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## OttawaWatch 335: About that federal budget

By Lloyd Mackey

*The Evangelical Fellowship, like its “partners” along the Canadian Christian spectrum, The Canadian Council of Churches and Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, continue to submit briefs to government periodically, based on their own research and the values of their collective memberships.*

How do you get the government to listen, anyway? Or the opposition, for that matter?

One way is to very carefully prepare a brief for a standing committee, whose makeup comes from all political parties.

The brief may not get much public attention, although the group presenting it may have its own ways of letting its own “public” know what its spokespersons had to say.

One such brief was presented, recently, to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. It was a nine-page federal pre-budget submission from the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. And it was entitled *Families, Compassion and Charities: Key Components to Maintaining a Strong Canada*.

The EFC is one of three major trans-denominational Christian influencers, nationally. The other two are the Canadian Council of Churches and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In reading the EFC brief, I was intrigued by its use of tight writing and brevity, as well as the use of headings and key words which are often utilized, both by government politicians and those who are members of other parties.

In the next few moments, I will summarize some of the brief’s highlights. OttawaWatch readers wanting to check out the details can go to [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca), find the “Key components to maintaining a strong Canada” headline, then chose the blue link dubbed “submission”.

Early on in the brief, the EFC self-identifies as “the national association of evangelical Christians, gathered together for influence, impact and identity in ministry and public witness.” While it avoids saying how many Canadians it represents, it tosses in some interesting statistics about EFC affiliates. There are 39 different denominations actually affiliated, along with another five maintaining observer status. Additionally, there are 76 ministry organizations, 34 educational institutions and close to 1,000 individual congregations.

The brief begins with an executive summary which notes that the EFC “does not generally engage in the number crunching of the government budget process.”

But it asserts that a budget is, “fundamentally, a moral document in which the nation’s leaders decide what is ‘right and wrong’ for public expenditure.” Thus, it maintains, “Biblical principles are relevant to the budgeting process.”

The EFC, it should be noted, maintains a permanent Ottawa office, two blocks from Parliament Hill, known as the “Centre for Faith and Public Life.” One of the EFC’s vice-presidents, Don Hutchinson, heads the centre, with several staff members doing research in such portfolios such as human rights, care for the vulnerable, religious freedom, sanctity of human life, marriage and family, and freedom of conscience.

In referring to the aforementioned “Three components”, the brief suggests that they “remain key to the success and strength of Canada’s present and future as well.”

Here summarized, is what the EFC says are the points to be noted about the three components:

- **Families.** The stability of Canadian families underlies and evidences the stability of the nation.
- **Compassion.** Our long history of compassion toward the less fortunate, at home and abroad, testifies to the heart of the Canadian people.
- **Charities.** Canadian charities, particularly religious charities, have been significant in the development of Canada’s health, education and compassionate response mechanisms and continue to be vital to the life of Canadians and Canadians’ expression of compassion toward those in need.

In talking with Hutchinson about the EFC brief, I learned that politicians of all parties had been particularly interested in the obvious generosity of religiously-motivated contributors to charity. Intriguingly, no matter their party affiliation, they seemed interested to know how government could encourage stronger support for such charities.

That discussion, Hutchinson said, turned to some of the studies being done by such “think” or “do” tanks as Cardus and Imagine Canada, about the use of more generous tax credits to encourage faith-based charitable giving.

(It has been noted elsewhere that donors to political parties get a better tax break than do those contributing to religious charities.)

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In wrapping up, today, I would like to mention both the Manning Centre Networking Conference, set for March 8 to 10 in Ottawa, and, particularly, one of the sponsored luncheons at this year’s conference.

That March 9 luncheon will be sponsored by the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada and will feature, as speaker, Marvin Olasky, editor-in-chief of *World Magazine*, a substantive and popular American Christian-rooted newsmagazine. Olasky, some may recall, was one of the originators of the phrase “compassionate conservatism”.

More information about the Networking Conference can be found at [www.manningcentre.ca](http://www.manningcentre.ca). I will be lurking around the edges, there, registered as a student and – what else – networking. All that in the interests of a good start on the thesis for my Tyndale Seminary doctor of ministries studies.

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