



For Immediate Release
February 1, 2010

Liberals are working to eradicate poverty and homelessness

OTTAWA – Liberals are working today on Parliament Hill by hosting a roundtable that looks to fill the Harper government's vacuum of ideas and actions for eradicating poverty and homelessness in Canada.

"Too many of our children continue to be left behind as low income Canadians struggle to make ends meet," said Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff. "Liberals believe that government has a role to play in helping to solve this problem."

Under the Conservative government, child poverty has worsened, with food bank usage up by 10 percent since March 2008, and 37 percent of all those assisted being children.

"It is unforgivable that Mr. Harper has no child poverty strategy whatsoever. Can we be surprised, when he once bragged that he was opposed to government programs to eliminate child poverty?" said Liberal Resources and Skills Development Critic Michael Savage. "Liberals are taking a very different approach, which includes bringing together Canadians with experience reducing poverty and homelessness with MPs who can create the policies we need to meet this challenge."

Led by Liberal MPs Mike Savage, Ken Dryden, Ruby Dhalla, Gerard Kennedy and Senator Art Eggleton, the morning sessions will consist of a panel of social justice advocates who will assess the societal cost of poverty, what measures have worked in the past to help alleviate poverty, and determine where Canada has come up short.

The afternoon sessions will focus on what we can do moving forward and will provide an opportunity for the public to engage panel members, as well as MPs and Senators.

The final session will reflect on what was heard and panel members will be asked to prioritize what federal government actions they believe could make the most difference to reducing poverty in Canada.

"We all know someone for whom life just hasn't turned out the way they thought it would – single mothers, people with disabilities, Aboriginals, new immigrants," said Ken Dryden, the Liberal Party's National Outreach Advisor for Poverty and Working Families. "Everybody deserves a chance to succeed in life. It's well past the time that we come

together in a collective effort to do something about poverty. That's what this day is about."

One of the many consequences of the Prime Minister's decision to shut down Parliament was ending an ongoing Parliamentary study on Poverty.

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Backgrounder:

The Realities of Poverty in Canada Today

- Almost three and a half million people live in poverty in Canada • 1 in 7 Canadian children (about 788,000) live in poverty, but these numbers do not include children in shelters, in the Territories or on reserves.
- In a 2007 UN report on the well-being of children, Canada placed 12th out of 21 countries, behind nations such as Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Spain and Switzerland.
- In First Nations and Inuit communities, the numbers are considerably higher, with 1 in 4 children growing up in poverty.
- Food bank usage in Canada has increased 10 percent since March 2008, with 37 percent of all those assisted being children.
- Canada's National Secretariat on Homelessness has estimated that homelessness affects approximately 150,000 people, although other reports identify as many as 300,000 homeless in Canada.

Meeting the Challenges of Poverty, Homelessness & Social Housing

Investing in people through social infrastructure stimulus is an important part of economic infrastructure stimulus. While the Harper government has made plenty of promises, they have delivered very little. Just look at the facts. As of December:

- Only 12 percent of promised infrastructure projects were generating jobs;
- Only 4.6 per cent of a \$1-billion fund to renovate existing social housing units has been spent;
- Only 1.9 per cent of a \$400-million fund for low-income seniors' housing is out the door; and,
- Only 0.1 per cent of a \$75-million construction fund to house people with disabilities has been spent.