

Oral Questions

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ): It is a pity, Mr. Speaker, that I will have to put my question in writing because I was unable to get an answer.

Since it is becoming increasingly obvious that, within four years, Quebec will no longer receive any money from Ottawa for social program funding—I repeat, social program funding—how can the minister justify his plans to set up new structures and implement new manpower training initiatives that will increase duplication, when these structures and initiatives are to be funded from surpluses in the UI fund, to which Ottawa will no longer contribute as much as a penny?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Again, Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat the same thing. The government, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health and myself have all stated in this House that one of the goals of the current reform is to reverse the trend, stop our reserves from shrinking and maintain a level that will allow us to set the amount to be transferred to the provinces, including Quebec.

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• (1135)

[English]

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development on behalf of all Canadians.

A new poll shows that only 19 per cent of Canadians under age 50 expect to get anything out of the Canada pension plan when they retire. Their confidence in the plan has gone down since the Liberals replaced the Tories in 1993.

Does the government have any plans at all to correct the Canada pension plan problem? What will it do to assure Canadian workers and employers that the money they are contributing to this plan is not just going down the tubes?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a curious question about money in the Canada pension plan going down the tube. The money goes to provide for retirement security for senior citizens. It goes to provide for a basic income benefit for disabled Canadians. It goes to provide a basic benefit for widows and their children.

The Reform Party's proposals as it puts them forward would mean a substantial reduction for disabled Canadians, a substantial reduction for widows, and a substantial reduction for 1.8 million pensioners. How can the hon. member stand up and tell us to do something to protect the system when his own party is proposing a way of slashing the program?

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the difference between the Liberals and the Reformers is that we would have a plan that would be actuarially sound. This one has never been sound. The Liberals were informed of that when they first brought in this plan. They fired the adviser who gave them that advice 30 years ago.

I ask again: What will the government do specifically to make the Canada pension plan actuarially and mathematically sound and sustainable? That is what Canadians demand.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, we announced in the last budget that we would be presenting a paper containing a series of proposals as to how we can deal with the sustainability of the Canada pension plan. The Minister of Finance will be meeting with his counterparts later this year to talk about this. As the hon. member should know, this is not just a federal government plan but one we share with the provinces. It is a joint plan and therefore we have to make those kinds of arrangements.

Let me give the member one very quick example of the kind of measures we are taking. On July 1, I announced a series of changes to the Canada pension plan that will allow those with disabilities to go back to work so that they can have a bigger incentive to be employed and not simply draw the benefit. It once again goes to the very heart and soul of what we are trying to do in our reform which is to provide for economic security by giving people a good chance at a job.

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[Translation]

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development. Despite a slight dip in unemployment after ten months of zero net employment growth in Canada, we find that the unemployment rate among those under the age of 25 has again increased. Even those who manage to find work are often in an extremely precarious positions. In fact, this is the lowest level of youth activity in the labour market in 20 years.

What concrete actions does the government plan to take to help young people, since the youth unemployment rate has again risen in September, from 15.7 per cent to 16.4 per cent?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased the hon. member raised that question. It does give me the opportunity to tell members of the House in case they have not heard that this morning the unemployment rate fell to 9.2 per cent which is the