



Let's get ready to rumble

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In late 1974, American boxing legend Muhammad Ali was anxious to regain his heavyweight champion of the world title from the young, popular George Foreman.

He had lost the "fight of the century" in Madison Square Garden and now wanted it back.

No one, not even the late Howard Cosell, one of Ali's most ardent fans, thought he had a chance of winning.

This fight, the "Rumble in the Jungle," was held in Kinshasa, Zaire. Before he left the U.S., Ali boasted how he would "out dance his rival and exhaust him mentally and physically."

Foreman believed him.

Ali won the historic fight, because he changed tactics and threw punch after punch, determined to outlast his opponent.

Cosell recounts how fatigued Foreman was by the eighth round. "Ali delivered a knock-out punch and Foreman couldn't rise to the count."

Today, Canada, hand-in-glove with the rest of the world, is pressured by a similar blockbuster boxing match between the role of government and the marketplace. Some rounds feature governments as defending champions, controlling the marketplace lest civilization itself suffer the dire consequences of a technical knockout.

Other rounds are dominated by open, competitive economies striving to create just, decent and humane societies. These bouts are often felled when financial (de)regulation runs amok.

In the past 20 years, globalization has put enormous pressure on business to streamline and reduce costs. Employees enjoy the higher standards of living, better services and more choices while turning to governments to protect them from threats of unemployment, stresses in the workplace, and unravelling of the social net.

Next week, Canadians will vote for which competing vision should be favoured in the eighth round of this rumble in the fiscal jungle.

The defending champion believes it's the government's role to create the conditions for growth, while the challenger fights for the government's right to create jobs through a tax-and-spend agenda, engineered to kick-start the economy.



The tensions mount as the electorate faces the reality of how Canada's economy competes internationally:

- Personal income tax burden is the highest of the G7 countries, according to the federal Department of Finance. Some promise modest measures to reduce taxes, others propose cuts to the lower and middle income brackets, and the rest pledge a barrage of spending programs.
- Government spending continues to rise as all parties succumb to the pleas of special-interest groups. All parties pledge greater restraint in the future and most have undertaken to maintain balanced budgets.
- National debt is about 30% of revenues with the government spending 13.7 cents of every dollar to pay interest charges. Lower debt reduces Canada's exposure during times of slow economic growth and leaves politicians with more cash to reduce taxes and to boost the social security net.
- Currently ranks 11th highest among 80 countries in terms of its tax burden on business investment, says the C.D. Howe Institute. Several parties plan to reduce business taxes, while others propose to raise them and add more to pay for a larger social safety net.

The bell rings to start the eighth round.

Like Howard Cosell, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce is an ardent fan of Canada's fiscal fight.

We believe in competitive personal and corporate taxes, prudent government spending, and paying down the national debt.

We hope the boxer who defends an open, competitive economy that strives to make Canada a just, decent and humane society wins the championship.

The thought of Canada holding the heavyweight title of the world is optimistic, but just the sort of bold vision we want from our next prime minister.