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Obituary - Canada's Jim Flaherty dies aged 64

By Robert Delaney in Toronto

Jim Flaherty, the former Canadian finance minister who guided the country through the global financial crisis with a stimulus program and targeted support for struggling companies, passed away at the age of 64, just 22 days after resigning from his post.

A Princeton University graduate and former governor of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, Mr Flaherty was appointed to his post in Ottawa when Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives took power in 2006. One of Mr Flaherty's final acts before leaving office was to submit a balanced 2014-2015 federal budget after several years of deficits caused by stimulus spending.

While stricter regulations relative to the US kept Canada's banks intact while US financial institutions including Lehman Brothers and Washington Mutual Bank failed, Mr Flaherty has been credited for alleviating some of the pain caused by the fallout. Canada's unemployment rate peaked 8.7 per cent in August 2009, compared with 10 per cent in the US in October of that year.

"Canada fared well vis-à-vis the experience of other countries during the crisis," Royal Bank of Canada chief economist Craig Wright said in an interview. "[Mr Flaherty] was the right man in the right job at the right time."

In addition to a stimulus plan that the Federal government implemented in 2009, Mr Flaherty worked with Ontario's Liberal government to provide more than C\$10 billion in aid for General Motors to keep the company's operations in the province running in exchange for a 12 per cent stake in the automaker.

As an indication of the positive legacy that will follow Mr Flaherty, Ontario's former finance minister Dwight Duncan, a member of the province's Liberal Party, praised Mr Flaherty's efforts two days ago.

"Our politics are very different but it was always a pleasure to speak with him," the Oshawa Express, a weekly newspaper based in the federal riding Mr Flaherty represented since 2006, cited Mr Duncan as saying on Tuesday.

"Many wouldn't have championed [the GM intervention] at the time," Mr Wright said. "With the clarity of hindsight, it supported the economy and the investment has paid for itself."

The former finance minister's appeal was also apparent in New York City's Times Square, where the Nasdaq's giant outdoor sign board displayed Mr Flaherty's image over a note honouring him.

Other figures from rival parties, including the leader of the federal Liberal Party Justin Trudeau, and head of Ontario's left-leaning New Democratic Party, Andrea Howarth, expressed condolences for Mr. Flaherty and respect for his work.

Local media, including CTV and CBC, are reporting that Mr. Flaherty died from a heart attack.

Mr Flaherty had been suffering from a rare and painful skin disorder over the past year, though in his resignation statement, he didn't cite this as a reason for his stepping down. Mr Flaherty is survived by his wife, a member of Ontario's parliament and the province's Conservative party, and the couple's triplet boys.

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