

Federal minister promotes Liberal budget during Windsor visit



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Jean-Yves Duclos, federal minister of families, children and social development, left, speaks with Tecumseh Mayor Gary McNamara on March 23, 2017 in Windsor, Ont. *DAN JANISSE / WINDSOR STAR*

The upshot of the Liberal government's federal budget for Essex County residents will be shorter

wait lists for affordable housing and more child-care spaces.

Jean-Yves Duclos, the federal minister for families, children and social development, came through Windsor Thursday to promote the 2017 budget delivered a day before in Ottawa.

“We know that in southern Ontario, and Windsor in particular, there are certain economic challenges as well as certain economic opportunities,” Duclos said in an interview.

“The automotive industry needs transition support and the agri-food industry is deserving and expecting investment to grow their businesses.”

He said the goal of the budget is “to grow the middle class and help more Canadians join that middle class.”

Duclos indicated pride in the government’s “historic investment in housing over the next 10 years to better support the housing needs of struggling families.”

The budget earmarked \$11.2 billion over the next 10 years to a national housing strategy focused on affordable housing.

After participating in a round table discussion with business and community leaders at the Windsor-Essex Chamber of Commerce, Duclos said the new initiatives should reduce the wait list for affordable housing by a third.

“There are a million Canadians who are living in housing conditions that are either not suitable or not affordable,” he said.

“For the last 20 years, the federal government took a back seat in the role of assisting with the housing conditions of Canadians but that changed as of yesterday.”

Locally, there are 3,500 on a wait list for affordable housing in Essex County.

The budget will also deliver \$7 billion over the next 10 years for new child-care spaces starting in 2018-19.

“Windsor is a good middle-class area,” Duclos said. “Yesterday’s investment in early learning and child care is going to make a big difference over time. Parents and mothers will be able to participate in the labour force.”

Duclos was left to speak in broad strokes since details on how and when the new programs will be launched have yet to be announced.

One round table participant was looking for more information on the funding for manufacturing and innovation.

The federal budget includes a \$950-million pot being spread over five years to support super clusters of innovative industries but whether that's doled out in the form of tax credits or grants is still unknown.

"We'll be looking for the details," said Matt Marchand, chamber of commerce CEO.

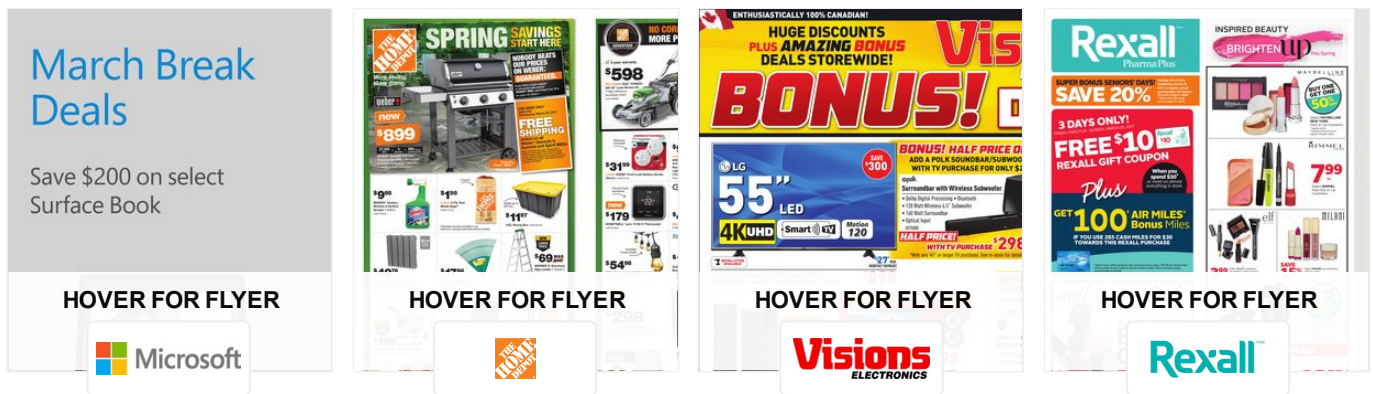
"I think there is opportunity (to help this region) but we've just got to see details. We certainly agree with the concept."

The super-cluster concept aims at growing advanced manufacturing, agri-food, clean technology, digital industries, health and biosciences and clean resources.

Duclos said some programs will roll out in a matter of weeks while others will take shape over the next few months.

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