

*Supply*

efforts on creating new and lasting jobs by investing in people through training and skills upgrading. To simply cut people off from income support that they themselves have contributed to is not only unfair but it also places an enormous additional burden on the already strained unemployment insurance system.

There are more efficient ways to stem abuses in unemployment insurance than this blanket change, which will only cause more problems than it solves. Perhaps the government fails to realize that this change in UI is counter-productive. Such a policy option clearly reveals the Conservatives' short-sighted approach to economic development. The people who are cut off from UI will have less purchasing power, will pay less tax, and many will probably seek social assistance from the state.

How will this help build the future of the country? How will this measure save money and reduce the deficit? Shifting the burden to the provinces which must administer welfare from decreased federal transfer payments is a pretty weak and transparent strategy.

I would like to share with the House today the situation in my riding of Kootenay East. I am sure that the story in my riding reflects the larger picture across the country.

• (1920)

Since being elected in 1988, my constituency office has had over 800 complaints about the UI system. Such a statistic is by itself quite an indication of the serious problems that exist. Let me elaborate. These hundreds of constituents have needed to ask their member of Parliament for assistance with UI because there are major delays in simply processing their claims.

Some claims have taken up to 12 weeks to process. Other cases involve multiple requests from bureaucrats for the same information. Everyone in the House knows that there is a serious overload in the unemployment insurance system already. The effect of this latest change will only add even more appeals and the unemployed will have to wait even longer to find out their status. Such stress and confusion are the last things Canadians need right now.

I have asked the Minister of Employment and Immigration many times to increase the staff in my riding's manpower centre in order to deal with the increasing caseload. However the minister has failed to act and the

situation worsens every day as more and more people find themselves unemployed.

It has even removed the toll-free telephone number so that people living 500 kilometres away from the manpower centre cannot even phone in to get the information that is required. It has cut back in the services at the desk. Adding this kind of bureaucracy over and above it is going to create even more for those who are entitled to their benefits.

In the Elk Valley area in my riding, there has been an economic shutdown for the last nine months. Radical restructuring in the coal mining industry has thrown hundreds of people out of work. The B.C. Supreme Court prohibited one company from reopening its mine because of bankruptcy. However, when the workers applied for UI benefits, the federal government ruled that they were ineligible. Finally, some months later when the company dissolved, the workers were given UI.

These workers then appealed for the lost benefits for the time the company fell into bankruptcy protection. Now, several months later, they have won their first stage of the appeal. The final resolution will take much more time because the government is going to overrule that appeal.

The government sent its top representatives from Vancouver into that area. One thousand workers lost benefits for over two and a half months and have been told by unanimous decision that they were entitled to it. I saw the member for Macleod get up. His riding adjoins my riding and has 300 of those workers. He stood up and agreed with the minister of state when she said the benefit will be given to the applicants.

I say to that member: "Why are you representing those 300 workers?" Those workers are having their houses foreclosed. Those workers have now lost their jobs, holiday pay and severance pay and the plant has gone into bankruptcy. A new buyer has come in and has said that it is not even going to rehire some of them. They are advertising in Alberta for new people and there are 1,000 of them sitting without unemployment insurance.

It was said that it was not a bankruptcy. The courts ruled that it was a bankruptcy. I wrote to the minister who oversees unemployment insurance and said that these people qualify. The minister said that they do not qualify. Finally, after the period from May 24 to August 25, it was decided that these people were entitled to it. They have now appealed and they have been notified