these electoral commitments are meant to address relate directly to the simple fact there are not enough workers nor is there enough operational funding to provide the services the public needs in a timely, accurate, and transparent way. These promises cannot be fulfilled unless the federal government employs more workers to provide the services.

According to Treasury Board data, 25,318 positions were cut from core public services and agencies between 2011 and March of 2015.¹ Statistics Canada estimates the federal public administration declined by 30,000 positions (from 300,000 to 270,000) over the same period, while departmental spending reports show even more cuts were planned.² The former government steadfastly refused to be transparent about the real impact of these cuts. We know, from research done by the Parliamentary Budget Officer and others, that the cuts have decreased service quality and undermined the ability of public service workers to do their jobs.³

While some welcomed the cuts as if they were somehow reflective of good management, the reality is the Canadian federal public service is small in proportion to the public it serves, and demands for public services are increasing.⁴ A demographic snapshot of the public service released by the government in 2013 shows that be-

tween 1983 and 2013, the Canadian population expanded by 38%, while the size of the public service over this period only increased by 5%. The federal public service now comprises 0.75% of the Canadian population.⁵

At the same time, real Gross Domestic Product in Canada has increased by 111% since 1983, while federal program spending has only increased by 52%. In 2013, there was an increase of 1.7% in real GDP and a decrease of 0.6% in federal program spending, which dropped as a proportion of GDP from 18.8% in 1983 to 14% in 2011–12.⁶ The government’s fall 2015 economic update estimated that as a share of GDP program expenses will decline from 13.4% in 2015–16 to 12.8% in 2020–21, their lowest levels since 1948. Operational expenses, which are a part of the overall program spending envelope, are also slated to fall from 3.9% to 3.5%.⁷

In fact, spending and revenue as a share of the economy are at a near 70-year low, at levels last seen before the introduction of the CPP, EI and medicare, which take up a large share of federal spending today.⁸ The current size of the public service is small in relation to the growth of Canada’s population and the requirements of its population. There is room for growth in a number of departments, as discussed in the next sections.

Public Science

Public science serves a unique and essential role in the creation of legislation and regulation, whether through long-term data collection or the supply of fundamental research related to public health, safety, and the environment. The safety of the food we eat, the transportation systems we use, the products we consume, and the toys our children play with all depends on government science.

Government scientists also initiate a lot of basic or high-risk research that might otherwise be overlooked by the private sector because it is not profitable, or because small and medium-sized companies cannot afford to undertake it on their own. The meningitis vaccine, first examples of computer animation, and the cardiac pacemaker were all developed in federal government labs.

Partnerships between the public sector, academia, and industry are important and can be mutually beneficial. But those partnerships producing groundbreaking research that is non-proprietary and benefits all Canadians are generally led by the public sector.⁹ Industry-sponsored research tends to support profits, while academic research is often dependent on a professor’s or team’s particular field of interest, the natural curiosity of students, and the availability of funding, and can be limited by academic publication pressures and accreditation concerns.

Public research — the glue that cements the partnerships with industry and academia, and that best focuses on public goals — was weakened by the previous federal government’s dismissive view of basic science and the public sector, and its preference for industry- and university-led initiatives that could be commercialized. Liberal promises, if implemented, would start to reverse this degradation in the following departments and policy areas, with room for improvement as noted.

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) lost 1,407 full-time staff positions (20% of its workforce) between 2012 and 2016, more than half of them (720 positions) from programs that mitigate the risks to human health from animals, fruit, and vegetables. Programs that regulate food production and packaging facilities lost 429 positions.¹⁰ In 2014, 60% fewer ground meat inspections — for fat content, filler, and fraudulent species claims — took place than in 2013. Without additional resources there will be no inspection of cooking oils.

Fewer than half of independent food retailers inspected in 2013 were slated for inspection in 2014.¹¹ In 2014, the CFIA amended a number of important inspection-related policies.¹² Veterinarians and scientists employed by CFIA say these changes will seriously undermine Canada’s culture of food safety and negatively impact public health and safety.¹³

Risk management inspection regimes and other models of self-regulation or deregulation, where food processors have more responsibility for monitoring their own operations, go hand in hand with staffing shortages. Although companies should always do their own due diligence this does not exclude the need for on-the-ground inspections by government regulators.

