

Paying debt, keeping taxes low key messages in throne speech

By Mark Pavilons

The federal government is on track and Canadians should take comfort in that fact.

That's the word from Government House Leader and York-Simcoe MP Peter Van Loan.

The focus in the speech, he said, is on keeping taxes low, boosting a growing economy and keeping communities safe.

The throne speech calls for a balanced budget by 2015, with legislation making it a requirement to pay.

The most interest aspect is a new free trade agreement with the European Union. Negotiations are going well and Van Loan said they're currently putting the finishing touches on the pact, which will benefit Canadians tremendously.

He said Canada does roughly \$12 billion net worth of trade a year with Europe and the new agreement will result in an additional 80,000 jobs here. In York-Simcoe, many residents have European roots, so those in business can advantage of the new deal. Canada can boast that it's the only country with free trade pacts with Europe and the U.S. Europe is our second largest trading partner and while some countries are experiencing difficulties, Europe is still the richest economy in the world.

There are three aspects that will appeal to average Canadians.

Van Loan is happy that the government is calling on a decrease in cell phone roaming costs, which are among the highest in the world.

As well, there's a move to unbundle cable TV channels and packages, to allow consumers more choice at reduced prices.

Making communities and citizens safer is the mandate of the Victims Bill of Rights, another feather in Canada's cap.

'Two and a half years ago, Canadians gave our Government a mandate to create jobs, keep taxes low, and help make our streets and communities safe for families,' said Prime Minister Stephen Harper. 'Despite ongoing global uncertainty, Canadians now have a unique opportunity to build on our ingenuity, our immense natural wealth, and our values and stability, to secure our future and our children's future.'

'Our government will deliver on the commitments made in the Speech from the Throne by creating jobs and opportunities for Canadians, supporting and protecting Canadian families, and putting Canada first,' he added. 'This is Canada's moment; we will seize it together to help ensure that hard working Canadians prosper.'

Some of the key measures that the government will undertake under each of its three principal themes include:

Creating jobs and opportunities for Canadians

'Balancing the budget by 2015 and reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio to pre-recession levels by 2017.

'Reducing the cost of the federal government to ensure that taxes remain low.

'Completing reforms to the Temporary Foreign Workers Program to ensure that Canadians always have the first chance at available jobs.

'Expanding trade with the European Union by concluding a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, as well as with markets in Asia and the Americas.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced Friday that this is the biggest, most ambitious trade agreement that Canada has ever reached. It covers most aspects of the Canada-EU bilateral economic relationship, including trade in goods and services, investment, and government procurement. It also grants the flexibility to include areas of mutual interest beyond those that have traditionally been included in Canada's trade agreements, such as regulatory cooperation.

'This trade agreement is a historic win for Canada,' said Prime Minister Harper. 'It represents thousands of new jobs for Canadians, and a half-billion new customers for Canadian businesses.'

The agreement will provide Canada with preferential market access to the European Union's more than 500 million consumers.

Canadian workers in every region of the country - including in sectors such as fish and seafood; chemicals and plastics; metal and mineral products; technology; forestry and value-added wood products; automotive; advanced manufacturing; and agriculture and agri-food - stand to benefit significantly from increased access to this lucrative 28 country market which currently generates \$17 trillion in annual economic activity.

The elimination of approximately 98 per cent of all EU tariff lines on the first day of when the agreement comes into force will translate into increased profits and market opportunities for Canadian businesses of all sizes, in every part of the country.

Supporting and protecting Canadian families

'Supporting greater competition in the wireless sector by addressing roaming costs on networks within Canada.

'Providing Canadians with the opportunity to choose the combination of television channels they want by requiring that they be

unbundled.

? Taking steps to address geographic price discrimination against Canadians.

? Supporting victims of crime and punishing criminals by introducing the Victims' Bill of Rights and legislation to address cyberbullying.

Putting Canada first

? Providing the Canadian Armed Forces with the tools they need to defend Canada's sovereignty and vital interests.

? Providing further support to help meet the needs of veterans, including helping them secure jobs and reintegrate into civilian life.

? Further strengthening the immigration system, including introducing a new model to select immigrants based on the skills that Canadian employers need to expand their businesses and the economy.

? Honouring Canada's Confederation as we approach our historic 150th anniversary in 2017.