

Federal Parliamentary Pre-Budget Consultations in Canada:

The Role of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

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Reason: House of Commons Standing Order



- Standing Order of House of Commons authorizes Standing Committee on Finance to consider and make reports on proposals regarding budgetary policy of federal government
- Pre-budget consultation hearings begin in September each year, and process ends with tabling of report in the House of Commons in December

Committee: Members and staff



- Standing Committee on Finance members are from main political parties in House of Commons:
 - Liberal Party
 - Conservative Party
 - New Democratic Party
- Committee is generally supported in process by 2 clerks, up to 5 analysts, logistics officer, numerous interpreters and translators

Pre-budget consultation process: Usual timelines



- Identify themes in late May
- Prepare news release in early June announcing themes, relevant deadlines, and – if known – locations and dates of public hearings
- Hold public hearings in Ottawa and throughout Canada in last half of September and throughout October

Pre-budget consultation process: Usual timelines



- Prepare report during first 3 weeks of November
- Consider report last week of November and first week of December, if required
- Present report in House of Commons in first half of December

1994: And so it begins



- Public hearings leading to somewhat limited focus in Committee's report, often on:
 - budget-making process
 - tax issues
 - “new” economy
 - productivity

2002: A turning point



- Broad framework focused on 2001 Census results, leading to report that addressed virtually all areas of federal public policy, including:
 - people
 - businesses
 - communities
- Established inclusive model that continues to be used
- Hundreds of requests to appear, all of which were accommodated

2003 to 2010: Incremental changes



- Identification of:
 - deadline for request to appear as witness and/or submit brief
 - limit on number of pages, and perhaps of proposals, in brief
 - specific themes/questions to guide content of briefs and appearance before Committee

2003 to 2010: Incremental changes



- In some years:
 - request for estimated federal fiscal cost of proposals
 - briefs that were submitted late or were “off topic” addressed in report’s appendix
 - cross-country public hearings, including perhaps site visit(s)
 - limit on number of witnesses invited to make presentation to Committee

2011: First step toward e-consultations



- All briefs available on Committee's website
- Strict limit on number of witnesses invited to make presentation to Committee
- Continued strict limits regarding:
 - deadline for request to appear as witness and/or submit brief
 - number of pages, and perhaps of proposals, in brief
- Continued desire to have briefs and presentations focused on themes/questions

2012: Evolution in e-consultations



- “Briefs” submitted on line in form of responses to specified questions
- Some responses did not address Committee’s specified questions, some were repetitious, some exceeded allotted length and some were unclear in terms of “the ask”
- Significant increase in number of individual respondents and small decrease in number of organizational respondents

2013: Somewhat different e-consultations approach



- Committee requested witnesses and those submitting briefs to address 1 of 6 specific topics, with focus on identifying:
 - “winners” and “losers” from proposal(s)
 - estimated federal fiscal cost of proposal(s)
 - ways that proposal(s) could be funded

2014 to 2017: Evolution in e-consultations continues



- Continued “two-stream” process:
 - limited number of witnesses invited to appear to address specific themes
 - briefs submitted and uploaded to the Committee’s website, ideally also focused on those themes

2015 to 2018: My time as Chair



- Continued “two-stream” process
- Identified themes for appearance as witness and for submitted briefs
- Ottawa-based and cross-country hearings, and perhaps U.S. fact-finding missions
- Continued attempts to be inclusive in choosing themes, selecting witnesses, drafting report, making recommendations

2015 to 2018: My time as Chair



- Inclusive in that any individual or group can submit brief
- Briefs and witnesses often represent wide variety of Canadian sectors, regions and demographic groups
- Gender focus in that some briefs and witnesses highlight priorities of women
- Committee's report, including recommendations, inform Minister of Finance's decisions about budget
- In recent years, federal budget undergoes gender-based analysis

2017: Highlights



- Public hearing process occurred from 19 September-1 December
- More than 300 witnesses during 16 meetings, some of which included “open mic” sessions
- More than 400 briefs submitted
- Report contained 92 recommendations

2017: Highlights



- Individuals:
 - health, security and well-being
 - education, skills and employment
 - under-represented groups, including seniors, Indigenous peoples, women and individuals with disabilities

2017: Highlights



- Businesses:
 - taxation and regulatory requirements
 - trade and business supports
 - employment measures and contributions
 - sector and business specific proposals

2017: Highlights



- Government:
 - Economic and fiscal policy
 - Environmental, scientific and social policy
 - Infrastructure and transportation

2018: To date



- Theme is economic growth as tool for ensuring Canada's competitiveness
- More than 400 briefs received by deadline
- Potential witnesses identified
- Ottawa-based and cross-country public hearings being scheduled
- Fact-finding mission to United States being planned

Pre-budget consultations: What has worked



- High number of briefs submitted
- Briefs generally are submitted by Committee's deadline
- Broad range of sectors, regions and demographic groups submit briefs

Pre-budget consultations: What has worked less well



- In some years:
 - limited number of briefs exceed length limit
 - content of briefs are “replicated”
- In most years:
 - number of requests to appear as witness exceeds time available for public hearings
 - to varying extents, briefs and witnesses are not focused on Committee’s identified themes

Pre-budget consultations: Lessons Learned



- Ensure that e-consultation tool and any other tools used in process meet security, design and other requirements
- Adequately test tools
- Ensure availability of adequate personnel in light of uncertainties relating to technology, volume of responses, etc.

Pre-budget consultations: Lessons Learned



- Identify themes that truly matter to people, businesses, communities and the country
- Select themes that allow all individuals and organizations to “find a home”
- Hear from as many interested individuals and organizations as possible
- Be as inclusive as possible
- Include the diversity of views expressed by witnesses and in briefs in Committee’s report

Questions?



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