The Liberals have promised to invest an additional \$80 million over four years for more inspection of domestic and imported foods. It’s difficult to estimate if this investment will reverse the deterioration of inspection and enforcement that has taken place over the last several years.

For this to be effective, the government will need to hire and empower more inspectors. Conservative policies eviscerated frontline service while protecting the management cadre, creating a top-heavy organization with a poor understanding of operations. Policies that were amended to facilitate increased self-management need to be reversed. The CFIA also needs to be more transparent and accountable given employee revelations of department officials misleading Parliament, parliamentary committees and the Canadian public.¹⁴

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

The Liberal government has promised to invest \$100 million over four years to enhance agricultural research, though it is not clear yet exactly where the money will go. Treasury Board statistics show that between 2011 and 2015, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada shed 1,764 jobs. Its capacity to provide quality public services has been severely compromised. A significant amount of the new funding should therefore be earmarked for reinstating this capacity. The Community Pasture Program and the Shelter Belt Program in particular need to be restored. Longstanding promises to create a Grain Centre of Excellence at the University of Manitoba should also finally be met.

The Community Pasture Program was a land management service in the Prairie provinces designed to reclaim land that was badly eroded during droughts. Despite known climate change challenges and increasingly dry winters this program was deemed unnecessary by the previous government.¹⁵ The Prairie Shelter Belt Program provided technical services as well as tree and shrub seedlings for the establishment of shelterbelts and other agroforestry, conservation, and reclamation projects on eligible agricultural lands in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and in the Peace River region of British Columbia, with the goal of improving the performance and sustainability of the agricultural sector. It was cancelled in 2013. The Grain Centre of Expertise, which was promised almost a decade ago, would have co-located the Cereal Research Centre, the Canadian International Grains Institute, the Canadian Grain Commission, and the Canadian Malting Barley Technical Centre to create a powerful crop and market development facility.¹⁶

Non-regulatory research led by public service scientists and technicians at the department also needs to be restored. The policy of the last government — that all public science must have an immediate commercial application — has narrowed the scope of the research being done and the type of partnerships with non-government actors. In general, across several departments, frontline public research capacity must be restored if Canada is to meet the food security challenges of the next century, and if agricultural sustainability is to be maintained.

Environment Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada

The Liberal government has made significant promises to repair the damage done by the Conservative government to Canada's environmental protection legislation and regulatory systems. These include a commitment to conduct a review of recent changes to the Fisheries Act and the Navigable Waters Protection Act, to reverse the \$40 million cut from the government's ocean and science monitoring programs,

and to restore \$1.5 million for research into freshwater lakes, including at the Experimental Lakes Area. Furthermore, the Liberal government promises to act on the recommendations of the Cohen Commission on restoring sockeye salmon stocks in the Fraser River.

These proposals are all worthwhile. Key portions of the Fisheries Act were repealed by the Conservative government in June of 2012, endangering habitats and removing triggers for impact assessments. The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act was replaced with a much weaker version that restricts assessment hearings. Later the same year, the Conservative government reduced environmental oversight in the Species at Risk Act. These changes should be reversed as soon as possible. In addition, ongoing National Energy Board reviews should be halted until a transparent review of Canada's environmental assessment processes can be undertaken with a view to examining both upstream and downstream risks and implications to the environment.

According to current plans and priorities, between 2010 and 2017 Environment Canada will have cut 21% of its staff, including 338 employees from the climate change division. A further 30% of the staff at Fisheries and Oceans Canada responsible for the Species at Risk Act, and the recovery and protection of all aquatic species in Canada, were cut.¹⁷ In 2014, the Federal Court ruled the federal ministers of environment and of fisheries and oceans acted unlawfully in delaying the creation of recovery strategies for species at risk. During the court case, department officials admitted that staff shortages were largely to blame for their inaction.¹⁸

More than \$100 million in cuts were made at Fisheries and Oceans Canada for water protection despite recommendations from public service experts that spending should be increased for both environmental and economic reasons.¹⁹ These cuts should be reversed, and national water legislation enacted with adequate funding to administer and enforce it. This is particularly true for First Nations communities in which households are 90 times more likely to be without safe drinking water than other Canadian households.²⁰

In order to fulfil Liberal promises on the environmental front additional resources and staff will be required. Restoring the legislation without ensuring there are enough scientists, enforcement officers, and others to effectively implement the legislation would be an empty gesture.

