



Opportunity Calls: A Minority Government in Ottawa

Ottawa has been a very interesting place these past few months. Since the federal election last fall, the dynamics in the House have changed greatly. The Harper Government has seen its fair share of near death experiences and has now survived the Budget 2009 confidence vote. The opposition parties have also gone through some significant changes. The Liberals have a new leader, Michael Ignatieff, and the opposition coalition no longer has the support of its founding members.

At the beginning of the year, Minister of Finance, Jim Flaherty held pre-budget consultations across the country, and Canadian Booksellers Association took part. In our brief to the minister we called for measures that would support small Canadian retailers. This included calling for increases to the small business tax threshold, for a deferred capital gains tax strategy to facilitate family business succession and for the Government to re-evaluate the competition framework in order to create an environment where retailers can flourish and compete.

The budget, as expected, focused on measures that would keep the effects of the global economic crisis at bay. Included in the budget were some measures directed at small businesses across the country that booksellers should take note of.

The budget increased the amount of small business income eligible for a reduced federal tax rate of 11 per cent to \$500,000 from the previous limit of \$400,000. It also included amendments to the Canadian Small Business Financing Program and the Business Development Bank of Canada in order to increase small business access to credit.

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Other measures that affect Canada's small business were \$30 million in funding over two years for the Canada Business Network and \$10 million to the Canadian Youth Business Foundation.

One of the interesting outcomes of the budget vote was the Liberal amendment that requires the government to provide regular reports to parliament on the budget's implementation and costs. The first update is scheduled for March and subsequent reports are slated for June and December. Each update will be a confidence vote. What makes this amendment so remarkable is that it ensures implementation of the measures outlined in the budget and also that Canadians could very well be heading to the polls some time in 2009.

The current climate on the Hill is definitely a fascinating one to watch, but most importantly it offers booksellers from across the country a unique opportunity. In a minority government situation, MPs want to hear from different groups and especially from their constituents.

Remember to keep this in mind when you see your local MP in your store or

in your community. Feel free to update them on our association's efforts and the concerns of small business in your community. It's important to keep building your relationship with your local MP. Politicians meet dozens and dozens of constituents and groups in any given week, so regular contact is critical to having our issues stay on their radar.

Keeping your local MP aware of issues affecting booksellers and small businesses is a key component of our advocacy activities. Not only will MPs from across the country know their local booksellers but they will also know the critical issues facing small retailers making it easier for them to be an advocate for our cause if needed. 

Huw Williams is the President of Impact Public Affairs and handles CBA's lobbying activities in Ottawa. He is co-author of a book entitled, A Guide to Government Relations for Directors of Not-For-Profit Organizations, published by the Canadian Society of Association Executives (www.csae.com). Recently, Williams was named as one of the Top 100 Canadian Lobbyists by The Hill Times.