

Government Orders

that will give people a chance to have dignity each day as they bring home a well earned paycheque.

The strategic initiatives program is a partnership with the provinces and territories. Together we are funding projects on a 50:50 basis. In the New Brunswick example it is a \$40 million investment over five years. This new kind of partnership, along with POWA which has been in existence for a number of years, is an example of the leadership of this federal government in trying to get this country back on the right road. Another example is job link in Ontario, a creative idea to allow welfare recipients broader opportunities to get back into the workplace.

Gilles is only one of about a thousand participants in the New Brunswick program. Older displaced workers between the ages of 50 and 65 are given a guaranteed annual income of up to \$12,000 in return for a minimum of 26 weeks of work. It gives these deserving men and women the opportunity to feel good about themselves. They are doing meaningful work and contributing to the prosperity of their province.

The strategic initiatives program is enabling us to test innovative and cost effective ways of reforming our social security system. It is helping us to determine the best approach to creating lasting employment, to understanding what is needed in education and training and to adjusting income security measures so they address the realities of the 1990s.

Of course the question often comes up: What have you done for us lately? This past Friday on behalf of the Minister of Human Resources Development I was involved in the announcement of a major study that will eventually help us to understand measures needed to assist older workers and other laid off workers.

This major study was announced in Elliot Lake. It will provide valuable information, research that is available nowhere in the world on what happens to the community, the businesses, older and younger workers, families, spouses, children, teenagers, when there is a major layoff in a community.

The study will be undertaken by a research team from Laurentian University in Sudbury in co-operation with the community. It will study the long term effects not only on displaced workers but on their community.

Something like 4,000 jobs have been lost since 1990 in a community where the population was roughly 18,000 and several more thousands in the nearby north shore. There is only one mine left with about 550 workers. In spite of that some marvelous things are happening in the community of Elliot Lake and the surrounding area. You would be surprised at how vigorously the community has responded to the tremendous challenges it faced when the major layoffs occurred. I am very proud to have this community and this region in my riding.

I believe this study will show that this occurrence and the response of the community will be an example to the rest of the country on how to deal with major layoffs. Imagine nearly 4,000

workers out of a population of 18,000. That is nearly 25 per cent of the entire population. They had good paying jobs in the mining sector. Take 4,000 jobs out of a community and see what happens if there is no creative response.

Come and visit the area and see the miracle that is occurring, the response. In fact the population did drop a little bit. It is about 13,500 now. Projections are that it will soon start growing if it has not already done so.

• (1730)

This research announcement is again a partnership initiative with the province. The federal government will invest a little over \$2 million under the innovations program. I believe great things will be learned from this exercise.

In Quebec the federal government recently announced joint assistance to help eligible unemployed older workers between the ages of 55 and 59 whose benefits after unemployment insurance and other normal assistance programs had run out. Major lay-offs which meet the program criteria are designated by federal, provincial and territorial ministers on a case by case basis after being assessed according to a range of socioeconomic factors.

The government is not sitting back, lying down and waiting for things to happen. We are acting proactively to anticipate what Canadians need.

This is all part of social security reform. Older workers are invited, in fact encouraged to give their views to the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development during the committee's current public hearings. Their input is welcome and will be given as much consideration as that of any Canadian. Of course all citizens are entitled to express their views to their member of Parliament. I am sure that each member will ensure the minister and/or the committee will hear their views. It is important that we reach a consensus on how to repair the social safety net.

As I said earlier, older workers are full participants in social security reform. Through the various programs and services that address their needs we will gather valuable information. I assure the House that the information will be reflected in our development of new social security policies and programs.

I have been focusing on older workers particularly. The critical needs of our older workers must never be forgotten. The workplace has changed permanently and we must be creative in our search for solutions.

I would like to conclude there. I mentioned earlier the round tables that I have had in my riding. I have been amazed at how much I have learned sitting around a table with average Canadians. We were all equals at the table. With all due respect to this place, I have learned as much around the table over a cup of coffee with average Canadians as I often have at meetings here in Ottawa. It is amazing the insights that one can get and garner