Climate Change

The Liberal government has changed the name of the department responsible for the environment to Environment and Climate Change Canada, creating the potential for an enhanced public sector response to what Foreign Affairs Minister Stéphane Dion

has called the “worst threat we are facing this century.”²¹ Climate change is an economic issue as much as an environmental one. Importantly, it is also a major security threat that will demand a concentrated public service response not unlike the effort Canada mounted during the Second World War. Effectively fighting climate change will require a change in our world view.²²

The Liberal government promises to invest \$200 million annually in clean-tech innovations for forestry, fisheries, mining, energy, and agriculture, as well as \$100 million per year in clean technology–producing companies. It also promises to establish green bonds to support large and community-scale renewable energy projects by providing loan guarantees for clean energy products as well as investment opportunities.

The government is Canada’s largest employer, purchaser of goods and services, and landlord. The Liberal government promises to increase its own use of clean technologies in energy, buildings, and procurement, an initiative that will require much consultation within the public service and significant resources to accomplish. These are all useful initiatives. They must be administered in a way that monitors expenditures so that the public interest is always top of mind.

The government has also committed to working with the provinces to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This is a positive approach, but it does not go far enough. Although some provinces are well on the way to reducing emissions, many are not. To overcome provincial reluctance, the federal government should create concrete targets backed up by public service resources to help all provinces meet them.

As oil prices fall below \$40 a barrel it is time for the government to more actively pursue job-intensive renewable solutions to climate change.²³ Public transit, renewable energy, and home/building eco-retrofits are all possible in co-ordination with provinces/territories and municipalities with financial help from Ottawa. Tax revenue that has been used to subsidize the resource extraction industry (an estimated \$3.6 billion in 2013–14, of which \$2.1 billion was federal) must be repurposed to support this goal.²⁴

Parks Canada

The Liberal platform promises to reverse cuts to Parks Canada made by the previous government in the 2012 federal budget, invest \$25 million annually to improve park management, and create 5,000 youth green jobs by hiring more guides, interpreters, and other staff at the department. But to fully restore what was lost under the last government, park seasons will have to be lengthened and personnel hired to manage the renewed services.

The Liberal plan to hire more students at peak season is good given high rates of youth unemployment. However, these positions should earn a fair wage and be covered under health and safety arrangements public service unions have negotiated with the employer. Student hiring in the past has not always met this criteria, jeopardizing the health and safety of young workers. Hiring students through the government's existing term hiring mechanism would provide them with workplace rights they would not otherwise have.

Statistics Canada

The Liberal government is bringing back the long-form census and has promised to make Statistics Canada independent, giving it the authority to release key information that informs government decisions. These are excellent moves that will assist policy-makers across the country.

The cancellation of the long-form census by the previous government led to a significant decline in the amount and quality of information about who Canadians are and how they live, making it impossible to accurately identify chronological trends in Canada's social and economic fabric. Regardless of how robust the National Household Survey was made, or the extra \$22 million injected by the last government, it could not replace the census.

In an article asking the Liberal government to “make Statistics Canada independent,” Canada's former chief statistician cautioned: “we should also ask why and how we got into this unacceptable situation in the first place, with a government interfering in the very technical issue of which questions should be asked on the census form. Could we find ourselves back in the same situation again one day in the future?”²⁵

The answer is currently yes, but that could be rectified without spending a dime. The law governing Statistics Canada must be changed to remove opportunities for political interference. At the same time, inadequate funding has resulted in too many foregone studies over the years — a poor record for a nation that purports to value science. An independent Statistics Canada should have the flexibility to recommend new data sets and the ability to make their case to the government for extra funding to support them.

Social Services

Employment and Social Development Canada

The Liberal government has promised to reduce the waiting period for employment insurance benefits from two weeks to one. It has also promised to create higher service standards for EI processing and to reduce waiting times. Although there are many other changes the government should initiate to improve EI for those who need it, their effectiveness will be undermined if there are not enough workers at Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) to administer the program.

