

My View – Stimulus money misses mark **By Maria Minna, MP**

Last October, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper predicted that Canada would not fall into a recession. In November, his government claimed that Canada would continue to post budget surpluses for the next 5 years when he knew that Canada was already in a deficit position before the economic meltdown due to his poor economic management.

Not one economist agreed with the Conservative government's numbers and projections. Canada is now facing an historic deficit of nearly \$85 billion. Before his government was threatened with defeat over his unacceptable economic update last November, Stephen Harper failed to even acknowledge the recession Canada was entering.

To make matters worse, the Prime Minister has missed the mark in proper investments in the future of the global economy. Investing in our physical infrastructure alone will not solve the problem.

Rebuilding our roads, bridges, water treatment plants, etc, is important, but just as important is investments in our social infrastructure – poverty reduction, climate change, early learning and child care, health care, post-secondary education, and skills training. These investments will make Canada the leader in the new economy that emerges from this economic crisis.

U.S. President Barack Obama recognizes that the new economy will require a highly-skilled labour force, new technologies, and a real commitment to fight global climate change. President Obama has made major investments in green technology, research, science and infrastructure a central part of his economic stimulus plan. Canada has a chance to make the same investments and be a leader in the new green economy.

The Canadian government has a responsibility to help our industries retool and invest in new technology. This will help our industries remain competitive and become more efficient. To achieve this, we must also be investing in science and technology through our National Research Council, and the Canada Excellence Research Chairs Program as established under the previous Liberal government.

Investments must also be made in the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council – whose budgets have been cut by \$148 million. The National Research Council has had its funding cut by \$27.6 million. The previous Liberal government established these Councils to reverse the “brain drain” to the United States and make Canada the lead on new ideas.

This is just further evidence that this Conservative government does not trust our scientists and researchers. Last year, 85 scientists sent a letter condemning the

Conservative government for interfering with scientists and their work, suppressing findings for political reasons, firing the head of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, closing the Office of the National Science Advisor, denying climate change, etc. This Conservative government is moving backwards just when these investments are most critical.

We need to invest in our labour force. With over 300,000 jobs lost in Canada in the last 6 months, we must invest in our people, in retraining and skills development. The federal government also has a responsibility to protect those families who have been affected by layoffs by increasing benefits and access to employment insurance. Simply extending benefits by 5 weeks is not enough when 60% of Ontarians cannot even access EI.

By reforming our EI system we can provide economic stimulus right into the pockets of those who need it the most – those who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own – who will spend that money on food, housing, and on their children, right in their own neighbourhoods.

The Conservative government is giving the cold shoulder to Canada's most vulnerable and not planning for the economy of tomorrow in this economic crisis. Stephen Harper's government is not investing in the social infrastructure that is so desperately needed. He fails to recognize that family issues are economic issues.

Social infrastructure as part of an economic recovery package should include:

- ◆ Investments in early learning and child care that is so desperately needed. Not only will this create new jobs for teachers, but will also allow for both parents or a single parent to re-enter the work force;
- ◆ Establishing a federal poverty reduction strategy to help the poorest in our community get out of the continuous cycle of poverty;
- ◆ Developing a national housing strategy with significant investments in housing infrastructure to alleviate the current 10-year wait for affordable housing in Toronto;
- ◆ Investments in research, science, and new technologies of tomorrow to fight climate change and make Canada a world leader in the emerging new economy;
- ◆ Increased investments in skills and literacy training and in our post-secondary institutions to foster a highly-skilled labour force, trained in new technologies; and
- ◆ Ensuring that those who have lost their jobs have access to employment insurance benefits and the training required to re-enter the workforce.

These are just some of the many areas where the federal government could make major investments to stimulate our economy rather than turning a blind eye to social

infrastructure.

This Conservative government is not planning long-term. This short-sightedness is dangerous and it leaves Canada at risk of being left behind when the global economy recovers.

Maria Minna