

Unemployment Insurance Act

Complementary to these training initiatives, we are also changing the UI Act to reflect the realities of today's work place. This means, in effect, respecting both the principle of equity and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That is why we have proposed the following major changes: Making 15 weeks of maternity benefits available during the period of a child's birth; making 10 weeks of parental benefits available to natural and adoptive parents to be shared by either mother or father; ensuring that claimants are able to draw a combination of maternity, paternal and sickness benefits up to a maximum of 30 weeks; making UI available to those who delay retirement past the age of 65.

This is another fact of life in this country. We have many people who reach the age of 65, who still have many years of productive life ahead of them, and who do not want to sit around. Many of us know neighbours and friends who reach the age of 65. Their company policy is that they must retire and they find themselves at loose ends with nothing to do. Some of them, of course, become consultants. In fact, I was watching a television program the other night in which a 92-year-old gentleman was being interviewed by a young lady. She said, "What do you do at 92?" He said, "I am a consultant". She said, "Who would consult a 92-year-old man?" He named a list of companies that are all in the Fortune 500. She said, "What do you charge an hour?" He said he charged \$1,500, and she said "You wouldn't have many takers at \$1,500 an hour". He said, "My dear, I have enough work ahead of me to last me until I am 108". I stood up and cheered because that is the kind of experience that is out there that can still be productive in our society and we should not let these people go.

We have made these adjustments to the UI program because Canadian society has changed. Canadian men and women now want to be equal partners at home and at work. We have a responsibility, therefore, to make the UI program relevant to that reality. We also have a responsibility to Canadians to ensure that the unemployment insurance program is efficient and economical, and that it does not provide a disincentive to work. In part, we want to be able to finance some of these improvements by raising the qualifying period for unemployment insurance in areas of low unemployment, and we propose to increase penalties for those people who quit

their jobs without just cause or who fraudulently collect benefits. There is a substantial underground economy in this country and, in fact, in all the western countries. We want to see those people go back into the regular taxpaying community.

• (1630)

It should be noted that when New Zealand went to the value added tax, it found 225,000 more people in business than before the tax was put in. In order to get the advantage of the claim back on the tax, they had to be registered. There were 225,000 underground businesses operating in New Zealand that the Government knew nothing about.

I am not saying that there are that many here, but there is a substantial number, which we all know about but do not like to admit. Our goal is to strengthen the unemployment insurance program so that it truly serves as a safety net for those in need, especially in those areas that are not participating in the fast growing economy. To do nothing more in their interest would be an admission of defeat for thousands of unemployed Canadians who desperately want to work.

One of the largest groups in our economy who are disadvantaged are single mothers. They are caught in a welfare trap, living in subsidized housing and relying on that cheque once a month to keep themselves going.

Many single mothers have been to my office, and there is not one of them whom I met who does not want to work. They want a productive job and want to contribute to society but they do not have skills. They do not want to be a net recipient of welfare.

Many single mothers who are asked if they can go to school for a certain course will say they cannot do so because they have no transportation and cannot afford a baby-sitter. Our Government will provide funds for baby-sitting and transportation to see that those skills can be made available to them so they can find productive work in our society and enjoy some of the benefits we have in this country. They do not want to be left in that welfare trap and we have a responsibility to help them as much as we can. We have a responsibility to foster a training culture with the Government acting as a facilitator in encouraging the private sector to contribute to a greater share of the skills development.