



September 27, 2021 – (Vol. V, No. 107)

53,366,000,000 reasons to like provincial credit right now

By Warren Lovely

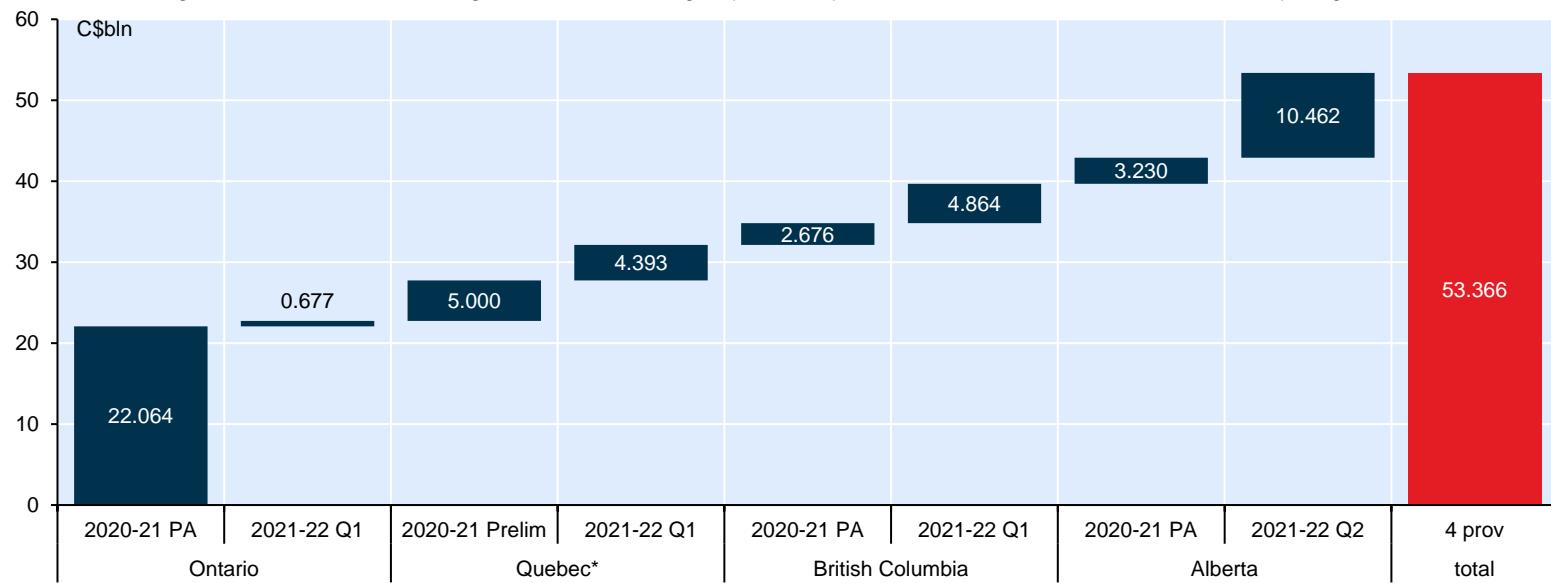
With just a handful of financial releases, Canada's four largest provinces have collectively erased 53.4 billion dollars in budgetary red ink, either from 2020-21 (last fiscal year) or 2021-22 (the current fiscal year). In describing the magnitude of the improvement in provincial finances vs. budget estimates/forecasts presented earlier this year, 'unprecedented' doesn't quite cut it; the sums involved are legitimately staggering.

The following chart illustrates the nature of the fiscal improvement that's so far transpired in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta. Official public accounts, or in Quebec's case preliminary estimates, have collectively wiped C\$33 billion from the combined shortfall for 2020-21. In other words, 40% of the aggregate deficit these four had estimated a handful of months ago has since evaporated, as revenue proved considerably stronger than expected and certain outlays failed to materialize.

There are lot of moving parts to a provincial budget balance as one might expect, but the vastly improved fiscal picture for 2020-21 is at least partly carrying over to the current 2021-22 fiscal year. At this point, the four largest provinces have lopped C\$20 billion from their combined deficit for 2021-22, Alberta currently making the single largest contribution to that upgrade as revenue exploded higher vs. budget plans.

Chart: Monumental fiscal revisions, all to the upside, in Canada's four largest provinces... with more to come this fall

Announced changes to 2020-21 & 2021-22 budget balances: Four largest provinces | Positive numbers indicate smaller deficits vs. prior guidance



Source: NBF, Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta / Note: For Quebec, 2020-21 improvement is based on June estimate, while 2021-22 Q1 improvement reflects April-June change in budget balance vs. the prior fiscal year (with full-year guidance as yet unavailable); C\$53.4 billion combined figure is two-year total

Importantly, the fiscal upgrades aren't over. Indeed, Ontario's *Q1 Finances*—which arrived prior to last week's stunning provincial public accounts—had made only modest preliminary tweaks to revenue and spending. With such an immensely positive base effect having been subsequently confirmed, Ontario's *Fall Economic Statement* (due no later than November 15th) can be expected to mark the 2021-22 deficit down to size. Quebec can likewise be expected to communicate a serious improvement in its full-year 2021-22 deficit, as results for the first three months of the fiscal year revealed that Quebec ran a near-balanced position from April to June.

