

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Christine Stewart (Northumberland): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is also for the Prime Minister.

Canada's economic health is important, but health is irrelevant if the patient, our society, is *in extremis* or dead. Poverty is killing our society. Over one million children, our nation's future, are being sacrificed on this government's altar of unfair economic policies.

Will the government reassess its bankrupt policies today, relieve the distress of our poor and immediately set family life, full employment and adequate housing as its first priorities?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I do understand that the question could be addressed in terms of poverty for children. I believe I answered a similar question yesterday when I said that we already put \$15 billion a year into the system for children, which is about one-tenth of all government spending.

I do not say again that it is too much, but I say that is the capacity we have.

At the same time, I agree that as long as we have children who are poor we have to do something and that is what we are trying to do. I am working out a strategy which I believe I can unveil sometime at the beginning of next year. It will help, but it will be done within the capacity we have to pay for it.

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[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Unemployment Insurance offices have huge backlogs and the Pie IX office in the riding of Saint-Léonard is no exception. Since November 4, it has received over 1,850 new applications for employment insurance. Only 329 have been settled so far, due to lack of funds and staff.

Oral Questions

Does the minister have any explanation for the fact that it takes more than 12 weeks for someone to receive an unemployment insurance cheque, and will the minister do something about the backlog in all offices, not only in Saint-Léonard but across the country?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, it is rather difficult for me to comment at length on the situation at the office in Saint-Léonard. If I had received notice of the question, I would have been able to provide more details.

There were some delays this fall because of the problems we had with the Public Service, but departmental management tells me that steps are being taken every day to try to speed up payment of unemployment insurance benefits to recipients.

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard): Mr. Minister, I described the situation in my riding, but the problem exists across the country. If the minister does not know about it, I think the unemployed in our country will have some very serious problems before Christmas.

I have another case for the minister. Lyne Normandin, a woman who lives in my riding and who just had an operation, filed her unemployment insurance claim on time. She even added a second medical statement, as required by the officer. Now she has just heard that her file was lost and she has to submit another medical statement. This means she will have to spend money to get the statement, without having received any unemployment insurance benefits.

What is this lady expected to do during the next four weeks?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, under the Privacy Act I cannot comment on individual cases, but the hon. member has mentioned a case I would like to look into personally, because it is intolerable that someone in that situation should be made to suffer because of delivery problems.

I certainly would like to look into the particular case the hon. member just described.