

Domestic cars and a national grid

By [David Orchard](#)

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In the lead-up to the Jan. 27 federal budget, the National Post has asked prominent Canadians to tell us what kind of fiscal blueprint our country needs. Here's what they told us, in 250 words or less.

The most productive government spending is on people. Investment in training and education is returned manyfold over recipients' working lifetimes. Canada has a much-reported shortage of skilled labour, yet many Canadians are unemployed or underemployed, with no opportunity for training in the skills required.

The situation is particularly striking in aboriginal communities across Canada where the unemployment rate is often 80%. Federal leadership and training support could –and should–provide skills, and hence opportunities, where they are needed.

A large high-risk bailout package is in the works for the U. S. auto industry in Canada. This money could instead be targeted to create and foster a domestically owned and controlled Canadian auto industry with all the attendant long-term benefits.

Canada has no east-west electricity grid. During the electrical blackout in Ontario the lights in Quebec and Manitoba were on. Those provinces had surplus power they were trying to sell into the United States. Ontario and some other provinces are looking to build more costly nuclear stations to achieve provincial self-sufficiency. Instead, with federal leadership, we should plan, and then construct, a national electricity grid that will allow Newfoundland, Manitoba, Quebec and B. C. electricity to find a home in other Canadian provinces.

This would rationalize our existing infrastructure, yield cost savings and leave the country feeling linked together. First Nations and Metis should be fully involved in all steps from the initial discussions to the supervisory and construction roles.

A domestic auto industry and a national electricity grid are two big ideas that could energize our economy and inspire Canadians. – David Orchard, a farmer and author, ran for the Progressive Conservative Party leadership in 1998 and 2003. He was a Liberal candidate in the 2008 election for the northern Saskatchewan riding of Desnethé-Missinippi-Churchill River.

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