

THE BUDGET STORY YOU WON'T HEAR

As MPs are readying themselves to head back to Ottawa, there is no bigger item on the agenda than the next federal budget. Budgets can and should be where we set our priorities as a country and plan how we are going to achieve them.

Yet budgets have become a partisan tool for staking out old battleground with characterizations that have long outlived their relevance: Conservatives are fiscally responsible enemies of big government while Liberals are spendthrifts who would rather keep the bureaucrats working than make things easier for Canadian families.

So it comes as no surprise that a news item from last year was released - or should I say buried - in the pages of newspapers four days before Christmas: **Prime Minister Harper ran a \$2.7 billion deficit in October.** Program expenses from department to department were up \$1.7 billion, or 11.3 percent.

For those who watch these kinds of numbers more carefully, this is part of a worrying trend with this government that refutes the old partisan rhetoric. Terence Corcoran, no cheerleader for Liberal policy, cites the "near record levels of spending" of the Harper government. He says that:

"The Conservatives failed to cut taxes when the opportunity existed in the early days of their rise to power. Instead, they let spending grow...Tens of billions in surplus revenue were chewed up doing everything but reducing the tax burden on Canadians."

A little history might be instructive. When former Prime Minister Mulroney left power, it was truly not just his own finances that could have used a lift... Canada had become an international credit risk from remarkable economic mismanagement. These days you don't hear much about the Liberal stewardship that turned Canada around, creating 8 back-to-back budget surpluses and putting more than \$10,000 more of after-tax income in the hands of Canadian families.

And chances are, given all the gloomy talk on 'lowering expectations' with the economy, you won't hear it from this government as well. It should make for some interesting swagger and name calling in the House again, as Mr. Harper tries to figure out somebody to blame for the way he's burned through billions in surplus revenue while putting none of it in the pockets of ordinary Canadians.



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