

Business of Supply

Government Orders

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Michael Savage Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NS

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this motion. I will be splitting my time with the distinguished member for **Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor** who, I must say, knowing this topic, will be great, as he always is.

I am pleased to have an opportunity to discuss our opposition motion today. I commend my colleague from **Kings—Hants** for his leadership on this file. Few people understand the economy better than the member for Kings—Hants. He has a long history and understanding of the corporate sector, as well as knowing what it takes to have a successful economy in this country.

Today's topic could not be more clear. In many ways, today's topic will be a focus in the next election, whenever that might come. The Liberals believe in corporate taxes being competitive, and I think we have proven that over the years. We reduced the rates starting in 2000 from 28% down to as low as 21%. We believe in competitive corporate taxes and, if the time is right, we believe there may be a time when corporate taxes might go lower.

However, this is not the time for corporate taxes to go lower. A lot of people may not understand this at home. Some people may think that corporate taxes are good and some people may think that they benefit from corporate tax reductions. In fact, most of them would not.

This is about the largest corporations in the country. It does not include most small and medium sized enterprises. That tax rate has not changed. It would be a great thing if that went down 35%, as the corporate tax rate in Canada has in the last decade.

Who actually benefits from this? It is not small and medium sized enterprises. How low does the corporate tax rate have to go? I understand that it is a complex issue, but imagine a businessman living in Cole Harbour or Dartmouth selling a product. His product costs \$1 and his competitor's product costs 98¢. He might look at it and decide that, if it makes sense economically, he will put his price down to 97¢, but he would not put it down to 85¢ because that would not make any sense.

We already have the second lowest corporate taxes in the G7. We are significantly lower at 25% than the United States. If that \$6 billion that would be dedicated to lowering corporate taxes were spent elsewhere, what could it be spent on?

I want to chat a little bit about some of those options. As the critic for human resources, skills development and the status of persons with disabilities, I can think of many Canadians and many Canadian families who would benefit from this. It also would benefit the Canadian economy to invest in those people who need that help.

I will now talk about education. I had the opportunity a few weeks ago to visit some colleges in western Canada. I saw young Canadians, mature Canadians, new Canadians and people waiting in lines who wanted to upgrade their skills and who needed to upgrade their skills.

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges has put out some great stuff. It talks about the demographic challenges that face Canada. It refers to it as jobs without people and people without jobs. We need to educate those people. We could put that money to work right now

educating Canadians who are not able to access the education that they need and, by extension, that Canadians need.

People with disabilities lack opportunity. Let us think about what we could do for people with disabilities. In my own riding, the Dartmouth Adult Services Centre, DASC Industries is renowned. Most political campaigns in Nova Scotia get their buttons made by DASC Industries. These are adults with intellectual disabilities. They want to build a new facility because they could use the space to bring in more people and continue to do the kind of work they need to do. That is not only good for people and great for adults with disabilities but it is also great for the Canadian economy.

We need to do more of that kind of work. We have the great work that Affirmative Industries does with affordable housing in Nova Scotia. Affirmative Industries allows its clients to build equity while they are living in housing in which they can take pride and in which they can invest. Those are the kinds of things we need.

We need to be innovative and creative. Lowering corporate taxes is not the only solution. In fact, right now I do not think it is a solution. I think it is a problem and the solution is to invest in people.

Early learning and child care has been a topic of discussion for a long time but particularly in the last week or so, since the **Minister of Human Resources** basically insulted people who use child care, which is over 70% of working moms in this country. We have some fabulous people working in the not-for-profit sector, as well as in the for-profit child care sector.

When I was at Bow Valley College in Calgary, I went to a school where people were dedicating their lives to being accredited to be early learning and child care professionals. I can tell members that it is not for the money because we do not pay them anywhere near enough. It is because they want to be involved in moving Canada forward.

