



House of Commons Debates

**THE HONOURABLE JOE VOLPE, P.C., M.P.
SPEECH IN REPLY TO THE 2010 BUDGET
TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2010**

Madam Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to reflect seriously on a document that requires very little attention. It requires very little attention for the following reasons.

First, as a budget document, it is sorrowfully missing in substance and in content. The budget speech, all 15 pages of it, double spaced, contains only a quarter of the intentions and is only a quarter of the length of the throne speech which was delivered a mere 24 hours before the budget. What does that tell us?

It tells us first that in a Speech from the Throne, the government lays out its big vision, its big plan, and its direction for where the country should be going. It gives people a sense of what the government sees this country can be. We all know what this country can be. We know what it has been and we know where it should be going. We really wanted to see whether the government is up to the task of all Canadians and the ambition that is resident in our nation, the potential that resides in all of us who live in Canada and who call this country our home and call this country our future.

Someone talked about maybe it is a place where we can seek hope. No, we live it every day. Every day Canada has a future for each and every one of us. We wanted to see whether the government would be up to the task. We waited with bated breath while the government recalibrated itself for three months. It shut down the entire democratic process so that it could give its attention to meeting the challenge that every Canadian lives on a daily basis.

What did the Conservatives do? They came up with a budget. The budget is the amount of expenditures that the government will put to the realization of those ambitions that are resident in every Canadian's life and which are expressed through the Speech from the Throne. How disappointed must every Canadian be after listening to the prattling of the Minister of Finance in the budget speech.

Every Canadian watching that performance, or lack thereof, was looking at the ways to judge this. The only thing they can do on a budget is to examine whether those who deliver it exude a competence.

Are they competent? Is there an inherent competence in this budget?

If there is credibility, can these people actually do things? Can they deliver them? Is there a trust factor? Indeed, is there a vision for the country?

On all of those criteria, on each and every one, the answer would be an unflinching no.

Look at the competence that we have before us. The government is the same one that a mere 12 months ago said, "Don't worry. Be happy. We are the strongest nation economically and fiscally in the entire G8. No problem. No recession".

Put to the wall by members of the opposition parties on this side of the House, what happened? The Conservatives said, "Oh well, we made a mistake. In fact, there is a worldwide recession. It is synchronized, just like swimmers in a pool, and it is going to hit us, so what we have to do is dissolve Parliament. Let us hear what the opposition has to say". This is after six months of no sitting of Parliament in 2008.

The Conservatives came back and what did they do? They said, "Oh, maybe you are right. Do you know what we will do? We are going to go into deficit finance. We are going to spend money we do not have, even though we are the richest in terms of our potential and the bucks that we had and fiscal responsibility. No, we do not have any money. We are going to borrow it and we are going to do two things with it. First, we are going to spend about \$16 billion in infrastructure programs".

Some people watching this program are wondering what it means when money is spent for infrastructure. Is it capital intensive items? Is it spending on prosperity-producing enterprises? Is it spending on transportation? Is it spending on gateway strategies? Is it spending on something that someone can point to five years, 10 years, 15 years down the road and say that it was money well spent, that we were happy to go into debt because we got something worthwhile out of it, something that is durable, something that all Canadians can point to and say it is their own?

Did we get that? No. There is not a single Canadian in this room who could say that there was this grand strategy, that the money was well spent. The fact of the matter is the money has not been spent. The government allowed \$3 billion already to lapse. The Conservatives say they have allocated about 90% of those \$16 billion, but who knows? They are the same people who said that we had a surplus when we were looking at a deficit. Then they turned around and said that they would put in another \$16 billion. Now we have \$16 billion for infrastructure. That is money that we have to pick up and we have to build something with it. Then we have another \$16 billion that the Conservatives have now started to call stimulus.

Remember that we did not need stimulus because we were already in great shape. We were told to be happy. Stimulus means essentially the Conservatives are giving up our money that they knew they would not get because the economy was in terrible shape anyway. That is really what it means.

It means as well that the Conservatives are getting prepared to spend more money on employment insurance payments. Do you know how much more, Madam Speaker? This is why I talk about competence. Five hundred thousand jobs were lost in 2009, not entry level jobs, but jobs that pay a substantial wage for men and women who have families to raise and who are in the business of making sure that the Canadian dream becomes a reality for all of their families.

Those 500,000 jobs are gone. They are gone from forestry. They are gone from fishing. They are gone from agri-production. They are gone from mining. They are gone from the auto sector. What were they replaced with?

We should think about these people and what they call the budget of last week. The Minister of Finance says we created 130,000 jobs last year. Yes, but 90% of them are at minimum wage and all are part time. What will the Conservatives do for the half a million Canadians who have exhausted or are about to exhaust their employment insurance?

The Conservatives say they will freeze the transfers to provinces. The provinces will have to pick up the balance. We will find ourselves in a situation that is more critical than it was last year. These are people who demand credibility. Is a document like that worth thinking about as a serious budget document?

Every Canadian that is following the House of Commons and watching this debate should be absolutely outraged that the Prime Minister of Canada would tell Canadians that he was going to recalibrate so that he could re-sanitize a system that he ruined, soiled and disrupted. That is what this budget really represents.

The Minister of Finance was waving something around, a prop. I would not be allowed to do that, but he did it. He took half an hour to read 15 pages. We used to call that a slow reader. Why did he do that? Because there is no substance in the budget. He had to do it for effect.

Not only is there no substance in it, but as I said a moment ago, there is no vision. Where are we going to be? What is the Conservatives' mantra? Think about the tragedy of wasting the efforts of all parliamentarians. The Conservatives' mantra is going to be "We are going to not tax". Hold on, they just taxed \$30 billion last year. I am sorry, that was a mistake. It was \$53 billion because that is the deficit, also another \$100 billion because that is what they say they lost in terms of increasing the debt.

Madam Speaker, I know you are a person who is anxious to make everything relevant to everybody, but do you know what \$100 billion is? It is \$3,000 out of your pocket. It is \$3,000 out of the pockets of the pages who are here in the service of the House of Commons. It is \$3,000 for every man, woman, and child in the country. Another \$53 billion deficit is another \$2,000. Every single man, woman and child in this country lost \$5,000 thanks to the Conservatives' incompetence last year. And these are people with a vision? They are people who have been taxing all year and are going to increase taxes so they can level off the deficit.

There is nothing so tragic as the Minister of Finance standing and crowing about the efficiencies of a government that he and the Prime Minister led down to perdition. They have been doing their best to ruin the economy of this country and the dreams of every Canadian. Shame on them.