

Oral Questions

long-term concern of this government we have been for the last ten years attempting to encourage the development of areas of generally slow growth.

That is the whole purpose of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, and it is on that basis that we have sought to bring to northern Ontario an industry which is based on the extraction of natural resources in northern Ontario.

INTRODUCTION OF UPDATED TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE
BENEFITS PROGRAM

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, we will see how broadly based the government's concern is with people. I have a question for the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. The minister knows that over 5,000 Chrysler employees are now out of work. He also knows that there were an additional 650 lay-offs announced yesterday, and that an Ontario minister said late yesterday that 2,500 more are anticipated later this year.

Since the government has now come to the assistance of the Chrysler Corporation, and since the total number of workers directly affected by lay-offs now in the automotive industry is about 35,000, could the minister tell us, at long last, when the government is going to bring in an updated TAB program to provide assistance to the workers and their families?

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Madam Speaker, this matter is being actively worked on by the Minister of Employment and Immigration. I should also like to inform the House that Chrysler announced yesterday that, while there were to be further lay-offs at Windsor, it was also adding a second shift to the van plant, providing a further 800 jobs on June 2, and at about that time a further 200 jobs at the car assembly plant.

● (1425)

Mr. Broadbent: Madam Speaker, that is about the fourth time the minister has told the House that the government is actively working on the problem, while some 35,000 Canadian workers are collecting unemployment insurance. Indeed, many of them do not have anything to collect at all. Can the minister give us a clear, definite date when the government is going to announce its assistance program for these workers who badly need it?

Mr. Gray: Madam Speaker, I hope it will be possible for a final decision on this matter to be made soon. I regret I cannot yet announce a date for any such decision to be made public. However, I remind the House that the Minister of Employment and Immigration has used the authority he has under the existing law to trigger extended unemployment insurance benefits in the Windsor area, in particular.

This will enable those who were laid off, in large measure—although not all, I agree—to have benefits over a longer period of time than would otherwise have been the case. During this extended period, it will be easier for us to give due consider-

ation and to make the right kind of decision on this whole issue of additional benefits.

Mr. Broadbent: Madam Speaker, I remind the minister that the workers laid off are also in the cities of Toronto, Oakville, St. Catharines, Oshawa, Brampton—other than Windsor. Windsor is important, but all the workers in this industry surely have to be taken into account.

Finally, can he explain to the House why the Government of Canada is providing proportionately more money in financial assistance to the Chrysler Corporation than is the government of the United States? Why was the government of the United States able to get a better deal for its taxpayers in coming to the assistance of that corporation than was the Government of Canada?

Mr. Gray: Madam Speaker, I first want to remind the hon. member that we are not providing money to Chrysler Canada: we are undertaking, if certain commitments are made, to put in place loan guarantees starting only in 1982. While the amount of loan guarantees that we have agreed to is somewhat above strict proportionality, it is in recognition of the fact that Chrysler Canada has a much greater impact on the Canadian economy than the parent company does in the United States. Its failure in Canada would have a correspondingly greater adverse impact on the economy and on at least 40,000 Canadian workers.

I felt, and cabinet agreed, that to have slightly more than strict proportionality was in the interests of the Canadian economy and Canadian workers generally all across the country. I am sorry that my hon. friend, in spite of his earlier protestations about wanting to help the workers, does not agree with this obvious point.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

RELOCATION OF DVA SITE IN CHARLOTTETOWN

Mr. Tom McMillan (Hillsborough): Madam Speaker, my question is to the President of the Treasury Board. In view of the fact that the federal government has a binding legal agreement with the province of Prince Edward Island, through the Charlottetown Area Development Corporation, to locate the Department of Veterans Affairs at the Charlottetown waterfront, and in view of the fact that the federal government has unilaterally changed the site from the waterfront to the centre of the city without consulting the province of Prince Edward Island and without consulting even the city of Charlottetown, my question to the President of the Treasury Board is, does the federal government intend to impose its choice of site on the people of Prince Edward Island, and does it intend also simply to ignore its obligations under a binding legal agreement to the people of Prince Edward Island?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, as the hon. member undoubtedly knows, Treasury Board has very little to do with site selection.