

Unemployment Insurance Act

Mrs. Dobbie: This program offers that hope. This program addresses the underlying problem of the chronically unemployed.

Currently, more than one million Canadians indicate that their lack of skills is a significant barrier—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I think if the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary would be able to complete her speech we might be able to hear a couple more speeches before 1 a.m. I hope Hon. Members will give courtesy to those who are speaking between now and 1 a.m.

Mrs. Dobbie: Mr. Speaker, I am glad my hon. friends opposite have wakened up. I must be saying something right.

Currently, more than one million Canadians indicate that their lack of skills is a significant barrier to finding employment. As one of my colleagues mentioned earlier, this is backed up by a number of studies done by, for example, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business which found that 50 per cent of its members cited a shortage of qualified labour as a problem.

In addition, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association found that 36 per cent of its member manufacturers expressed difficulty in finding skilled trades people. As one who has spent time as a printer, a small manufacturer, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, from my own personal experience that this is very true.

What we are trying to do is address this problem. The number of people who are currently trained under the UI program number 75,000. It is our goal to double that to about 140,000, or about 5 per cent of UI beneficiaries.

To make sure that this training is relevant, we will be seeking the advice of labour and business, which is an appropriate thing to do, in the further design of UI support for training.

We are hearing a great deal from Hon. Members opposite about so-called mythical cut-backs to the UI program. I do not know from where they are getting this. The total funding for the program remains the same. It is not being reduced.

Mr. Allmand: You have not read the Bill.

Mrs. Dobbie: What we will do is make training more effective by allowing for a longer duration of training periods—up to three years—and by assisting persons who are on UI to obtain high school equivalency certification to allow them to qualify for available jobs or to pursue a skills training program.

Mr. Speaker, you have heard the facts and the figures over and over again during this debate. However, there is one area that seems to continue as a question of misunderstanding by members of the Opposition who seem to have a hard time understanding a number of things. This one has to do with the number of weeks of work required in order to collect insurance. I would like to set the record straight by saying once and for all that people living in areas of high unemployment above 11.5 per cent need only log 10 weeks of employment in order to trigger benefits. That is to say that a person in one of those areas must only work two and a half months to collect. That is as it was before.

Second, another point which should be registered with those who have a hard time absorbing information across the way, is that those people in seasonal jobs—in fact, most of the people who rely on UI most frequently and who trigger benefits more than once in a 52-week period—will find that the qualifying period is unchanged. Construction workers in Manitoba, for example, who collect more than once in a 52-week period must work 18 weeks in order to collect. This is no different from what it was before.

Ms. Clancy: How about the fish plant workers?

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Mrs. Dobbie: The program has been made more relevant and more responsive to today's needs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Chair recognizes the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands (Mr. Milliken) on a point of order.

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, we are here discussing a Government Bill and there is not a single Minister of the Crown in the House. I think that there should be a Minister—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member is out of order. There are Ministers in the House.