

OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

Tuesday, March 20, 2007

The Budget

Financial Statement of Minister of Finance

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

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

The Conservative budget has failed Canada's most vulnerable people. Those who need government most have once again been ignored by the Conservative government. Instead of reaching out to ordinary, hard-working Canadians, the government has only reached out to the CEOs sitting around boardroom tables.

Instead of reaching out to those who are homeless, or instead of investing in affordable housing or post-secondary education, or ensuring that poverty among first nations would be eliminated, the Conservatives chose to ignore and sideline them.

This was supposed to be a budget, from what I recollect of what the Prime Minister said, that would be discussed around kitchen tables. After reading the budget, one really wonders what kitchen table this Prime Minister was sitting at, because this is a budget in which there seem to be more losers than winners. It is a budget in which the rich will only get richer and the poor only poorer.

Perhaps the chief economist at RBC Financial, Craig Wright, best summed up this budget when he said:

It's a minority government budget. It's about politics more than it's about policy: a little bit for everyone, not enough for anyone.

It is evident from this quote that this budget was not looking at Canada's future. This is a budget that is a step backward, a step backward for the children of Canada, for the most vulnerable of Canada, for our first nations communities, for the homeless, and for those who really needed the government most.

Let me talk about child care. The Conservatives have spoken quite often about choice in child care, but what choice has a Conservative government really given hard-working Canadian parents when they have failed to deliver a single child care space?

The \$250 million that has been given to the provinces and territories is really a mere drop in the bucket compared to the \$1.2 billion that would have been invested by the previous Liberal government. One needs to ask oneself, does this Conservative government really believe in early learning and childhood development?

We have seen over the last 24 hours that child care advocacy groups across the country are saying that the Conservative plan has offered little money or absolutely no money and no accountability to ensure that child care spaces are going to be created.

We all recollect the 2006 campaign when the Conservatives promised the creation of 125,000 child care spaces over five years. Now, as we take a look 14 months later, we see that not one child care space has been created.

Canadian families have very quickly realized that this was yet another Conservative promise made and another Conservative promise broken. Unfortunately, this time, that broken promise has impacted thousands and thousands of Canadian children across the country.

If we take a look at this particular budget, we see that the government talks about creating 25,000 new child care spaces. Twenty-five thousand actually sounds like a large number, but one only has to take a look at a few examples.

We can take a look at the city of Ottawa, which actually has a centralized child care waiting list. Parents across the country and parents living in Ottawa can actually add their child's name to one particular city list to ensure that it appears on a central list. As for this list, in Ottawa alone, the number of children waiting for a child care space is 10,000. There are 10,000 children in Ottawa waiting for a child care space. This is for only one city in Canada.

What about some of the other cities that are even more populated than Ottawa? What about Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary or Winnipeg? I know that in my own riding of Brampton—Springdale, which has one of the fastest growing cities in the country, the list of child care spaces is growing longer and longer. Children in my riding of Brampton--Springdale are waiting.

The government has simply acted as an ATM machine. It has thrown money at families by giving them \$100 a month and now it is throwing money at the provinces and territories. The only thing that is evident while the government acts as an ATM machine is that there has not been an action plan. There has been no leadership to ensure that we deliver the child care spaces that children and Canadian families so desperately need.

(1650)

Many child care advocacy groups and many Canadian families talk about the fact that when the Liberals were in government they actually sat down with the provinces and territories and came up with a \$5 billion investment in an early learning and childhood development plan to ensure there would be quality, universality, accessibility and a developmental component so that our children, the future leaders of our country, would get the very best.

What did the Conservatives promise? They gave \$100 a month that is actually taxable. Now that Canadian parents and families are filling out their tax forms, they realize they actually have to give money back to the government. The \$100 a month was really about \$66 a month for some families. This is absolutely no choice because where can any Canadian family or parent find child care at \$66 a month?

The only choice that Canadian parents and families have been left with is that they can either stay at home or pay for child care out of their pocket, but the problem and the dilemma there is that there are no child care spaces. It is quite clear from this budget that the promise to Canadian families and parents for child care and the delivery of child care spaces was actually a smokescreen.

A senior economist from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives said:

You can easily spend in the billions creating a genuine national child-care program for kids younger than six. Splitting \$250 million among all those provinces...is not going to do it.

We're missing the boat on this in a big way. Research connects early learning with all kinds of education and production benefits that spin off later on. And it allows people to show up for work if they know their children are well cared for.

