

*Government Orders*

The government has taken a number of steps to assist in developing and assessing the implications of social security reform for aboriginal peoples. The objective is to establish an inclusive approach in consultation and in co-ordination with aboriginal peoples.

We will be participating and ensuring—myself specifically, along with the minister and the government—meaningful aboriginal involvement in the social security reform process in the upcoming months. Social security reform can provide aboriginal peoples with a unique opportunity to foster effective delivery of social services that will have an immediate impact on their communities.

The governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories for instance have launched a strategic initiative to help social assistance recipients. Investing in people will provide them with counselling, career and employment development, life skills, on the job experience and education.

By creating opportunities and reducing dependency, we can work toward building upon the hope and promise of Canada's youth, both within and outside the aboriginal communities. I commend the Government of the Northwest Territories for the steps they are taking to help northerners to better themselves. They have undertaken their own track and I am sure they will integrate their views into this.

I would like to conclude by saying that this is not just about one Canadian, one organization, one special interest group. This is about the direction in which our country will go. This is about the way we want to see the quality of life affected for every child in this country. This is about the way that we as a government want to reinvent the direction in which government goes to serve the public, to serve every Canadian.

This is the way we want to balance those elements we have all talked about from all sides of the House. It is about jobs, about affordability and about vulnerability, not to avoid the people who most need our help, but to provide reform for all of our country and for every Canadian. We welcome their participation.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec):** Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a question to the hon. member in her capacity as a woman and as the status of women critic. I would like to know what she thinks of the Minister's proposal that unemployment insurance benefits be reduced and based on family income in the case of the frequently unemployed.

We all know that it is mostly women who hold temporary and part-time jobs. I would like to ask the member if she does not see these measures as being regressive for women's financial equality.

Another aspect of the Minister's proposals suggesting that the benefits be based on family income is that a woman's benefits will be subordinate to her spouse's income. Does the hon. member not feel we are still treating women as citizens of—

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Order. I want to remind colleagues that following the interventions by member we are subject to a 10-minute question or comment period.

[Translation]

With your permission, would the hon. member please be good enough to repeat her question. I will not count the time.

**Mrs. Gagnon:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what the hon. member thinks as a woman and as the status of women critic. I would like to know her opinion on the minister's proposal that unemployment insurance benefits be reduced and based on family income in the case of the frequently unemployed.

● (1245)

We all know that it is mostly women who hold temporary and part-time jobs. Is the hon. member not of the opinion that these measures would bring women's financial equality backwards?

I would also like to hear the views of the hon. member on the Minister's proposal that the family income be taken into account when establishing the level of benefits. Does she not think it is a regressive measure showing that women are still second class citizens?

[English]

**Ms. Blondin-Andrew:** Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member took the opportunity to ask a question. She makes remarks about the unemployment insurance changes proposed and also about family income and support.

Those are subjects for debate and consultation. Those are matters on which we are asking the public to give us their views. We are engaging in a public process. I am sure she has her own specific views.

I would like to allow the public to make up its mind. I will be dealing, as I indicated, with aboriginal women, friendship centres, the four national aboriginal groups, northerners, Canadians from all parts of the country. I will be meeting with people in Kamloops tomorrow. I will be listening, as should the other parties be listening to the public.

I mentioned in my speech this is not prescriptive. We are not going to tell people what it should be. We want to ask them for their responses to the proposals we have put out there.