The Conservative government cut 2,954 jobs from the department between 2011 and 2015.²⁶ Additional staff were hired in the past year, but this has not repaired the damage.²⁷ Funds to operate Citizen Centred Service, a key business line within ESDC, will have been cut in half from 2011 levels by 2017 under current plans — a loss of 2,100 positions. Department reports show that between 2011 and 2013 there were over 26 million blocked calls — where people could not get through to the EI help-line — and over a million hang-ups.²⁸

There is a shortage of staff in the EI processing and appeals sections. Significant reinvestment in ESDC will be essential, given the extent of the previous government cuts, if the Liberal government wishes to realize its promises.

Immigration

What was Citizenship and Immigration Canada has been renamed the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, and the Liberal government has promised to double its budget for processing family-class sponsorships and to reduce wait times in general. The government has also promised to invest \$250 million to increase Canada's ability to process refugees, and to improve the nation's overall capacity to sponsor and settle refugees and immigrants to Canada. Current immigration levels in Canada are quite high (about 250,000 newcomers per year), though with Canada's aging population there is a strong economic argument to increase this number.

There is an even stronger moral argument for Canada to welcome more refugees. The World Bank estimates that by 2030 between 35 and 122 million people will be living in poverty because of climate change.²⁹ Poverty and food shortages are inevitably leading to more migration and more refugees, making this an ongoing problem that Canada and other more prosperous nations must begin to plan for and adapt to.³⁰

Part of that planning must include ongoing financial and human resources to process and help resettle immigrants and refugees in Canada in ways that sustain them physically and emotionally. This will take a lot of rebuilding. Staffing is inadequate at Canadian visa offices and the refugee board, and under-resourcing has made it

almost impossible for the department to respond in a timely way to everything from family reunification to administering citizenship applications.³¹

Court Challenges Program

The Court Challenges Program, created in 1978, provided an average of \$2.3 million annually to help disadvantaged and marginalized Canadians bring language and equality rights challenges under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Many important human rights cases that have improved Canadian law would not have been pursued without assistance from the program.

The Conservative government cancelled the program in September of 2006, saying it did not make sense for the government to “subsidize lawyers to challenge the government’s own laws in court.”³² Because of the length of time it takes cases to wind their way through the courts, the Court Challenges Program still receives minimal, though inadequate, funding.³³ Reinstating this program to its full capacity will promote increased opportunities for equality within Canada’s justice system.

Other Services

Government Operations and Mechanisms

The Liberal platform made a number of promises related to government operations and mechanisms, notably on improving access to information, and with respect to Canada’s official languages policy. These promises, which will demand new investment, apply to all departments and can be construed as improving the quality of public services.

For example, the Liberals promised before the election that they would eliminate all fees except for the initial \$5 filing fee on access to information (ATI) requests, and broaden their coverage to include the offices of the prime minister and other ministers, as well as administrative institutions that support Parliament and the courts. But the promise to cut fees was not included in Prime Minister Trudeau’s mandate letters to the ministers of justice and the treasury board, which instead called for a simple review of the ATI process.

Fees that discourage access should be eliminated. ATI requests have been increasing for a number of years and the demand cannot be met in a timely way (5,000 have been filed since the election).³⁴ The existing 30-day response time limit is seldom met, with some unanswered requests dating back to 2009 and 2010.³⁵ Although the Liberal commitment to transparency may ease the workload burden on depart-

ments, they will still need additional resources to address current ATI demand and clear the backlog from the last government. Departments should be encouraged to submit plans about how they intend to deal with the workload.

The Liberal platform also promised to create a simple, central, no-fee website for personal information requests. Since these are already free to file, and already come with a 30-day time limit, the only new commitment here is the requirement to provide a written explanation for any delays to the applicant and the privacy commissioner.

The Liberals have promised to promote the use of Canada's official languages. Their platform committed to developing a new official languages plan to support English and French linguistic minorities, and to establish a free online service for learning and retaining English and French as a second language. Increased transparency in government is welcome, as is support for bilingualism, but effectively operationalizing these goals will require additional resources.

Canada Revenue Agency

The Liberal government committed to significant investment at the Canada Revenue Agency. In addition to clarifying the rules pertaining to charities, which will eliminate resources focused on seemingly politically motivated audits, the Liberals promise to invest over \$80 million to combat international tax evasion and to create a multilateral anti-tax haven strategy. This is a progressive promise that should pay for itself while generating additional revenue for other government priorities. According to Canadians for Tax Fairness, Canadian corporations had \$199 billion hidden in the top ten tax havens in 1994. Recent research by Gabriel Zucman found that Canada has at least \$40 billion stashed away in Switzerland alone.³⁶

The government also promises to overhaul operating practices at the department in the following ways: to develop a client relationship that will include proactively contacting Canadians when they are entitled to, but are not, receiving tax benefits; offering to create returns for clients, particularly lower- and fixed-income Canadians; supporting paperless tax filing; and ensuring CRA correspondence is user-friendly. Canadians want fair tax policies and these steps help ensure poorer and richer Canadians are treated fairly.

