

Oral Questions

lities for providing services and setting standards in the area of manpower, along with the related funds and fiscal resources?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the Quebec government accepted the amendment proposed by the opposition Liberals recommending that the Quebec government sit down and undertake a serious negotiation. That is a very good step which I think demonstrates there can be some openness in terms of pursuing these very important matters of how we can redefine the roles and responsibilities. I certainly will be approaching those discussions with a very open mind about the kinds of interests and the ways in which we can deal with the problem.

We have been in contact with Madam Harel's office. We hope to be able to organize the meetings as soon as possible and as soon as we can fully look at all the respective programs that are being considered in light of the statement and conditions set forward last week by the Prime Minister.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the National Assembly's resolution clearly reaffirmed the consensus reached in Quebec that manpower issues should unconditionally come under the jurisdiction of the Quebec government, as prescribed by the Constitution.

Are we to understand from the minister's answer that he is prepared to conduct discussions with the Quebec government about Ottawa's withdrawing, unconditionally and without federal standards, from the area of manpower and transferring related resources to Quebec, as requested in the resolution passed unanimously by the Quebec government and the Liberal opposition? Everyone agrees in Quebec. Does the minister really intend to do so?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was already made very clear in the Prime Minister's statement of well over a week ago that the federal government will withdraw from the area of manpower training. We have made that very explicit. We have also followed that up with the legislation which was tabled on Friday. It will oblige the federal government to work in concert with the provinces in detailing those kinds of relationships. We made it very clear that there would be no training voucher of any kind without the consent of the provinces. We will be sitting down with the provinces to work out a clear harmonization of programs where it is required. It can develop beyond that.

• (1420)

What is important, which the hon. member should applaud, is that for the first time since the Quebec government was elected well over a year ago there has been a major change in its position. It is now willing to sit down under the present Constitution to talk about how we can establish a partnership to help people get back to work.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that not only the minister, but all those watching these proceedings and all members of this House understand our concern. The Government of Quebec was taken for a ride so often by the people opposite that we have become extra careful. We want to know if this is going to take place under optimal conditions.

I would like the minister to be unequivocal. Will he agree, as suggested by the Quebec government at the request of the Quebec National Assembly, Liberals included, to discuss with the Quebec employment minister the possibility of repatriating to Quebec responsibilities pertaining to manpower without letting the threat of national standards hang over our heads as he has in the past? Is he prepared to make a commitment to achieve results along the lines of the consensus expressed by the Quebec National Assembly? I think that the question is clear enough to deserve a clear answer.

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I gave a very clear answer to the previous question. We have already stated clearly in the House and we have entrenched it in the proposed legislation, which I hope the hon. member will vote for as he is so interested, that we recognize and accept the full jurisdictional competence of the provinces in the area of training. There is nothing ambiguous about that. It is perfectly clear.

Now we have to work out the basic rules so that we can apply all the programs. We have to ensure that the clients of our insurance program who paid premiums to get benefits will be assured of receiving those benefits. It is as simple as that.

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[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Since Friday, the Minister of Human Resources Development and the Minister of Labour have been repeating that the federal government will not use the unemployment insurance fund surplus to reduce its deficit, but will instead put it into a separate reserve fund. Need I remind the Minister of Finance that, in his 1995