According to a UNICEF study, in the OECD nations, Canada ranks dead last on the 10 basic benchmarks of early learning. We achieved a passing grade in one of them. We need some kind of a national system. We need to invest in early learning.

Just last week, the federal government had a lawyer in court citing evidence that cast disrepute on a one-year parental benefit that came in with the Liberals in 2000. How many Canadians want to go back to a six-month benefit for their children? How does that help to increase learning? It almost seems that there is a sense among some people, certainly with the government in Canada, that learning starts at the age of six. Learning starts even before birth but it certainly takes place between the ages of zero and six. We need to do more there.

Canada's rate of literacy is not good. For a developed country, we need to invest in the skills that are required to have a literate workforce. One of the saddest meetings I had as a member of Parliament was when I met a person from the riding of the member for **Kings—Hants**. This person came to see me because he knew I was doing some work on literacy. He had already been to see the member. He told me that he had a problem. He said that he worked hard, had a job he liked, had three children and that he was offered a chance for a promotion. The problem was that he had to take a literacy test and he said that he could not pass it. He said that he thought that if he failed it he might lose the job he had. He came to see me because the federal government had cut the grants to literacy and the Nova Scotia literacy council and the person could no longer get the access, as a learner, that he needed.

Let us invest. Let us give those people who, for their own benefit, need to achieve their potential. However, as a national benefit, we need to achieve the economic potential of Canada. We should be investing in those kinds of programs. Those are the things that build a country and provide a nation. Those are the things that make us stronger.

Canada has been a great nation for a long time and a very fortunate nation. In some ways, we have been fortunate. We are a large country with a lot of natural resources. We have a population that is, by and large, spread along the southern band of the country. We have not had world wars fought on our land. We have not had awful natural disasters, although we are having more of those now with global warming. We have been a fortunate nation but we are now facing challenges and some of those countries that used to send their students to us to be educated are saying that they prefer to keep them there.

India, Brazil, Russia, and China are building universities and are educating their own citizens. They are investing in research and innovation at a rate that now outstrips us, after the great momentum that Canada had in research and innovation in the first five years of this century. We will lose our edge as a country if we do not invest in education.

Education does not go from the ages of six to eighteen. That is the national system of education. Education begins before kids are born. Some of the most important learning years are zero to six. After students graduate from high school, we need to do more to assist those students who have trouble now, students with disabilities, aboriginal Canadians, low income families, and first generation learners who do not have a family history of post-secondary education. We need those. The Nova Scotia Community College right now could add thousands of new students if it had the space. We could be educating Canadians for the new economy if we invested in education and learning as a lifelong approach to making Canada stronger.

I want to talk about poverty for a second. We do not have a national anti-poverty strategy in Canada and we desperately need it. In fact, a year ago, the United Nations, in its periodic review, made a recommendation to Canada that we should have a national anti-poverty strategy. The response of the federal government was to take out that recommendation and say that it was a provincial responsibility. That is not the case.

Poverty is everybody's responsibility. When we allow people in Canada to live on the streets or to underachieve, or to have a job and still live in poverty, we are diminishing the economic capacity of this country. When we allow people to live on the streets of Canada without shelter, that is a disservice, not only to those people but to all Canadians. There are all kinds of surveys showing that it is cheaper to house people than to have them living in shelters and bouncing around. The cost to our health care and judicial systems is monumental. Let us invest in people.

As I was saying, we certainly have no problem believing in corporate tax cuts when it is appropriate. It is not appropriate now. Canadians are hurting right now. They need help. They want a partner. They do not want anybody to bail them out. They just need a partner in the federal government. Canadians do not want an adversary. They want a partner who understands their concerns, who will put them ahead of the big oil companies, who will work with them to educate them, who will help them with their children and who will take care of their parents when they are sick. That is what it means to be a Canadian and that is what it means to live in this country.

That is what the opposition day motion is all about. I congratulate the member for Kings—Hants and I urge all members to support this motion.