From 2011 to 2015, the Conservative government cut almost 1,800 jobs at the CRA, according to Treasury Board.³⁷ Hundreds of senior auditors were laid off. Currently, CRA does not have the capacity to fulfil these Liberal promises without providing more resources, including staff.

Canada Post

The Liberal platform promised to stop Canada Post's plan to end door-to-door mail delivery and to review operations at the Crown corporation to ensure Canadians were receiving high-quality service at a reasonable price. One of the reasons the Conservative government and Canada Post stopped door-to-door delivery service was so that 6,000 to 8,000 postal worker jobs could be eliminated. At the time, both claimed Canada Post was in such dire financial straits the important service could not be sustained.

In fact, Canada Post has created revenue for the government in all but two of the past 17 years. By December 2013, losses were only \$110 million on annual revenues of \$5.8 billion.³⁸ The 2014 Canada Post budget showed profits of \$194 million. In the first quarter of 2015, the corporation posted a pre-tax profit of \$24 million.³⁹ Though Canada Post was short \$31 million in the second quarter, the overall \$7-million shortfall to that point is insignificant compared to annual revenues, even with declining mail volumes.

A review of Canada Post will demonstrate there are other options besides cutting services to sustain the corporation as it moves into an environment where less mail is being delivered. For example, four years of intensive research at Canada Post into offering financial services concluded postal banking was a "proven money-maker." The Conservative government refused to entertain the concept.⁴⁰ The Liberals would be wise to consider it.

National Defence

In their party platform, the Liberals promised to implement the recommendations in the Canadian Forces' Report on Transformation on how to build a more "modern, efficient, and effective military," including the proposal to reduce administrative staffing within government and the Canadian Armed Forces to strengthen front-line operations. The Liberals also committed to removing the current Canadian Air Force presence from Iraq.

National Defence is a public service. Like other public services it is dependent on tax revenue. Among the services it provides within Canada is the mitigating role the Forces play during floods, forest fires and other disasters. The department's main role is to support Canada's foreign policy and the overall welfare and security of Canadians. In the past, Canada contributed much more to peacekeeping than it does now. When once Canada fielded 3,300 peacekeepers, there were only 34 military personnel participating in peacekeeping missions internationally in 2014.⁴¹

It is time to have a full discussion of the role the Canadian Forces should play at home and abroad. Only then will we be able to make informed choices about the skills and equipment they will need to carry out this mission. Acting in the absence of a sensible national defence plan, as the previous government did, will only continue to lead Canada into reactionary and politically motivated missions that undermine the quality of defense services.

Veterans Affairs

The Liberal platform promised to reopen the nine veterans' service centres closed by the previous government, and to fully implement all the auditor general's recommendations on enhancing mental health service delivery for veterans. The platform also committed to hiring 400 new service delivery staff (on top of the "more than 100" that the Conservative government committed to hiring in its 2015 federal budget) and provide greater education, counselling, and training for families providing care and support to veterans. Lastly, the platform promised to budget \$20 million for two new centres of excellence in veterans' care.

These steps will be welcomed by veterans as well as the mostly overworked public servants who try to assist them. Treasury Board figures show that between 2011 and 2015, Veterans Affairs cut 915 jobs. Although the 400 new service delivery staff will be welcome, more personnel will likely have to be employed to operationalize the improved service delivery that the government hopes to introduce.

Canadian Coast Guard

Security in Canada is the responsibility of a number of different departments. One of the most important for Canada's fishers is the Canadian Coast Guard. Although the previous government made commitments to the coast guard most of them did not materialize, whereas the cuts they promised did.

The Liberal government has renamed the department within which the coast guard resides to Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard — a symbolic recognition of the important role that the Coast Guard plays in maritime waters. It has also promised to re-open the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre in St. John's and the Kitsilano coast guard base in Vancouver, both positive measures in support of Maritime safety.

