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[The Budget]

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the budget on behalf of my constituents of Brampton--Springdale, a budget which impacts seniors, families, children, women and men not only in my own constituency of Brampton--Springdale but all of Canada.

In a time of growing economic crisis, many Bramptonians, like many other Canadians across the country, are suffering. They have been hit with the loss of their jobs either in the manufacturing or the auto sector, in the retail sector or at assembly plants.

If we take a look at my riding of Brampton--Springdale, the Chrysler plant has eliminated its third shift, the loss of 1,100 jobs. Eleven hundred families were impacted overnight. The Simmons factory has closed, with hundreds of other Bramptonians losing their jobs. ABC plastics has closed, and the list goes on and on when it comes to people losing their jobs and companies closing their doors.

The result of these people losing their jobs as companies close their doors is that thousands of families out there are struggling to make ends meet, whether it is that single mother worrying about how she will put food on the table for her children, or that father wondering how he will care for his family, or that family struggling to find a child care space, or those seniors having to make that very difficult choice of either filling up the medicine cabinet or their gas tank or their fridge.

We have known in the last month alone that over 100,000 Canadians have lost their jobs. I only have to go to an email that I received a short while ago in my office, which states:

“I have never written to any politician before but I write to you today out of desperation. After working for 22 years at a company I was told last week I was being let go. I have never known another job other than the company I worked for. I thought, when I was let go and the company was closing its doors, I would be able to apply for EI. I have just learned the wait period is for two weeks and then there is a massive backlog of another three weeks. Now almost four weeks later, I am without pay and I really don't know where to turn. I actually don't know where I'm going to be buying the next carton of milk for my baby. I know as I write to you I won't be able to get any money from you for the food that I so desperately need, but I am asking you to please tell your colleagues, your fellow MPs, that there are so many people out there like myself who were employed for years and years at one company and have been let go. All of us are looking for hope. We are looking for hope for a brighter future and a better tomorrow”.

Then there is the story of Mr. Beharry and Mr. Smalla, my constituents who came in to see me a few hours after they were informed that their company, ABC plastics, was closing its doors. They had been laid off. As I sat with both of these individuals, I learned that they had worked as well for almost two decades at the same company. They were left on that day without any direction or resources as to how they would go on to rebuild their lives. As fathers, they were concerned about how they would feed their children, and as husbands, how they would support their families.

The story of Mr. Beharry and Mr. Smalla is like the stories of many other Bramptonians and many other Canadians across the country who are struggling. It is these Canadians, these Bramptonians like Mr. Beharry and Mr. Smalla, who were looking to this budget, who were looking to the government of the day for the leadership, for some action and really for a sense of hope for a better tomorrow.

As time has gone on, we have seen that the Conservative government of the day mismanaged the economy. The result is absolutely no leadership and then no action plan to help those people who are so desperately struggling.

We look once again at the area of Peel, where the issue of poverty and the gap between those who are rich and those who are poor continues to increase. We look at the issue of social housing in my riding, which has a wait list of more than 13,000 individuals, more than 30,000 people. The wait time to get into a housing unit is 21 years. It is these people on that wait list who were looking to the Conservative government and this budget for a sense of hope for a better future and a brighter tomorrow.

(1540)

Let us take a look at the number of people who are accessing emergency shelters. In 2006 over 11,776 people accessed the emergency shelter in Peel. The region provided a total of 111,812 bed nights to those poor people, to those residents who are so incredibly desperate.

Unfortunately, the budget has delivered absolutely nothing for affordable housing and homelessness. We thought, and many of us hoped, that the budget would provide for a national housing strategy. There is absolutely nothing.

Canadians had seen, through previous Liberal governments, eight consecutive balanced budgets. Canadians were given a sense of hope with having one of the best economic records in the G8 and one of the highest employment rates and the lowest unemployment rates.

As my colleague so eloquently described it, as the tsunami hit the global financial markets throughout the world, many of the other G8 countries acted. They acted on behalf of their citizens and on behalf of their nations to provide stimulus packages. What did we have in Canada? We had the Prime Minister of the day denying there was an economic recession. We had the Prime Minister and the Conservative government denying there was the possibility of a growing crisis. We had thousands of people losing their jobs, having the door shut in their faces. We had seniors struggling to make ends meet, to pay their energy bills and their mortgage payments. They received absolutely no hope from the government.

The government told us there would be surpluses. A few months later, when the budget came out the other day, we all learned Canadians would be inheriting an \$84 billion deficit.

