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Budget Implementation Act, 2007

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand today and speak on behalf of not only my constituents of Brampton—Springdale but also on behalf of some of Canada's most vulnerable, the vulnerable who the Conservative government has failed time and time again, the homeless who have been left out in the cold and the single mothers who have not had access to appropriate day care. The Conservative government has failed those who have needed it the most: the Canadians families that are working hard to make ends meet and put food on the table for their children; the homeless; the women; the children; the students; aboriginals; and, unfortunately, the list goes on and on.

The Conservative government had an opportunity to close the growing gap in our country between the rich and the poor but, unfortunately, it chose to cater to its voter base, to those who are already rich.

It is evident that the government is not interested in giving a hand to those who need it most, whether we talk about the issue of health care where it failed to deliver a guaranteed wait time list, whether we talk about the Kelowna accord which the government tore up into shreds, or whether we talk about the Canada summer jobs program which failed to employ thousands of students who needed jobs and needed an opportunity to ensure they could make ends meet and pay for their tuition.

Let us talk about the issue of child care. One of the first acts by the government was to tear up the Liberal early learning child care agreements that were signed in consultation and collaboration with the provinces. These agreements would have ensured adequate, quality, universal, accessible and affordable day care programs for the children of Canada. They would have ensured that mothers and fathers wanting to enter the workforce would have every opportunity. However, the government tore those up and replaced them with its so-called child care plan, a plan that was supposed to provide a choice. Parents, however, quickly learned that it was not a choice.

Why was this plan not an adequate choice? For the \$1,200 a year that was being promised for children under the age of six, parents quickly learned that the \$1,200 or, if we break it down, almost \$100 a month or \$20 a week, they were looking at about \$3 a day. Where in the country will parents be able to find quality, universal, accessible and affordable child care for \$3 a day?

The Conservatives promised that they would give \$1,200 to parents for day care but parents realized, once they did their tax returns in 2007, that the \$1,200 was actually taxable. By the time all was said and done, parents ended up with approximately \$300 to \$400 a year for child care.

Therefore, a two income family in Ontario making about \$40,000 would actually need to pay the government \$31 a month out of the \$100 a month that they were receiving. The government actually made back about \$624 million as a result of taxing all of that income. However, it refused to put it where parents wanted it go, which was toward the creation of child care spaces.

One hundred and twenty-five spaces were promised. If we take a look, 16 months after being elected, how many spaces have been created? Zero spaces have been created for the children of Canada.

Time and time again, research reports and experts have highlighted the importance of investing in early learning and child care. Independent experts, such as the think tank, the Caledon Institute, have already concluded that under the Conservative plan and within the Conservative budget, it is the rich who stand to benefit. The government is failing low and middle income families. Once again, the government is showing that it is out of touch with the needs of average, hard-working Canadians.

(1515)

Let us look at the summer jobs program that was created by the former Liberal government, a program that provided opportunity. It provided opportunity for non-profit organizations. It provided opportunity for students of Canada to have gainful, meaningful, valuable employment to ensure they would be able to work during the summer, have quality work experience and utilize the money they made to pay off their tuitions and their student loans.

What did the Conservative government do to the summer jobs program under this budget? It actually cut funding to the program and rebranded the program that the Liberals had introduced and which had worked phenomenally well for many years past. They created the Canada summer jobs program. What did non-profit organizations, community groups, students and parents find out when the program was announced? They found out that their funding was denied because the Conservatives chose to target the most vulnerable in our society, the hard-working students, the non-profit organizations and the community groups.

We on this side of the House, the Liberal opposition, are working to provide an effective voice for the students, the non-profit organizations and the community groups to ensure they would get their funding back.

Mysteriously, after speaking to this issue time and time again on this side of the House during question period, during statements by members and through press releases, we quickly learned that the minister had reversed the decision.

We have seen that this budget has provided almost nothing for the aboriginal and first nations communities in Canada. We see the frustration and the anger. The aboriginal community wanted to work with the Kelowna accord that invested in health care, in education and in housing for the aboriginal community but the agreement was torn into shreds. It is due to this frustration and this anger that the aboriginal and first nations communities, championed by Phil Fontaine who has done excellent work, will be holding a national day of action. The aboriginal community, like many of the other vulnerable groups that I have mentioned, all want action. They want results and they want them now.

Due to the excellent fiscal management of the previous Liberal government, we delivered eight consecutive balanced budgets and we reduced the debt. However, it is unfortunate that despite the surplus the former Liberal government left the Conservatives, the first act of the Conservative government was to cut funding to the Status of Women Canada, which provided opportunity, to the court challenges program, which provided a voice.

It is clear that the budget does not meet the needs of Canadians.

Let us talk about the issue of housing. When we take a look at the issue of housing, one realizes that the Conservative budget is actually leaving the homeless out in the cold. When we think of basic human needs, we think of food, of water and of the importance of having a roof over one's head, but the Conservative government did not invest one cent of funding for affordable housing in the budget.

In the previous Liberal government, we had committed over \$2 billion a year to housing. How much would a \$2 billion a year investment have created in terms of housing units? It would have created 636,000 housing units: \$1 billion in new affordable housing and \$1 billion on the homeless to ensure they had opportunities. We also had national consultations conducted to develop a national housing framework. We had a budget that committed to additional resources to ensure the homeless would have the very best.

When we look at the budget, we realize that the government has not delivered for the most vulnerable in our society. Whether it is the students of Brampton—Springdale, whether it is the women in the country who worked with organizations that benefited from Status of Women Canada or whether it is with regard to housing or the environment, it is unfortunate that the Conservative government has not stepped up to the plate and has not done the job done.

(1520)

Canadians are counting on some leadership. They are waiting for an action plan. When will the Conservative government step up to the plate and deliver a budget that will meet the needs of our country and move Canada forward so we can compete with the best and the brightest?