In 2013, the Conservative government projected coast guard cuts in the area of \$20 million with an accompanying loss of 300 full-time jobs.⁴² The cuts led to three of five marine communications centres in B.C closing alongside the Kitsilano base, which alone responded to about 350 calls for rescues per year. Kitsilano served Vancouver's Burrard Inlet, the busiest harbour in Canada. Calls for maritime assistance

must now be sorted out 17 nautical miles and 35 minutes away. The former commander of the Kitsilano coast guard station told reporters the serious fuel leak last April in English Bay would have been responded to in 10 minutes, as opposed to several hours after the leak occurred, had the base not been closed.⁴³

The Conservative government also shut down the St. John's Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre in 2012. The centre protected the safety of mariners who operated in an area spanning more than 900,000 square kilometers of ocean and 28,956 kilometers of coastline. It responded to more than 500 distress calls a year. Reinstatement of these bases should be a priority. Likewise for the 10 coast guard communications centres shut across Canada by the last government.⁴⁴ The operators of these centres dealt with emergency calls from mariners in distress. Although it was not among the Liberal promises, the government should seriously consider reopening them also.

Quality Public Services Depend on a Healthy Public Service

The previous government repeatedly introduced omnibus legislation that undermined the ability of public service workers and their representatives to ensure a fair and healthy workplace. The legislation weakened health and safety legislation, impeded workers from making complaints about workplace issues, and narrowed the ability of workers to improve the contractual relationships that govern their employment. Unhealthy, unvalued, and micro-managed workplaces are not conducive to providing quality public services.

Collective bargaining determines working conditions. The Liberal platform promised a Liberal government would bargain in good faith with public sector unions. The party committed to implementing the Mental Health Commission of Canada's National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. The Liberals also promised to revoke changes the Conservative government made to labour legislation that undermined fair representation, subverted the bargaining process, and undermined health and safety representation.

Meeting these promises will not always be easy, but it will be worth it for public sector workers and those who rely on the services they provide. Workers who are well-treated, happy, and healthy, who are not overworked and can take the time to properly address questions from the public, consistently provide better service.

Conclusion

One of main problems the Liberal government will have in keeping its promises to Canadians is that the cuts the Conservative government made to public services, many of them ideologically driven, were deep, sacrificed quality, and need to be reversed.⁴⁵ Revitalizing Canada's public service will require serious decisions about how to generate more public revenue, importantly to pay for the staff needed to supply revitalized services.

Fortunately, the Liberal government is in an excellent position to implement strategic tax increases to pay for public service enhancements that will be supported by the majority of Canadians who voted for change (see Tax Chapter in the forthcoming 2016 Alternative Federal Budget). Serious attention to addressing tax avoidance and ending subsidies to the oil industry are among the many smart options out there for producing new revenue.

Nobody likes to see a government break its promises, and much has been said already about the Liberal track record on these things.⁴⁶ Now that the party once again forms the government, there will be a lot of voices demanding that it scrap its promises as too expensive or too risky. This would be a huge mistake politically and for Canada's depleted public services.

The Canadian people made a clear choice in the last election against austerity. The majority of Canadians voted for change and for an activist government. They voted for transparency and a reinvestment in a caring, thoughtful, and more equal Canada. No government would be able to implement that vision without a strong and vibrant public service.

***Howie West** is a member of the Alternative Federal Budget Steering Committee and Work Reorganization Officer with the Public Service Alliance of Canada.*

Notes

1 Treasury Board of Canada. This information is retrieved from the government's regional pay system and consists of two population segments: the Core Public Administration (CPA) and Separate agencies (SA). The changes from 2014 overall are negligible with only 104 fewer jobs overall. In the last year the government chart shows that some departments and agencies continue to cut positions (e.g., CRA, CFIA, CSC, and AAND) and others (e.g., ESDC) have increased their staff from the previous year. Link: <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/res/stats/ssen-ane-eng.asp>

2 Statistics Canada Survey of Payrolls (SEPH), CANSIMtable 281-0023

3 MacKinnon, Leslie. "Most cuts hitting services, says budget watchdog," CBC News, November 7, 2012. Link: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/most-cuts-hitting-services-says-budget-watchdog-1.1217923>