Notwithstanding marginal good news in fall updates, the fiscal revisions already confirmed are major game changers in terms of provincial borrowing needs. With budget deficits materially smaller than what had been officially assumed, it follows that provincial cash balances are miles above plan. For context, the C\$53.4 billion of reduced budgetary red ink vs. most recent budget estimates compares to the C\$125 billion in gross long-term borrowing that these four provinces had originally intended for 2021-22. Alberta and British Columbia have already knocked down their official long-term requirements owing to the better budget picture. Ontario and Quebec will be next to usher in considerably lower long-term borrowing requirements this fall. Expected revisions to their funding programs will likely dwarf anything we've seen before and would, arithmetically, vault borrowing status ahead in no small way.

While we've trained our focus on the four largest provinces here, we'd note that other provinces are releasing public accounts and/or fiscal updates. As but one example, Nova Scotia's recent 2020-21 public accounts succeeded in slashing last fiscal year's deficit by more than half, from an estimated C\$706 million to an actual C\$342 million. Impressive stuff in its own right. Finally, don't lose sight of the fresh pledges made during the recent federal election campaign, which could result in incremental federal support (including for health care) starting this fall.

We're not saying that provincial bonds are going extinct. Hardly. Nor has economic or fiscal uncertainty entirely faded from view. But what we're witnessing is an overwhelmingly rapid and truly historic fiscal improvement for Canada's provincial government sector, not just in terms of budgetary accounting but where it matters most: net borrowing requirements.



Economics and Strategy

Montreal Office

514-879-2529

Stéfane Marion

Chief Economist and Strategist
stefane.marion@nbc.ca

Kyle Dahms

Economist
kyle.dahms@nbc.ca

Alexandra Ducharme

Economist
alexandra.ducharme@nbc.ca

Matthieu Arseneau

Deputy Chief Economist
matthieu.arseneau@nbc.ca

Daren King

Economist
daren.king@nbc.ca

Angelo Katsoras

Geopolitical Analyst
angelo.katsoras@nbc.ca

Paul-André Pinsonnault

Senior Economist
paulandre.pinsonnault@nbc.ca

Jocelyn Paquet

Economist
jocelyn.paquet@nbc.ca

Toronto Office

416-869-8598

Warren Lovely

Chief Rates and Public Sector Strategist
warren.lovely@nbc.ca

Taylor Schleich

Rates Strategist
taylor.Schleich@nbc.ca

Alpa Atha

Fixed Income Economist
alpa.atha@nbc.ca

General

This Report was prepared by National Bank Financial, Inc. (NBF), (a Canadian investment dealer, member of IIROC), an indirect wholly owned subsidiary of National Bank of Canada. National Bank of Canada is a public company listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange.

The particulars contained herein were obtained from sources which we believe to be reliable but are not guaranteed by us and may be incomplete and may be subject to change without notice. The information is current as of the date of this document. Neither the author nor NBF assumes any obligation to update the information or advise on further developments relating to the topics or securities discussed. The opinions expressed are based upon the author(s) analysis and interpretation of these particulars and are not to be construed as a solicitation or offer to buy or sell the securities mentioned herein, and nothing in this Report constitutes a representation that any investment strategy or recommendation contained herein is suitable or appropriate to a recipient's individual circumstances. In all cases, investors should conduct their own investigation and analysis of such information before taking or omitting to take any action in relation to securities or markets that are analyzed in this Report. The Report alone is not intended to form the basis for an investment decision, or to replace any due diligence or analytical work required by you in making an investment decision.

This Report is for distribution only under such circumstances as may be permitted by applicable law. This Report is not directed at you if NBF or any affiliate distributing this Report is prohibited or restricted by any legislation or regulation in any jurisdiction from making it available to you. You should satisfy yourself before reading it that NBF is permitted to provide this Report to you under relevant legislation and regulations.

National Bank of Canada Financial Markets is a trade name used by National Bank Financial and National Bank of Canada Financial Inc.

Canadian Residents

NBF or its affiliates may engage in any trading strategies described herein for their own account or on a discretionary basis on behalf of certain clients and as market conditions change, may amend or change investment strategy including full and complete divestment. The trading interests of NBF and its affiliates may also be contrary to any opinions expressed in this Report.

NBF or its affiliates often act as financial advisor, agent or underwriter for certain issuers mentioned herein and may receive remuneration for its services. As well NBF and its affiliates and/or their officers, directors, representatives, associates, may have a position in the securities mentioned herein and may make purchases and/or sales of these securities from time to time in the open market or otherwise. NBF and its affiliates may make a market in securities mentioned in this Report. This Report may not be independent of the proprietary interests of NBF and its affiliates.

