

Harper's budget made poor choices, missed opportunities

By Maria Minna, MP

When Prime Minister Stephen Harper shut down Parliament for three months, he said he needed time to “recalibrate” his government’s agenda and that his decision had nothing to do with Opposition questions about the alleged torture of Afghan detainees.

That’s why, when Parliament resumed on March 3, 2010, Canadians expected some sort of vision for the country; a new direction resulting from almost three months of preparation. They were let down – big time.

Instead of a bold new vision and direction, Harper offered only gimmicks – a proposed change to the lyrics of “O Canada” that lasted 48 hours, and a “Seniors Day”, but with no support for pensioners or protection of retirement savings. The government was silent on health care. There was nothing on culture. There were cuts to the environment and international aid.



Listening to Harper’s fifth Speech from the Throne and Budget in four years, I couldn’t help but ask myself: “He shut down Parliament for three months for this?” It clearly wasn’t “recalibration” that Harper wanted. He wanted to shut down debate on the Afghan detainee scandal and ensure that he could pose for photo-ops at the Olympic Games without having to account for his governments shoddy record in the people’s House of Commons.

Harper’s budget was all about poor choices and missed opportunities. That’s why I voted against it.

At a time when we need urgent action on climate change, Harper cut Canada’s flagship renewable energy program, ecoENERGY, and cut crucial environmental assessments from Environment Canada’s responsibilities. The United States is investing six times as much per capita as Canada is on clean energy. This is a missed opportunity to create jobs and be a world leader in clean technology.

Harper inherited a \$13 billion surplus from the previous Liberal government, but he put us in deficit even before the recession began. His intentions to shrink government were clear from the

start – slash government revenue and then cut government services. What is not so clear is what he plans to cut. What services will be impacted?

Harper slashed \$140 million in funding for research councils last year, cut the National Research Council of Canada, and scrapped 50 years of Canadian leadership in nuclear medicine.

This is the same ideology that drove former Premier Mike Harris to make drastic cuts in education, health care and the safety of our food and water. The result was oversized classrooms, enormous health care wait times, and the Walkerton water contamination disaster. Streamlining and ensuring efficiencies is the responsibility of any government, but it is unconscionable when these cuts hurt our communities and put lives in danger.

We need early learning and child care

In the budget of 2005, the previous Liberal government committed \$5 billion over five years and signed agreements with every province and territory to enhance and expand high-quality developmental early learning and child care.

Harper's decision to cancel the early learning and child care agreements with the provinces continues to impact Canadian families four years later. Just imagine where Canadian families could be today if that investment had been continued. We would have an additional 3,500 child care spaces in the City of Toronto. Instead, Toronto is losing valuable child care spaces and the cost is going up as the number of spaces decreases and the demand rises.

The Liberal Party of Canada believes early learning and child care and lifelong learning should be the priority of any government. That is why we have committed to reinstate the national early learning and child care agreements with the provinces as one of the first acts of a new Liberal government. Furthermore, we understand the need to invest in skills training and upgrading at all levels. Education is key to economic growth and prosperity and there is no better investment we can make other than in our children and our labour force.

While Harper was warming over old policies through the prorogation period, the Liberal Party went back to work in Ottawa on January 25th, 2010. I co-chaired our very first roundtable discussion on jobs and the economy. We held a full-day discussion with a range of stakeholders on manufacturing, youth unemployment and the jobs of tomorrow.

Throughout the three-month prorogation period leading, the Liberal Party held more than 30 roundtable discussions on issues that matter to the people of Beaches-East York. These included jobs and the economy, retirement savings and pensions, women's equality, health care, poverty and homelessness, community safety, international development, the environment and climate change, lifelong learning and early education and child care, rights of Canadians abroad, the digital economy, infrastructure spending, and many more.

We are building an action plan for our country which I hope will be worthy of your support.