- 4** Scratch, Lydia (2010). *Public Service Reductions in the 1990s: Background and Lessons Learned*. Ottawa: Library of Parliament.
- 5** Treasury Board Secretariat (2013). *Demographic Snapshot of the Federal Public Service 2013*. Ottawa: Government of Canada. Link: <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/res/stats/demo13-eng.asp>
- 6** Finance Canada. "Fiscal Reference Tables 2012: Table 8." Ottawa: Government of Canada. Link: <http://www.fin.gc.ca/frt-trf/2012/frt-trf-1202-eng.asp#tbl8>
- 7** Finance Canada (2015). *Update of Economic and Fiscal Projections*, p. 47. Link: <http://www.budget.gc.ca/efp-peb/2015/pub/efp-peb-15-en.pdf>
- 8** Sanger, Toby, (2013) *Canada's (not so incredible) shrinking Federal government*, Rabble.ca Blogs November 21, 2013 <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/progressive-economics-forum/2013/11/canadas-not-so-incredible-shrinking-federal-gover>
- 9** Mazzucato, Mariana (2013). *The Entrepreneurial State*, Anthem Press, New York, p. 13: "From the development of aviation, nuclear energy, computers, the Internet, biotechnology and today's developments in green technology, it is, and has been, the State — not the private sector — that has kick started and developed the engine of growth, because of its willingness to take risks in areas where the Private sector has been too risk averse."
- 10** Macdonald, David and Kayle Hatt (2014). *At What Cost? The Impacts of Rushing to Balance the Budget*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Link: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/what-cost>
- 11** Kingston, Bob (2014). *Speaking Notes for News Conference*. Link: <http://www.foodsafetyfirst.ca/2014/04/22/speaking-notes/>
- 12** Canadian Food Inspection Agency (2014). *Consultations. Accountability*. Retrieved May 2015 from the CFIA website: <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/about-the-cfia/accountability/consultations/eng/1330977431764/1330977617771#guidancedocumentrepository>
- 13** The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (2014). *Summary of CFIA Consultation Submissions*. Retrieved May 2015 from the PIPSC website: <http://www.pipsc.ca/portal/page/portal/website/news/announcements/pdfs/cfia-12102014.en.pdf>
- 14** Author's conversation with Bob Kingston, president of the Agriculture Union, a component of the PSAC. November 18 2015.
- 15** Tait, Carrie. "Wildfires and Drought are Hurting Prairie Economy," *Globe and Mail*, July 16, 2015. Link: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/industry-news/energy-and-resources/prairie-wildfires-and-drought-hurting-wide-range-of-industries/article25539563/>
- 16** The Western Producer. "Plan For Centre of Excellence Dashed," April 20, 2012. Link: <http://www.producer.com/2012/04/plan-for-centre-of-excellence-dashed/>
- 17** Calculations by author based on Environment Canada's Performance Reports and Reports on Plans and Priorities.
- 18** Cheadle, Bruce. "Environment, fisheries ministers failed to enforce Species at Risk Act, court rules," *Canadian Press*, February 14, 2014; see also *Western Canada Wilderness Committee v. Canada* (Fisheries and Oceans), 2014 FC 148 - Smith testimony, para 84 and 85.
- 19** De Souza, Mike. "Harper government cutting more than \$100 million related to protection of water," *Postmedia*, December 27, 2013.
- 20** Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2009). *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*, United Nations, New York.

