

Government Orders

The unemployment insurance program works very well. Interestingly, 70 per cent of all Canadians who receive unemployment insurance benefits return to the labour market before exhausting those benefits. Most Canadians who become unemployed use their benefits to find new jobs. The challenge is to ensure we can continue to provide this assistance to Canadian workers. To do that, we intend to deny benefits to those who quit their jobs without just cause. Those who choose not to work will no longer be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.

Furthermore, starting on April 4, 1993, the benefit rate will be 57 per cent. Benefits for new claimants will be frozen for the next two years, as is the case for all federal Public Service employees, members of this House, senators, ministers, the Prime Minister and the Governor General. This is a one-time measure that will last two years and is intended as a response to a one-time situation.

Now for a look at the other side of the coin: job creation and training. Premiums paid by small business will be frozen. Furthermore, small businesses which in 1993 pay more unemployment insurance premiums than in 1992 will be eligible for a refundable tax credit for the surplus premiums paid. This measure will encourage them to hire people and create jobs.

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We will also spend more on retraining. In 1993, the government will spend \$2.21 billion to help nearly a million workers receiving benefits return to the labour market. The budget for this is \$260 million more than in 1992 and five times more than was spent in 1990 to train the unemployed. What workers really want is not UI benefits; they want to increase their employability and especially they want work and better access to the labour market. These measures meet their expectations.

As industry restructures, employers and workers agree on who will stay, who will go and what special arrangements will be offered to those who quit. Workers who leave make it possible for other workers to stay and help industries be competitive. Someone who leaves his or her job in these circumstances and looks for other employment will not be considered as having quit voluntarily. Another important point about the amendments

presented in this bill directly concerns cases of sexual or other harassment. Arbitration boards will have the power to protect the privacy of victims of harassment. In cases of sexual or other harassment and at the beneficiary's request, the arbitration board can hear the testimony of both parties separately so the beneficiary does not have to be in the same room as the person who harassed him or her.

At the beneficiary's request, the board can conduct the first-level appeal proceedings behind closed doors or in private and exclude the public and media. Last week, the member for Hamilton East asked whether these were minor or major changes. She knows very well that in many cases, victims of sexual harassment hesitate to speak out because it is often embarrassing for them to do so and it is not always easy to talk about it. If the member for Hamilton East and others are really serious when they talk about sexual harassment and how trying an experience it is for the victims, I am sure they will appreciate these amendments for what they are and will support these measures contained in Bill C-113.

Two years ago, the unemployment insurance account had a \$2.2 billion surplus. In 1992, this surplus became a \$4.5 billion deficit. In fact, if we do not modify the unemployment insurance program, the forecast deficit will rise to over \$8 billion in 1993. By making the proposed changes, the government can reduce this deficit to \$7.5 billion. We had a choice to take these measures or increase premiums, which would have led to lay-offs, or borrow yet again and increase the deficit. We know very well that when we borrow to finance deficits it is your children and mine and future generations who will have to pay these deficits in the end. We had the choice to make the right decision, namely control costs by giving benefits to those who really need them. What the opposition proposes, I repeat, is to pass the bill on to those who will come after us and finance people who quit their jobs for no valid reason and abuse the system.

As the Prime Minister said last Tuesday, Canada's generosity to the unemployed is unmatched in the OECD countries, but I do not think we have to pay benefits, with money taken from one's fellow citizens, to someone who quits a job without reason, provocation or cause. I think the Government of Canada has made a good decision.