This Report is not considered a research product under Canadian law and regulation, and consequently is not governed by Canadian rules applicable to the publication and distribution of research Reports, including relevant restrictions or disclosures required to be included in research Reports.

UK Residents

This Report is a marketing document. This Report has not been prepared in accordance with EU legal requirements designed to promote the independence of investment research and it is not subject to any prohibition on dealing ahead of the dissemination of investment research. In respect of the distribution of this Report to UK residents, NBF has approved the contents (including, where necessary, for the purposes of Section 21(1) of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000). This Report is for information purposes only and does not constitute a personal recommendation, or investment, legal or tax advice. NBF and/or its parent and/or any companies within or affiliates of the National Bank of Canada group and/or any of their directors, officers and employees may have or may have had interests or long or short positions in, and may at any time make purchases and/or sales as principal or agent, or may act or may have acted as market maker in the relevant investments or related investments discussed in this Report, or may act or have acted as investment and/or commercial banker with respect hereto. The value of investments, and the income derived from them, can go down as well as up and you may not get back the amount invested. Past performance is not a guide to future performance. If an investment is denominated in a foreign currency, rates of exchange may have an adverse effect on the value of the investment. Investments which are illiquid may be difficult to sell or realise; it may also be difficult to obtain reliable information about their value or the extent of the risks to which they are exposed. Certain transactions, including those involving futures, swaps, and other derivatives, give rise to substantial risk and are not suitable for all investors. The investments contained in this Report are not available to retail customers and this Report is not for distribution to retail clients (within the meaning of the rules of the Financial Conduct Authority). Persons who are retail clients should not act or rely upon the information in this Report. This Report does not constitute or form part of any offer for sale or subscription of or solicitation of any offer to buy or subscribe for the securities described herein nor shall it or any part of it form the basis of or be relied on in connection with any contract or commitment whatsoever.

This information is only for distribution to Eligible Counterparties and Professional Clients in the United Kingdom within the meaning of the rules of the Financial Conduct Authority. NBF is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and has its registered office at 70 St. Mary Axe, London, EC3A 8BE.

NBF is not authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and the Financial Conduct Authority to accept deposits in the United Kingdom.

U.S. Residents

With respect to the distribution of this report in the United States of America, National Bank of Canada Financial Inc. ("NBCFI") which is regulated by the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) and a member of the Securities Investor Protection Corporation (SIPC), an affiliate of NBF, accepts responsibility for its contents, subject to any terms set out above. To make further inquiry related to this report, or to effect any transaction, United States residents should contact their NBCFI registered representative.

This report is not a research report and is intended for Major U.S. Institutional Investors only.

This report is not subject to U.S. independence and disclosure standards applicable to research reports.

HK Residents

With respect to the distribution of this report in Hong Kong by NBC Financial Markets Asia Limited ("NBCFMA") which is licensed by the Securities and Futures Commission ("SFC") to conduct Type 1 (dealing in securities) and Type 3 (leveraged foreign exchange trading) regulated activities, the contents of this report are solely for informational purposes. It has not been approved by, reviewed by, verified by or filed with any regulator in Hong Kong. Nothing herein is a recommendation, advice, offer or solicitation to buy or sell a product or service, nor an official confirmation of any transaction. None of the products issuers, NBCFMA or its affiliates or other persons or entities named herein are obliged to notify you of changes to any information and none of the foregoing assume any loss suffered by you in reliance of such information.

The content of this report may contain information about investment products which are not authorized by SFC for offering to the public in Hong Kong and such information will only be available to, those persons who are Professional Investors (as defined in the Securities and Futures Ordinance of Hong Kong ("SFO")). If you are in any doubt as to your status you should consult a financial adviser or contact us. This material is not meant to be marketing materials and is not intended for public distribution. Please note that neither this material nor the product referred to is authorized for sale by SFC. Please refer to product prospectus for full details.

There may be conflicts of interest relating to NBCFMA or its affiliates' businesses. These activities and interests include potential multiple advisory, transactional and financial and other interests in securities and instruments that may be purchased or sold by NBCFMA or its affiliates, or in other investment vehicles which are managed by NBCFMA or its affiliates that may purchase or sell such securities and instruments.

No other entity within the National Bank of Canada group, including National Bank of Canada and National Bank Financial Inc, is licensed or registered with the SFC. Accordingly, such entities and their employees are not permitted and do not intend to: (i) carry on a business in any regulated activity in Hong Kong; (ii) hold themselves out as carrying on a business in any regulated activity in Hong Kong; or (iii) actively market their services to the Hong Kong public.

Copyright

This Report may not be reproduced in whole or in part, or further distributed or published or referred to in any manner whatsoever, nor may the information, opinions or conclusions contained in it be referred to without in each case the prior express written consent of NBF.