



Rachel Blaney

Member of Parliament
North Island-Powell River

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Minister of Finance

April 9, 2021

Via email: chrystia.freeland@canada.ca

Re: North Island-Powell River Priorities for Budget 2021

Dear Minister Freeland,

I am writing to outline the budget priorities and economic needs for North Island—Powell River (NIPR), which is comprised of the northern half of Vancouver Island and a coastal portion of the mainland surrounding Powell River, in British Columbia. It is a beautiful, rugged, rural and remote region that is home to over twenty Indigenous communities, several municipalities, and four regional districts.

The high priority areas of concern that require tangible measures in the upcoming budget are connectivity, addressing the climate crisis, housing, childcare, an aquaculture jobs transition plan, and lifting seniors out of poverty.

These priorities are informed by my private Member's motion, [M-53](#), which details principles for a sustainable and equitable future in determining funding for COVID-19 relief and recovery, for rural and remote regions such as NIPR. Implementing UNDRIP, responding to the climate crisis and taking a regional approach to an equitable distribution of wealth are the three principles the federal government must abide by when distributing COVID-19 recovery funds and resources across Canada. It is especially important to note that coming out of this pandemic is an opportunity for the federal government to address climate change. We must transition away from fossil fuel projects by funding exclusively projects that reduce or eliminate GhG emissions, and by investing in clean water projects. I encourage you to thoroughly explore the motion and apply its principles to the upcoming budget in offering economic recovery support to communities like ours.

Rural and remote regions like NIPR suffer from a lack of connectivity for internet and cell coverage. During the pandemic, the need for accessible and affordable high-speed broadband internet has become obvious to all Canadians. As well, travelling through remote areas without cell coverage is a safety and health concern. Connectivity is vital to building growth in local economies and to keeping Canadians safe. The upcoming budget must continue to heavily invest in these connections for rural and remote regions.

Housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable across British Columbia, not just in the lower mainland. More and more I hear from NIPR residents that they are unable to afford a home in the community where they grew up. Frankly, the Liberal Government has not given enough attention to addressing the housing crisis. None of the measures announced since you were first elected in 2015 have had any impact on housing affordability in my riding. You must do better, especially as it relates to housing in First Nations communities. Canada needs an urban, rural, and northern Indigenous Housing Strategy that is governed and led by Indigenous peoples and housing providers and I implore your government to adopt such a strategy in place of the distinctions-based model.

In my riding, many working families are struggling without affordable childcare. You have mentioned in the media that childcare supports will be featured in the upcoming budget and I look forward to hearing about those measures, albeit with skepticism. Your party has a record of promising childcare all the way back to 1993 and yet Liberals have failed to deliver on this promise each and every time you have been in power. I beseech you to prove me wrong and finally deliver quality, affordable childcare so parents can get back to work, supporting their families.

Our coastal communities have been affected by recent decisions taken by your government in the fisheries and oceans sector. I respect Minister Jordan's decision on the Discovery Islands fish farms and know there is a great deal of uncertainty in the region on what the outcome will be. The federal government must support the transition of good, sustainable jobs in the blue economy sector by directing funds to aquaculture transitions in the most affected communities. These solutions must be local and include clear consultation with Indigenous communities and keep workers at the heart of decision making.

In relation to this point, it is vital that the federal government continue to implement the recommendation of the Cohen Commission of 2012 and apply a precautionary approach to protect wild salmon. That is why I reiterate the call of my colleague, Gord Johns, for a wild salmon strategy that will make historic investments in the conservation, protection and restoration of wild salmon habitats.

Again, it is possible to protect both jobs and wild salmon if your government adopts a transition jobs plan for workers in the aquaculture sector.

Finally, I would like to point out the importance of addressing the financial needs of vulnerable seniors. During the pandemic, New Democrats had to fight for support for seniors and we were

successful in convincing your government to give a onetime payment of \$500 for many of them. But that's not enough. Increases to both the Guaranteed Income Supplement and the Old Age Security funds are necessary if we want to lift seniors out of poverty.

Thank you for your consideration of these priorities and please don't hesitate to contact me directly if additional information is required.

Regards,



Rachel Blaney, MP
North Island-Powell River

Ottawa

900 Justice Building
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
(613)992-2503

Campbell River Office

427 10th Avenue
Campbell River, BC V9W 4E4
1(800)667-8404
Rachel.Blaney@parl.gc.ca

Powell River Office

4697 Marine avenue
Powell River, BC V8A 2L2
(604)489-2286