The Canadian Advocate is a monthly roundup of AEM’s ongoing advocacy efforts in Canada. Our industry supports over 149,000 good paying jobs in Canada and contributes $45 billion a year to the national economy. With over 100 member companies in Canada and growing, AEM is actively engaging lawmakers in Ottawa and throughout the provinces to advocate for policies helping equipment manufacturers succeed in Canada and around the world.

Due to technical issues, we were unable to send the March edition of the Canadian Advocate yesterday. We thank you for your patience.

Federal Parties Gear Up for Election

Election speculation, always popular during a minority parliament, is rampant among the chattering classes in Ottawa in recent weeks.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau cannot help but look with envy and hope to emulate the examples of New Brunswick and British Columbia, who both held elections during the pandemic that delivered majorities to their incumbent minority governments. A slow start to vaccination in Canada is suspected to have prevented Trudeau from calling the early election already. With vaccination now ramping up quickly and placing Canada among the top per-capita in vaccinations among the G20, the Trudeau Liberals may now see their opportunity.

The stage will be set when Parliament resumes after the Easter break and the first federal budget in two years is tabled on Monday, April 19. This will be Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland’s first full budget since she was named to the role in 2020.

Like the Biden administration to the south, the Trudeau government has taken on the slogan of “Build Back Better.” The nearer ideological alignment between the current Canadian and U.S. administrations on the environment and climate change file, and the Supreme Court of Canada win on the constitutionality of the carbon tax will only further embolden the Trudeau Liberals to dig in on their current agenda. On that note, we can expect to see the Liberals continue to make hay after the Conservative convention this month delivered leader Erin O’Toole a divisive vote by party members (54 per cent to 46 per cent) voting down a resolution to acknowledge that climate change is real, even while O’Toole himself was pushing for a strong environmental platform to gain more support in the suburban and urban ridings needed to return to government.

We can expect to see a federal budget that focuses heavily on infrastructure for economic recovery, particularly with a “green” environmental lens placed on it. Key social spending items such as a national child care plan are also repeatedly pointed out by federal ministers as a way to ensure that the recovery is more inclusive after the COVID-19 lockdown laid bare some longstanding gender inequities.
Ontario Provincial Budget Tabled

Ontario Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy tabled the provincial budget on March 24. While the main focus remains tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, there are other key items to note. A new tax credit to help workers with training expenses is proposed for this year, which would provide $2,000 for up to 50 per cent of eligible expenses. The Ontario government is also committing $400 million over four years to create the “Invest Ontario Fund,” which is aimed to encourage investments in the key sectors of advanced manufacturing, technology, and life sciences.

The Ford government projects that Ontario’s deficit will not return to surplus until 2029-30. The expected deficit for the 2021-22 fiscal year is pegged at $33.1 billion, falling to $27.7 billion in 2022-23.

Quebec Provincial Budget Tabled

For Eric Girard, Quebec’s Finance Minister, this was the first budget since the beginning of the pandemic. Investment in public infrastructure will be a key factor in kick–starting the economy. To that end, the government is increasing funding for the 2021–31 Québec Infrastructure Plan (QIP) by $4.5 billion, bringing the total amount from $130.5 billion to $135.0 billion. Nearly 60 per cent of investments under the plan are earmarked for the next five years to accelerate the economic recovery.

The budget projects that the deficit will be $12.3 billion in 2021-22 and will decline to $8.5 billion in 2022-23. The Minister of Finance has emphasized that no measures to reduce the budget deficit will be implemented until Quebec has returned to its pre-pandemic employment level, and the return to a balanced budget is projected for 2027-28.

(Credit: Quebec Finance Minister Eric Girard)

CNESST Regulatory Issue in Quebec

AEM is putting forward a submission on proposed new regulations by Quebec’s Workers Compensation Board, the Commission des normes, de l’équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST). The proposed regulations would require an engineer to certify modifications on equipment that does not have a Type C standard. Yet, what constitutes an engineer has not been well defined, nor has what would constitute a substantial modification.

The proposed regulations would have an impact on AEM members in the forestry, mining, agriculture, and turf sectors. It currently is not meant to include handheld machines, nor the construction sector. However, the exclusion on the construction sector could be removed in the future. Officials have stated that they are open to input from stakeholders, and AEM will argue that these changes would put Quebec out of step with international standards.

Ongoing Advocacy in BC and Alberta

AEM is continuing to work on key ongoing regulatory issues in British Columbia (3-point safety belt) and Alberta (OHS regulations on mining equipment) as reported in the January Canadian Advocate. Further updates will come in due course.
That’s all for this month. If you have any questions or would like to learn more, please contact Alex Russ at aruss@aem.org or call (202) 898-9006.

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