

**Notes for a speech by Deepak Obhrai, M.P. and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the Opposition Motion  
June 20, 2011 – House of Commons, Ottawa**

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I am indeed very happy to rise today to talk about the NDP motion. In essence, we are talking about the issue of seniors, which of course is extremely important for all of us.

Canada's seniors have worked hard to build a better country for future generations. Therefore, it is very important during this time that we all work together to ensure that seniors get the benefits that they are entitled to and that they do not fall through the cracks.

Since our government came into power in 2006, we have brought in various initiatives to help seniors, giving about \$2.3 billion in targeted tax relief in 2011-12. As well, since this government came into power and addressed the needs of seniors, we now have the lowest rate in the world for seniors in poverty. That is a huge achievement since the time we took over as government when the rates were higher.

In 1999, the rate was 7.9% and today the rate has fallen to 5.8%. However, that does not mean that we do not have much to do. Indeed, we have a lot of things to do. We need to continue working to ensure that no senior lives in poverty. We need to understand one thing, but let me talk about two points first.

Everybody is saying they went to senior homes. There are a lot of senior homes in my constituency, too. When I visited them, the first question seniors asked was why we were in an election and why we have wasted \$300 million for an unnecessary election. The Canadian public spoke and those who were on this side, more specifically the Liberal Party which was pushing for this so-called vote of confidence and contempt of Parliament, is today sitting at the far end of the House because Canadians have spoken and gave this government a strong mandate for the next four and a half years to put things in order. That is what Liberal members forget. It was not what they said to Parliament, it was what Canadians said through the ballot box. Now they can answer why they wasted \$300 million of taxpayers' money.

Let us talk about something else. Some low-income seniors get the guaranteed income supplement and some get CPP. At the end of the day, if the economy were not moving forward, we would not be in a position to help seniors. To help seniors best, we need a strong economy in which they can have a lot of advantages, including the guaranteed income supplement and additional resources.

We must also not forget that this is in conjunction with our provincial counterparts, which also have programs to ensure that seniors are looked after. There is one thing that is absolutely clear when members speak in Parliament. They all recognize that seniors have played a very important role in building this country and it is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that they are taken care of.

However, we just cannot have tunnel vision to take care of them. We need to have lots of programs because there are many seniors out there with a lot of different needs. For that, the Government of Canada, this government here, has brought in a lot of programs. Pension splitting is one program to ensure that seniors keep more money at home. On tax relief, we

have released more than 85,000 seniors from paying taxes. All of these measures go in a small way to help out seniors, to ensure they have more tax-free money in their pockets, to have the freedom to have a lifestyle that they want and deserve.

Of course, at a certain stage in life, there were those who did not contribute to the pension plan in the past, who did not have any other pension available to them. For that, we brought in the OAS and the GIS. If the NDP will see it, in the last budget this government introduced a special supplement, to be given to those who are below the poverty line and could not meet their needs, by giving them an additional \$600 per single and \$800-plus for a couple. This was to help them out because that is what we have learned. What did the NDP do? It played a part in the politics that defeated the budget here in the last Parliament.

I am very happy to say that Canadians sent us back and we have re-introduced those measures that could go a long way to help seniors out there.

All my colleagues say they go to seniors' homes. We all go to seniors' homes and sit and listen. They vote. Let me say in no uncertain terms that seniors are very intelligent people because they have lessons of life behind them. They know how to make sound decisions. Therefore, it is clearly important that we listen to them, we hear them and we take that in. For that reason, this government introduced a special position for a minister of state for seniors. That is very critical, specifically a minister responsible for ensuring that the voices of seniors are heard, and to her at this current time, that is reached on the cabinet table, and into the government decision-making process. Henceforth, that is a very key element.

I have been here for 14 years and we have been hearing all of those things. However, this government has a clear record of going out there and helping seniors, first of course to see that nobody falls down, and those who have fallen down to take them out and off they go. There is a lot of work to do. I am very proud to say that we have, at this time, the lowest rate of seniors poverty in the world. Why do I say that? As parliamentary secretary for foreign affairs I get opportunities to travel around the world, representing Canada. As I do, I can say that the situation in other parts of the world is really horrendous for seniors, and it is due to a culmination of reasons such as bad economy, bad governance, no social programs and seniors are left to fend for themselves. This is a terrible situation in other parts of the world. However, here, we are fortunate enough in our country that this government worked very hard, through listening to seniors, and that we have created programs that will ensure that most seniors will get their needs and the things they want.

Of course, of crucial importance, I am speaking also from experience because my mother is a senior as well. She receives a lot of the benefits and she can tell me with no question at this time, if she does not get something she will wring my head off. It is as simple as ABC. She is my mother and she has all the right to wring my head off.

Naturally, I listen to what my mother has to say and she stays in a seniors' home and she is surrounded by seniors. Of course she gets all the input from seniors as to seeing what kind of programs and what kind of things the government is doing.

As I said, there is a provincial government role as well. So it is important for us that both the provinces and the federal government work together to ensure that the seniors receive the benefit they need.

From the point of view of the Government of Canada, the key issue to ensure for seniors is of course the OAS and the GIS. That remains key.

We must also be cognizant that we do not put all of our resources into one area, but that it covers a wider scale of things, more seniors and others, so that we do not have seniors slipping down as well. That is what the government has done.

Then as our economy improves, and our economy is improving thanks to the excellent management done by this government when the world economy was all shaken and everything here. Because of that we have been able to address many of the concerns.

The fact still remains that a robust economy will allow Canada, will allow us to address the issues that the seniors need to have addressed and to say quite clearly that the government, through sound management, has managed to reduce the poverty levels to the lowest ones in the whole world.

I think there is still work to be done, and this government will continue doing that work through our Minister of State (Seniors) and through ensuring there is a sound economic management of this country which will enable us to meet the needs of the seniors.