

equalization. Our objective should be to reduce the amount of benefits paid through job creation.

Would the member try to deal with the essence of the subject really being not equalization but rather the best interests of Canadians?

[Translation]

Mr. Lefebvre: Madam Speaker, earlier I listened to the speeches made by several members opposite. I listened carefully. One of them mentioned that, under the new program, a worker unemployed for 52 weeks would—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): The hon. member must address his comments to the member who just spoke, namely the member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Lefebvre: Madam Speaker, I will remember that. One of his colleagues said that a person working 14 to 15 hours a week for 52 weeks would benefit—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Again, I remind the hon. member for Champlain that his observations must relate to comments made by the member who asked the question, not to those of another speaker.

Mr. Lefebvre: I understand, Madam Speaker. It is because I do not have the name of the hon. member's riding.

An hon. member: Mississauga.

Mr. Lefebvre: Mississauga. Fine. I will now continue. The member opposite told us that the new UI program is beneficial to those who never collected UI benefits. He referred to people working 14 to 15 hours. However, if we multiply those 14 or 15 hours by 52 weeks, we realize that it is impossible for these people to be eligible for UI benefits. The numbers do not add up.

• (1640)

[English]

Mr. Derek Wells (South Shore, Lib.): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to address the Bloc motion on the subject of unemployment insurance reform. I can only begin by saying how astounded I am that such a motion could have been drafted, let alone introduced at this time.

What is the source of the motion? What unemployment insurance reforms are the hon. members of the opposition thinking about? I presume it is not the same reform that was introduced by the Minister of Human Resources Development last Friday.

I heard the Prime Minister's announcement a little over a week ago. I read the documents. What I and millions of Canadians heard was a statement from the Prime Minister that the federal government respects and recognizes the jurisdiction of the provinces in education and training. Millions of us heard him say the federal government is therefore withdrawing from

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the direct purchase of training, from apprenticeship training, co-operative education programs, and workplace based training. We heard him announce that agreements with the provinces will be sought on the design and delivery of proposed employment benefits in order to harmonize them with provincial programs. We heard him explain that in some cases the provincial government or a provincial agency could be responsible for delivering these federal measures. Indeed, he was at pains to point out that in other cases provincial programs could be used instead of the proposed federal measures.

He made it perfectly clear to millions of us that funding for training will only be provided by the federal government with the consent of the province concerned. Depending on the agreement reached, it could be provided to individuals, to the provincial government, or to a third party. He stated clearly and ultimately that this arrangement can allow a province, if it wishes, to assume full responsibility for these employment measures, subject only to the proviso that the federal government's responsibilities to ensure the needs of the unemployed are addressed and that the measures that allow them to return quickly to the workforce are met.

The employment insurance reforms specifically and deliberately seek to eliminate overlap and duplication. The reforms will mean that even more than ever a province will be able to develop a comprehensive labour market strategy and policy. It is surely a distortion to maintain otherwise.

It is always difficult to bring about true reform. In the case of a program as well ingrained in the economic and social fabric of Canada as the unemployment insurance program, it is doubly difficult. I am concerned that factual distortion of the sort presented by this motion will damage public understanding of the reform package, especially in Atlantic Canada, where a sound understanding of the new system is of paramount importance.

I believe it is important for Atlantic Canadians to know the facts so they can be aware that the reforms provide much needed structural adjustments, which are absolutely necessary and which over the long term will be good for Canada and for Atlantic Canada.

The opposition members should also take note of the fact that these reforms will help high unemployment regions like Atlantic Canada. This reform package will create 100,000 to 150,000 new jobs, and 45,000 part time workers in Atlantic Canada who are now not eligible for benefits will qualify under these reforms.

Unemployment insurance was never a solution to the Atlantic regional unemployment, nor was it meant to be. We are now facing the fact that it has actually become a cause of unemployment. In other words, it is part of the problem and not the solution. Many people are better off collecting UI than accepting the work that is available. In a recent survey of small