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Federal government promising a 'renters' bill of rights' in upcoming budget

Trudeau expected to make more pre-budget announcements in coming weeks



Darren Major || March 27, 2024



The federal government says it will introduce a number of new rental measures, including a 'renters' bill of rights,' in the upcoming budget, scheduled for April 16. (David Horemans/CBC)

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that his government will introduce new measures — including a new "bill of rights" — that he says will help protect those who rent their homes as part of the upcoming budget.

Trudeau said the new measures are specifically geared toward younger people, who are renting more than previous generations.

"It's about changing the rules of the game in a way that meets young people where they are," he said on Wednesday.

Ottawa will work with provinces and territories to develop a "renters' bill of rights" that would introduce a national standard lease agreement and implement requirements for landlords to disclose an apartment's pricing history to allow tenants to negotiate their rent.

The new measures will also include a \$15-million fund for provincial legal aid organizations that help tenants fight against "renovictions" and landlord abuse.

The Liberals are also proposing to change federal rules so that making rental payments on time will count toward someone's credit scores, something Trudeau said is meant to help renters looking to one day buy a house.

"If you look at someone who pays a \$2,000 [per month] mortgage, they're getting recognition and credit for that from their bank as part of their credit score," the prime minister said.

"But if you're paying \$2,000 a month on rent, you get no kudos."

Typically the government doesn't discuss what is in an annual budget until it is introduced in the House of Commons. But the announcement was made weeks prior to the release of the Liberals' next budget, which is slated to drop on April 16.

Releasing tidbits from the budget ahead of time is part of a new communications strategy for the Liberals, sources told CBC News. Trudeau and his ministers are expected to make a number of similar announcements in the run-up to the budget, the sources said.

Before revealing the planned rental measures on Wednesday, Trudeau took a moment to plug the April 16 fiscal plan, saying that the budget will be about "fairness."

"For Canada to succeed, we need everyone to succeed," he said.

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland joined Trudeau for his announcement and hinted about further announcements ahead of budget day.

"Over the coming days and in the April budget, we are going to launch a no-holds-barred plan to wrestle down the cost of owning and renting a home," she said.

Wednesday's announcements came on the same day that the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation released a report that found a surge in new apartment construction drove housing start increases in several major Canadian cities last year.

But the report also cautions that demand continues to outweigh supply.

The opposition Conservatives, who have enjoyed a healthy lead in recent polls, have made housing — and other cost-of-living issues — a key point of attack against the governing Liberals.

Following his announcement, Trudeau was asked whether he thinks he bears any responsibility for people feeling left behind in the current economy and whether the new measures would be enough to convince younger people to support him in the next election.

In response, Trudeau suggested that a recent rise in the cost of living is not unique to Canada.

"Young people who are key to our present, and obviously key to our future, are seeing a system that is stacked against them. That's true in Canada but also true elsewhere around the world," he said. "What we're focused on now is making sure that young people can see their success in the economy."

Opposition parties criticize Liberal announcement

Scott Aitchison, the Conservative housing critic, said Wednesday's announcement was Liberal posturing that won't get results.

"Today's photo op is just another set of meaningless measures that won't result in building the homes Canadians need," he said in a statement.

NDP housing critic Jenny Kwan criticized the announcement for not going far enough.

"The Liberals are so out of touch with what Canadian renters are experiencing that they keep offering half-measures instead of a real action," Kwan said in a statement.

The NDP is calling on the government to invest more in affordable housing while temporarily preventing for-profit firms from buying designated affordable-housing spaces.