



# COMMUNIQUÉ

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## HOW DOES THE NEW HARPER CABINET STACK UP FOR CO-OPERATIVES?

The new and smaller cabinet of Prime Minister Stephen Harper of 27 members, announced on February 6, will leave the co-operative movement waiting for answers as to how its major priorities will be dealt with in the next Parliament.

In announcing the new Cabinet, the Prime Minister reaffirmed the Government's intention to focus on five key priorities:

1. Cleaning up government by enacting and enforcing the Federal Accountability Act;
2. Lowering taxes for working Canadians, starting with a reduction to the Goods and Services Tax;
3. Protecting Canadian families and communities by strengthening the justice system;
4. Supporting the child care choices of parents; and
5. Delivering health care Canadians need, when they need it, by establishing a patient wait times guarantee with the provinces.

But what about other issues, such as those CCA included in its [14 Points for Building a Stronger Canada through Co-operation](#)? We are particularly concerned with the need to expand the existing [Co-operative Development Initiative](#) for the next two years; assure the roll out of the [Social Economy Initiative](#) in all regions of the country (at present only Quebec has this program up and running) and securing the [Make Poverty History](#) goals. We will probably have to wait until the Speech from the Throne on April 4 and the new budget that will follow in late April or May to find out.

Among the cabinet appointments of particular interest to co-operatives are:

Jim Flaherty, MP for Whitby Oshawa (Ontario), is the new Finance Minister and a new MP. A former Ontario cabinet minister for finance, he is an unknown quantity at the Federal level as far as his attitudes to co-operative issues.

Diane Ablonczy, Calgary – Nose Hill (Alberta), Parliamentary Secretary to Flaherty, is one of the 55 Conservative candidates who endorsed the Make Poverty History program and is a long-time member of the [Calgary Co-op](#).

Among the 308 newly elected MPs, 178 Members have endorsed the Make Poverty History goals. This majority in the new House includes 40 Conservative, 6 Bloc, 29 NDP and 103 Liberal MPs. The Make Poverty History goals include better international aid (0.7% of Gross Domestic Product), fair trade, cancelling the debt of the poorest countries and ending child poverty through raising the Child Tax Benefit to \$4,900 per year per child.

Diane Finley becomes Minister for a re-merged Human Resources and Social Development department that also assumes control of the Service Canada agency, which delivers many of the government programs. The Housing and Homelessness Branch will be part of the new HRSD department. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation will report directly to the Minister of HRSD. Labour is also integrated but has a separate Minister. Ms. Finley is well-aware of the important role of co-operatives from her time as agricultural critic in the last Parliament. The HRSD ministry is in charge of the policy framework for the Social Economy file but as yet there is no specific Parliamentary Secretary assigned to this issue.

The new Minister of Agriculture and the Wheat Board, Chuck Strahl Chiliwack Fraser Canyon, (British Columbia) is now the Minister responsible for the Co-operative Secretariat. He is backed up by two Parliamentary Secretaries, David Anderson, Cypress Hills – Grasslands (Saskatchewan) and Jacques Gourde, Lotbinière – Chutes-de-la-Chaudière (Quebec). It remains to be seen whether one of these two will have particular responsibility for the Co-op Secretariat, as was the case in the last government.

Josée Verner is Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for La Francophonie and Official Languages, and is the minister responsible for the Canadian International Development Agency. Ms. Verner was the critic for the Quebec regional development agency in the last Parliament and thus is well aware of the Social Economy file. Ted Menzies, Macleod (Alberta), is her Parliamentary Secretary and another MP who has signed on to the Make Poverty History asks.

As the social economy program is actually administered by the Department of Industry through the Regional Development Agencies, appointments concerning these departments are important. Maxime Bernier, Beauce (Quebec) is the Minister of Industry. Colin Carrie, Oshawa (Ontario), is his Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry. Mr. Bernier is also supported by the following regional development agency ministers:

- Tony Clement, Parry Sound-Muskoka, (Ontario), the Health Minister, is the Fednor (Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario) Minister. Mr. Clement has also endorsed the Make Poverty History program.
- Carol Skelton, Saskatoon-Rosetown-Biggar (Saskatchewan), the Minister of National Revenue, is the Minister of Western Economic Diversification. Ms. Skelton, also a Make Poverty History endorser, was the critic for the Social Economy in the last Parliament.
- Jean-Pierre Blackburn, Jonquière-Alma (Québec), who is the Minister of Labour, is the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec.
- Peter McKay, Central Nova (Nova Scotia), who is the Minister of Foreign Affairs, is the Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.