

Canada Labour Code

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Madam Speaker, I am pleased to follow up on a question I asked before Christmas. The question concerned the enabling accessibility fund. This is a fund that was set up a number of years ago by the government ostensibly to provide support to the disabled community by helping to renovate buildings to become more accessible for people with disabilities.

There was a problem with the fund when it was announced that the stipulations for what was called the large or major segment of the fund were brought into disrepute by people in the disability community. They suggested that these large amounts of money were set up specifically to apply only to projects in ridings of government members, including the **Minister of Finance**. In fact, at the time, Traci Walters, who was the national director of the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres, said:

Non-profit organizations are under-resourced and under-staffed--especially disability organizations...We do not have a team of experts who can pull something like this off within one month.

That was the timeline they were given. Of course, when the funding was announced it turned out that a total of \$30 million out of the \$45 million that was allocated for the entire fund, two-thirds of the money, went to two projects, one in the riding of the **Minister of Finance**, the other in the riding of a Conservative member from Calgary.

What made it even worse was when the other funding was announced there were 166 projects that were funded. To follow the math, 166 projects were funded totalling just under \$6 million. Of those projects that were funded, 21 were in Liberal ridings, 15 were in Bloc Québécois ridings, 23 were in NDP ridings, and 107 were in Conservative ridings. This meant that 35% of the funding went in the smaller funds, and it went in incredibly disproportionate numbers to Conservative ridings. In fact, two-thirds of the money went to Conservative ridings.

A couple of years later the government replenished the fund. With the attention that was brought to it and the outrage by disability groups, one would think the Conservatives might have thought a little more about it and decided there should be a more equitable distribution. In fact, the funding was even more skewed.

What does this mean?

This means that the Government of Canada has set up a fund and is politically using it as a slush fund for its own members. It is taking money meant for disabled Canadians across the country and picking to which ridings the funding will go.

Most amazing is that one rural riding in Ontario received more grants than all of the GTA ridings put together. Why is that? It is because the GTA ridings were held by Liberal members of Parliament.

As MPs we all do our jobs. We represent disabled people across the country. This should be done fairly.

Last week I had the chance to meet, as I am sure other parliamentarians did as well, with two leaders in the disability community: Steve Estey, who happens to live in my area of Halifax and Dartmouth; and Vangelis Nikias. Steve is hearing impaired and Vangelis is visually impaired and they are leaders in the disability community. They have helped to negotiate and have worked on Canada's position going back to 2004, 2005 and 2006. They helped to negotiate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled, a landmark achievement that countries across the world signed on to.

It took Canada almost four years to ratify that deal. Last spring the Government of Canada decided it would ratify the UN convention. Great celebrations were held across the country. I was at two of them. I was at the one in Halifax and the one in Ottawa. There was virtual jubilation in the disabled community that finally the government was recognizing that we could do more for the approximately four million disabled Canadians. Since then, we have had nothing.

My question for the parliamentary secretary tonight is: How could the government use funds like the enabling accessibility fund in such a political way?