Then the government promised a stimulus to help create jobs with infrastructure spending. One only had to read the fine print. Mayors across the country got ready because they heard about possible infrastructure spending. They presented their wish lists of shovel-ready projects, wish lists that were presented by municipalities and cities like Brampton which had a wish list that included the Trinity Common Terminal refurbishment project and the AcceleRide bus rapid transit projects. However, when they read the fine print, even though cities like Brampton have a wish list, which have been included in the city's 2009 budget, in order to access the infrastructure spending provided in the budget they must come up with the money. Many of these municipalities do not have the money.

We realize that the list submitted by the Brampton municipality would create an extra 21,000 jobs, jobs that are so desperately needed by many of my constituents. I hope the government will look at an action plan to ensure it provides the support to municipalities that do not have the opportunity to give some of the funding.

Before I go forward, Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member of Parliament for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Let us look at some of the initiatives that were left out of the budget. When constituents lose their jobs, they look to EI for hope. However, the budget does not provide increased accessibility to EI. There will be no reduction in the wait time before an individual can receive EI benefits.

Those people were looking to this budget for hope. Unfortunately, they did not receive it. This is why our leader and my Liberal colleagues have put the Prime Minister and the government on probation to ensure that there is accountability, to ensure the funds that have been promised do not just look great as words on paper but are delivered to the municipalities and to the people who so desperately need them. Canadians across the country and constituents like mine in Brampton are looking to government. They are looking to all parliamentarians, regardless of their political stripe, to put aside their partisanship. They are looking to us for hope.

(1545)

I think by working together in a spirit of cooperation, in a spirit of collaboration, we have an opportunity to give those people, who are struggling to make ends meet, the hope that they so desperately need for a brighter future and a better tomorrow.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I was disappointed to hear the member refer to the fact that she thinks that she is putting this government on probation, as has been stated by her leader. What she of course does not understand is that her party only has a certain number of seats in the House and it is quite presumptuous of her and her party to suggest that they are putting government on probation.

In fact, it is the Canadian people, through an election, who either put us on probation, or give us approval. She will note that in the last election it was the Canadian people who gave this government an even larger minority government and more members to move ahead with the agenda that we placed before them.

Therefore, I would ask the member this. How does she square that when she is suggesting that she is putting us on probation when she has no power to do that, and the fact is it is the Canadian people who have the power to do that?

(1550)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla:

Mr. Speaker, we are actually speaking up for those vulnerable people across the country, the seniors, the women, the men who have lost their jobs and are desperately struggling, by speaking up on their behalf and putting the government on probation to ensure that what it promises is what it delivers.

We have seen it time and time again, whether it was in regard to income trusts when the government said it would not tax them and it did; when it said it would have an elected Senate and then it appointed 18 senators in one shot; or when it said it would provide infrastructure funding and the dollars never got out the door. I think Canadians across the country have a very loud and clear message for the government. They are looking for leadership. They are looking for hope.

If the money does not come out the door of the government, it may be the Conservative government that is going out the doors of many Canadians.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): 

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member for Brampton—Springdale on her very eloquent remarks about the inadequacies of the budget and the need for hope.

Let me tell the House what one constituent wrote to me about child care. She said:

It took me six months to find child care for my new child. I now have to return to work early in order to be able to afford my child care which I have to pay for immediately in order to keep my spot. I have a well-paying job, however, more than one full paycheque each month will go to child care.

P.S. I also know a social worker who has to take an unpaid leave of absence from her job because her child care provider quit and her child does not turn two until April and she cannot find anyone to care for her son.

Does the hon. member worry about women and families like that across the country who need child care? As I say, the member was very eloquent until the part when she spoke about probation and her new role as a probation officer for the government.

I wonder if she can tell us why, if she does care about the issues she talked about, she was unable to join with us in creating a government that would provide the kind of hope and answer the kind of needs that people like my constituent and the people she mentioned desire, and desire to have immediately in this country.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla:

Mr. Speaker, I can definitely say that the issue of child care is one that I am very passionate about. I only have to take a look at many of the families in my riding. Many of the parents, some of whom are single mothers and single fathers, really struggle to find child care spaces.

It was unfortunate that one of the first initiatives of the Conservative government was to cut the early learning and child care agreements which would have actually created spaces and provided the opportunity for parents to ensure that their children received quality access that was affordable and that was universal in nature, and of extremely high quality in terms of its developmental approach for their children.

Investing in children is going to ensure the success of the future of our country. It is unfortunate that the Conservative government provided almost \$100 a month which after taxes resulted in \$60 a month. I do not know where in this country one can find child care for \$2 a day.

I would hope that the Conservative government, moving forward in the coming months, would realize that investing in children, investing in early learning and child care would provide those families with hope, and would ensure the productivity and the success of our great country.

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