It is clear throughout this Conservative budget that the government has failed Canada's most vulnerable.

We can talk about the issue of foreign credential recognition. The Conservatives promised that they would create an agency, but in this budget they have not provided the resources or the infrastructure to actually implement this agency. They have not talked about establishing this agency.

The member for Eglinton—Lawrence spent many years to ensure that when new immigrants came to our country with hopes, dreams and aspirations that their qualifications would be recognized, that they would be able to be accredited and integrated into the labour market workforce. But the Conservative government has failed to get the job done and those new Canadians still continue to wait.

We can talk about health care. The Conservatives talked about the implementation of a wait time guarantee, but it is quite unfortunate in reading the budget that health care was not one of their top priorities. Instead the Conservative government is trying to blackmail the provinces and territories into signing on by waving \$612 million, but if they decline, that \$612 million will go out the window.

Canadians want to ensure that they have the most effective and efficient health care system, but the government must believe in that type of system. It must invest in health care to ensure that the wait times guarantee is actually implemented. Once again the Conservative budget failed in ensuring that they would deliver quality health care for Canadians across the country.

In conclusion, it is clear that the Conservative government's budget was only good for one table around the country and that was for the CEOs who sit at the boardroom table, not for the average hard-working Canadian. The Conservatives have once again sidelined those who need the government most.

The finance minister and the Prime Minister had a real opportunity to help Canada and to ensure Canada's success in the coming years, but unfortunately they failed on all accounts. On behalf of the hard-working families in my riding of Brampton—Springdale, on behalf of students, seniors, aboriginal people and first nations, on behalf of those who are homeless in this country, there is no way that this budget deserves their full support.

(1655)

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I listened with great intensity to the member's comments. Obviously in her time spent in this Parliament she may not remember the 10 years of promises of past Liberal governments in regard to child care.

It astonishes me how quickly the Liberals can transition from a government of unkept promises to a government of critics. It continues to astonish me how quickly they can move from what they promised but were never able to deliver to being critical of a government that in a short period of time has presented two budgets to Canadians and two budgets that have moved Canadians forward in a positive way.

This budget provides a tax credit of \$2,000 for every child in Canada providing up to \$310 per child in tax relief and impacting more than three million Canadian families for a dollar value of \$1.5 billion in tax relief. Does the member disagree with a budget that helps families in such a significant way?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla:

Mr. Speaker, what we as Liberals disagree with is that this particular budget will not help the hard-working Canadian families that actually need it most. When the Conservatives talk about the \$2,000 tax credit and they talk about the fact that some families will get back \$310, when we do the math it is about 80¢ a day. We cannot even buy a cup of coffee for 80¢. The families that really need it most, the lower income families, are not going to benefit from this.

If the Conservatives really wanted to help lower income families, they would have ensured that they invested in the areas that are important to those low income families. They would have invested in the creation of child care spaces which would have ensured the empowerment of Canadian parents who want to be part of the workforce and also provide high quality child care.

I must also say it was a Liberal government that actually ensured that Canada had one of the best financial records in the G-8. It was a Liberal government that delivered a \$42 billion investment in health care to ensure that we would have a wait times reduction. It was a Liberal government in consultation with the provinces and territories that invested \$5 billion in early learning and childhood development to ensure that we would invest in our future: our children.

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party and the member are guilty of perpetuating the myth that the institutionalized child care scheme of theirs was somehow going to be free. The Liberals have never ever attached any type of individual family cost to their scheme. They have simply laid it out among the general public as though it were going to be some freebie for parents of young children. I would love to hear what their estimate of cost per family would be for this government-run child care system of theirs.

At the same time, I would like them to tell me exactly how they would get this government-run child care system into every little rural spot of the country so that Canadian families who do not live in the big cities where the Liberals' friends are would be able to take advantage of some child care benefit that would have been offered to them by the failed Liberal government.

The new Conservative government child care system, the universal one, on the other hand, reached out to families in every single part of the country. Whether they lived in the far Arctic or in the rural areas of British Columbia or Ontario, every single family would benefit, not like the mythical, government-run, badly explained, so-called freebie of the failed Liberal government.

(1700)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):

There is a half a minute to respond.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla:

Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague, having talked to Canadian families and Canadian parents and mothers, giving them \$100 a month that is taxable, which at the end of the day probably results in about \$50 to \$60 a month, is not a child care plan. That is not an investment in early learning and child care development. The government is acting as an ATM machine, because what choice is it really giving parents when there are absolutely no spaces in the country?

Whether families live--

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence