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Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Budget 2017

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak today to the Conservative opposition day motion that states:

That, given the failure of the government to achieve the economic and employment objectives presented in Budget 2016, and given the growing protectionist and competitive threat from the United States, the House call on the government to ensure that Budget 2017 includes: (a) no further tax hikes on Canadian families, businesses, seniors or students; (b) immediate measures to encourage companies to hire young Canadians and address the youth unemployment crisis; (c) a credible plan to return to a balanced budget by 2019 as promised to Canadians; and (d) no plan to sell Canadian airports that involves (i) using the revenues to finance the Canada Infrastructure Bank, (ii) selling them to investors or enterprises that are under the political influence of foreign governments, (iii) higher user fees for Canadian taxpayers and travellers.

I felt that it is important that we all know what the motion clearly states and what we are talking about here today. As we know, tomorrow the Liberal government will table its second budget, a budget that is expected to include tax hikes for Canadians, a budget that is expected to sell Canadian airports to foreign investors in order to raise funds to finance the Liberals' infrastructure bank even though we have P3 Canada, which was specifically set up to leverage private sector dollars for infrastructure projects. In fact, P3 Canada has leveraged \$6.6 billion for infrastructure, which would not require the government to sell off our ports or airports.

As the official opposition critic for infrastructure, communities, and urban affairs, I have been following the Liberals' infrastructure plan very closely, and I use that term very loosely. I have several concerns around the continued announcements on infrastructure spending and the number of projects that are actually under construction.

Despite numerous announcements and re-announcements of infrastructure projects, the Liberals have actually failed to begin construction, create jobs, and grow the economy as promised to Canadians during the election. The only thing that is growing is the deficit. The

Liberals are burdening Canadians in debt with no possibility of a balanced budget until 2055. As of today, there have been 1,432 infrastructure projects announced and re-announced by the Liberal government. Of these projects, 1,344 have not—I repeat, have not—started construction. That is 94% of the infrastructure projects. There are more than 1,300 projects not under construction, not creating jobs, and not stimulating the economy.

The Liberals like to claim that they are investing more money in infrastructure than ever before, simply because they like announcements and of course we know they love photo ops. Yet, they have announced more projects in their first year in office than any government previously, not built, not constructed, not growing, just announced. The difference here is this. The Conservative government actually managed to build infrastructure, not just announce it. In fact, under the Conservative government, we did announce 7,802 projects and we constructed more than 7,300 of those projects. Some 94% are complete, and that means jobs. In fact, that means 1.1 million jobs were created. We completed 94% of our infrastructure projects before we left office, while the Liberal government has not been able to start 94% of its infrastructure projects.

When the Conservatives came into power, the federal government had been spending approximately \$500 million a year on infrastructure. By the time we left office, we were investing over \$5 billion per year in infrastructure. We still managed to balance the budget and leave a surplus. I have provided these details today because infrastructure is directly related to today's opposition motion. Canadians need to understand exactly where their money has gone and how much is being spent to create a \$30 billion deficit.

During the election, the Liberals promised Canadians that their small \$10 billion a year deficit would pay for unprecedented levels of infrastructure spending in their communities, would stimulate the economy, and would create thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of jobs. All of this would be over the first three years in office, and in the fourth year they would balance the budget. Instead, Canadians got a \$30 billion deficit in the first year and admittedly an unprecedented level of infrastructure announcements and no balanced budget. We heard from the Prime Minister numerous times that budgets balance themselves, but as every Canadian knows, budgets do not balance themselves. The Liberals failed to get infrastructure funding to communities in 2016, and in fact they have frozen nearly \$1 billion that, according to budget 2016, should have gone to communities last year. Instead, they have allowed it to lapse, one thing they said they would never do. In fact there are many things they said they would never do, but this is one. Instead of sending the money to communities through the gas tax fund, as they promised during the election and which is written in their platform, the Liberals decided to roll it over into next year's budget.

In receiving and reviewing the 2017 main estimates, the parliamentary budget officer stated in that report that \$2.5 billion worth of infrastructure projects cannot be located. This is money that according to budget 2016 should have gone to communities next year. Another parliamentary budget officer's report states that the Liberals' infrastructure plan has no way to measure performance, has virtually no transparency on how the money is being spent, has shortchanged communities billions of dollars for local infrastructure, and has failed to stimulate the Canadian economy. That is all from the PBO. There have been four independent reports citing the same concerns, including the latest Senate report.

