

Oral Questions

● (1445)

Hon. Douglas Peters (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions)): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier the details of the budget will be given on February 22.

The tax changes the hon. member mentions have not been stated in this House. If there are such changes they will be stated in the budget itself and at that time the answer will be obvious.

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[Translation]

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development. In today's newspaper coverage of the meeting of human resources ministers, we learned that the federal government, through its reform of social programs, intends to play a major role in social assistance and deal directly with Canadians, thereby violating provincial jurisdiction in that field.

Will the minister dare to confirm that he is considering abolishing transfers to provinces regarding social assistance and launch a direct payment program for Quebecers and Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, what I can confirm is that yesterday we had a very co-operative, collaborative discussion with all the ministers from the provinces. We agreed to undertake a major review and re-examination of a number of programs that affect Canadians. That was a clear demonstration of how federalism works well when you make it work well and when you want to make it work well.

We look forward to working together at both levels of government to ensure that Canada's social programs effectively meet the needs of all Canadians.

[Translation]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, very cordial agreements were also reached at Meech Lake and in Charlottetown between the ministers representing the two levels of government. How can the minister explain that his government, which was elected on the platform of no more references to the constitution, is so blatantly violating provincial jurisdiction?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, coming from a member who voted against

the Charlottetown agreement it is no wonder she uses that as the model. We intend to do things very differently.

We intend to work in a co-operative way with all Canadians both through the federal and provincial governments. I say to the hon. member that this is not a matter of fighting over turf. This is not a matter of battling over jurisdiction. This is really a matter of how we can co-operate to get the best use of very scarce resources for the benefit of all Canadians.

That is our objective. I am glad to say it was one that was shared by all the provincial ministers at that meeting.

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UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

On January 1 the government imposed a 7 per cent payroll tax on all workers and employers in Canada in the form of an increase in unemployment insurance premiums, which all economists agree will kill jobs.

How is this tax increase consistent with the government's job creation objectives described in the red book?

Hon. Douglas Peters (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions)): Mr. Speaker, the unemployment insurance premium increase that came into effect in January was a minimum amount. At the same time it was announced by the minister that the premiums would be held at a flat level because of the job creation commitment this government has.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, if increasing UI premiums kills jobs, then it follows that reducing UI premiums would create jobs.

When does the minister expect to announce a reduction in UI premiums?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Finance with whom I have had many interesting and co-operative discussions on this matter, if the hon. member could curb his patience the Minister of Finance will present one of the most important and significant long term documents this House has seen in a long time next Tuesday.

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● (1450)

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Reg Alcock (Winnipeg South): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Like many other members I have had an opportunity to meet with refugees from the former Yugoslavia. These people are in