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Excerpts:

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth-Cole Harbour, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, today marks the anniversary of the 1989 parliamentary motion to eliminate child poverty by 2000. That goal was not reached, so where do we go from here?

Thanks to Campaign 2000 and its partners, the House adopted a new resolution today. It is missing specific targets, but it is a start. The human resources committee continues its study on a poverty reduction strategy, but the federal government has refused a recommendation from the UN Human Rights Council that Canada needs a national strategy to eliminate poverty. The government said no to that. That is not acceptable.

Other countries have successfully reduced poverty, six provinces have poverty reduction plans, and we have vehicles like the child tax benefit and GIS that are proven to reduce poverty. We just need to make them more robust.

Canada is a fortunate land, but that good fortune is far from equally shared. Poverty is not inevitable and it can be eliminated. What it requires is political will. On this day we need to recognize where we fell short, commit to a new goal, and develop a strategy to reach it.

Poverty

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth-Cole Harbour, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, today we mark the 20th anniversary of a parliamentary motion calling for the elimination of child poverty.

We have much work to do to, even to change people's attitudes, including members of the Conservative government.

The minister for employment insurance suggested that she did not want to make EI too lucrative. Today we read the comments from the Conservative member for South Shore-St. Margaret's who referred to the unemployed as "all those no-good [blanks] sitting on the sidewalk in Halifax". I cannot even use the word in this chamber.

Is this what the Prime Minister meant when he referred to a culture of defeat?

An email apology will not feed children or house families. Will the government commit today to an anti-poverty plan for Canada?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, there are two different approaches one can take. One can take the approach of having a plan, spending years developing a strategy, which is what the Liberals did with very little result. The other option is to do what this government has done, and that is to take action against poverty.

We do not want to see a single poor child in this country. That is why we have enhanced the national child benefit and the child tax credit. Between the two of them, they have affected three million children in this country. With the universal child care benefit, another 55,000 children are out of poverty. The child poverty rate in this country is half what it was under the Liberals.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth-Cole Harbour, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, in response to a question, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development seemed to indicate, I think she said, that child poverty under the Conservatives was half what it was under the Liberals. That is what I heard. That is an absolute lie.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto-Danforth, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago today in this chamber, NDP leader Ed Broadbent moved a motion to eradicate child poverty and it was passed unanimously by the House of Commons.

Here we are in 2009 and yet we have one in ten children in Canada living in poverty, one out of four aboriginal children. Many provinces are taking action to bring forward poverty eradication plans. Just earlier today in this chamber even the Conservatives voted in favour of our motion to eradicate child poverty.

Was the vote meaningful? Will the Prime Minister tell us if he is committed to eradicating child poverty?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, no one is for child poverty. Under this government, we are spending three times more than our predecessors on early childhood learning, child care and education.

When I look at the number of initiatives we have taken, what is interesting is in almost every case the NDP has voted against these things. I hope the NDP will go back to the days of Ed Broadbent and actually stand with us on some of these matters.

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