- 21** Berthiaume, Lee (2015). "Climate change is the 'worst threat we are facing this century': Stephane Dion," *Postmedia*, November 18, 2015.
- 22** Klein, Naomi (2014). *This Changes Everything*, Alfred A Knopf, Canada. This is the thesis of the book.
- 23** Smith, Grant (2015). "OPEC Export Price Falls Below \$40 for First Time Since 2009," *Bloomberg Business*, November 16, 2015 (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-11-16/opec-export-price-falls-below-40-for-first-time-since-2009>); The NASDAQ pegged oil prices at \$41.9 on November 22, 2015 (<http://www.nasdaq.com/markets/crude-oil.aspx>).
- 24** Bast, Elizabeth et. al. (2015). *Empty Promises: G20 Subsidies to Oil, Gas and Coal*, Oil Change International, Overseas Development Institute, p. 72.
- 25** Sheikh, Munir (2015). "There's Too Much At Stake, Make Statistics Canada Independent," *Globe and Mail*, November 5, 2015. Link: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/rob-commentary/theres-too-much-at-stake-make-statistics-canada-independent/article27117905/>
- 26** Treasury Board of Canada <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/res/stats/ssen-ane-eng.asp>
- 27** Curry, Bill. "Ottawa hiring 400 public servants to manage EI," *The Globe and Mail*, December 9, 2014.
- 28** MacDonald, David and Kayle Hatt (2014). *At What Cost? The Impacts of Rushing to Balance the Budget*, CCPA. Link: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/what-cost>
- 29** Hallegatte, Stephane et. al. (2016). *Shock Waves: Managing the Impacts of Climate Change on Poverty*. World Bank Climate Change and Development Series. Washington, D.C.
- 30** O'Hagan, Ellie Mae (2015). "Mass migration is no 'crisis': it's the new normal as the climate changes," *The Guardian U.K.*, August 18, 2015. Link: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/18/mass-migration-crisis-refugees-climate-change>
- 31** Cresky, Jim (2015). "John McCallum's Renovation Job," *Embassy Magazine*, Wednesday, November 11, 2015.
- 32** McGregor, Janyce. "John Baird's decade in federal politics," CBC News, February 3, 2015. Link: <http://www.cbc.ca/m/touch/politics/story/1.2943299>
- 33** Rennie, Steve. "Scrapped court challenges program still 5-7 years from winding down," *The Canadian Press*, March 04, 2015.
- 34** Beeby, Dean. "Liberal transparency reforms subject to 'review' next year," CBC News, November 30, 2015. Link: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/access-to-information-reforms-review-1.3342584>
- 35** Cheadle, Bruce. "Data show unfulfilled federal access-to-information requests going back to 2009," *The Canadian Press*, June 25, 2015. Link: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/data-shows-unfulfilled-federal-access-to-information-requests-going-back-to-2009/article25106483/>
- 36** Zucman, Gabriel (2015). *The Hidden Wealth of Nations*, University of Chicago Press, London, p. 31.
- 37** Treasury Board of Canada. Population of the Federal Public Service: <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/res/stats/ssen-ane-eng.asp>
- 38** Yalnizyan, Armine. "Canada Post's Vow To 'Protect Taxpayers' Needs A Reality Check." *The Globe and Mail*, December 16, 2013. Link: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/canada-posts-vow-to-protect-taxpayers-needs-a-reality-check/article15981676/#dashboard/follows/>
- 39** Busby, Mattha. "Canadians are stopping cuts to Canada Post now to stop privatization later," *Rabble.ca*, June 5, 2015.
- 40** Cox, Ethan (2014). "Canada Post Should Deliver on Postal Banking," *Toronto Star*, February 19, 2014.

41 Shephard, Michelle. “How Canada Has Abandoned Its Role as Peacekeeper,” *Toronto Star*, October 31, 2014. Link: http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2014/10/31/how_canada_has_abandoned_its_role_as_a_peacekeeper.html

42 PSAC. *Harper’s Conservatives are Bleeding Our Public Services: Vote to Stop the Cuts*. Link: <http://votetostopthecuts.ca/issues/search-rescue/>

43 DeRosa, Katie. “Coast guard union warns that more cuts increase risk from spills,” *Times Colonist*, April 12, 2015.

44 PSAC. *Harpers Conservatives are Bleeding Our Public Services: Vote to Stop the Cuts*.

45 Page, Kevin (2015). *Unaccountable: Truth and Lies on Parliament Hill*. Penguin Canada, Toronto, p. 149.

46 Greenspon, Edward, and Anthony Wilson-Smith (1996). *Double Vision*. Doubleday Canada, p. 133: Within two years of the 1993 election, almost all of the promises in the Liberal “Red Book” were ignored. Greenspon and Wilson-Smith quote Paul Martin as screaming, “Don’t tell me what’s in the Red Book. I wrote the goddamned thing. And I know that it’s a lot of crap.”



www.policyalternatives.ca

PLEASE MAKE A DONATION...

Help us to continue to offer our publications free online.

With your support we can continue to produce high quality research—and make sure it gets into the hands of citizens, journalists, policy makers and progressive organizations. Visit www.policyalternatives.ca or call 613-563-1341 for more information.

The opinions and recommendations in this report, and any errors, are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publishers or funders of this report.