We hear over and over again the Liberals' talking points of how they have cut taxes for the middle class, but they also ignore the fact that they have introduced numerous new taxes on the very same Canadians, like the new national carbon tax, new taxes on savings accounts, new taxes on children's arts programs, taxes on tuition and textbooks, taxes on children's fitness and sports programs, higher CPP taxes, higher EI premiums, higher small-business tax rates, higher

taxes on campgrounds. Also, coming soon, capital gains taxes are on the table, airports and ports are up for sale, and we do not know yet about the health and dental benefits. The list goes on. This is what Canadians need to know when the Liberal government tells them it is growing the middle class and helping those who want to join it.

We need a plan that cuts taxes for Canadians. We need a plan that gets Canada's spending back under control and brings in a balanced budget. We need a plan that will support small businesses and encourage companies to hire and create jobs, especially for young Canadians. We need a plan that does not include selling off some of Canada's most valuable assets. Unfortunately, a solid, transparent, and accountable plan for Canadians' future is not what we can expect from the Liberals' 2017 budget tomorrow. Therefore, I urge my Liberal colleagues across the way to work with all parties in this House and come up with a real plan, a plan that puts Canadians first.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the member across the way says she wants to see a plan. There is Bill C-2, a tax cut for Canada's middle class. How did the Conservative Party vote on that plan? The Conservatives voted against that plan.

Then we have Conservatives across the way talking about how they want to give advice to the government on balanced budgets. That has to be one of the weirdest things, because the Harper government never got it right. It had deficit after deficit, and it even created the deficit prior to the last recession coming into place. This government does not need to take any advice from the Conservative Party with respect to balanced budgets.

Why did the member vote against Bill C-2, which is a great tax decrease plan?

Ms. Dianne L. Watts:

Mr. Speaker, I am always entertained by my colleague's questions.

We voted against a \$30 billion deficit. We voted against all of what I just spoke about, all of the tax hikes and the removal of tax credits. I will further explain to my colleague across the way that Conservatives talk about a plan that is needed for infrastructure and to help the Liberals get their spending under control, and so do the reports from the parliamentary budget officer, the Senate committee, the C.D. Howe report, and the Fraser Institute report. It is not just us. There are many people wanting the government to have a plan in place.

As far as the budget goes, our House was in order and we handed over a balanced budget. In fact, we handed over a surplus of \$2 billion. The member really needs to get caught up on what the actual facts are.

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to my colleague's speech, whom I thank.

I wanted to talk about my community and Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, or more specifically the riding of Jonquière, which I am very proud to represent. The Conservative motion mentions unemployment and students, and earlier I heard my colleague refer to post-secondary education in his speech. If I am not mistaken, the topic was student debt. Full employment is a very important concern. We are seeing young people leaving. Every day, some of our young people leave because there is no full employment. We have nothing for them. We do not exactly have concrete plans. We just talked about plans, but initiatives and ways to keep our young people in the region are major concerns.

As was already mentioned, during the election campaign, the Liberals raised the stakes to invest in our infrastructure. Now, we do not even have anything concrete. We have not seen one red cent. We are not seeing any results.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about full employment and youth unemployment.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts:

Mr. Speaker, one of the things we take and hold so dear concerns creating the environment for job creation.

That means there are low taxes, access to post-secondary education, and access to training for students and for the younger population. It is absolutely key to create that environment. The more the job creators are taxed, the more Canadian families are taxed, the more people will leave. They will leave to find better opportunities. That is what the Liberal government just does not get.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague for a great speech. When she mentioned in the lobby earlier that she was going to speak on infrastructure, I thought that would be a great opportunity for us to learn about the failed infrastructure program of the Liberal government. That is what we have here.

We know that tomorrow we are going to hear a budget that will be written in red ink again. We will be neck-deep in deficit. It will be another spend, spend budget, and yet the delivery of a lot of infrastructure, as the member pointed out, will not happen.

In the previous government, we saw the largest infrastructure program ever, the \$75 billion building Canada fund. We saw those projects delivered. Today, in Alberta, for example, the Liberals have announced money for infrastructure where the province is now talking about taking the packet for municipalities and putting it into provincial general revenue. There is no infrastructure money getting down to the municipalities. There are no projects under way. There are no projects that are even really being planned in smaller communities.

Could my colleague comment on that type of program, a failed program of the Liberal government?

Ms. Dianne L. Watts:

Mr. Speaker, as I alluded to before, it is not just the Conservatives, and me, as a critic, saying this. There are two reports, the parliamentary budget officer report and the Senate report, that clearly state that the infrastructure plan is not transparent. We cannot follow the money. The infrastructure dollars are not getting out the door to communities, where they should be. The Liberals are now looking at selling off airports and ports to pay for a bank, when we already have PPP Canada, which has leveraged private-sector dollars to the tune of \$6.6 billion.

Every time we turn around, we see different independent organizations clearly stating that the current government does not have a plan, and whatever plan it thinks it has is failing miserably.