

Government Orders

Mr. Tony Valeri (Lincoln, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is certainly a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to rise today and speak to this motion. I would like to focus my comments on the opportunities that Canadians have for input into the social security reform process and to encourage Canadians to participate.

• (1810)

Certainly, social security reform is one of the most important initiatives undertaken by government in many years. Canadians have an unprecedented number of ways of making their voices heard on this particular subject. All Canadians must be able to have their say on how we should rebuild the Canadian social safety network for the 21st century.

Let me outline the many ways in which Canadians will have an opportunity to share their concerns, ideas and solutions on how to redesign our programs. These consultations will help to make our programs not only more efficient but certainly more effective, which is one of the big goals of this whole social security reform.

It has been about six or seven weeks since the launch of the discussion paper. Public interest in the document has certainly been quite high and remains high. Since October 5 the ministry has received over 12,000 calls requesting material and information. In total, we have distributed about 114,000 copies of the discussion paper and almost 210,000 copies of the summaries of that discussion paper.

We want a mutual exchange of ideas with the public on the federal government's initiative to reform social security and we want to hear from as many Canadians as possible. To encourage this we have recently released a workbook called "Have your say" which seeks the public's input on our social security reform options. We supplied a postage paid envelope in each workbook for the return of the response. All answers mailed prior to January 16, 1995, will be part of a final published report on what Canadians have said.

As well we will be sending the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development an interim report in late December. The analysis of the responses will be conducted by D.R. Harley Consultants Limited, an Ottawa based firm which assisted in the development of the workbook to ensure its objectivity.

The workbook is widely available through postal outlets, Canada Employment Centres, many grocery stores, the YM and YWCAs across Canada. It is also available by calling the 1-800 number, a toll free number, or by calling your local member of Parliament.

The 1-800 line is a source of information and an avenue for Canadians to express their views on social security reform. Canadians have already made extensive use of this line and it

continues to be heavily used. I think this alone is a prime example of the importance that Canadians place on social security reform and the government's commitment to hearing their views.

In addition to the workbook and the 1-800 line, Canadians have an unprecedented number of ways to make their voices heard on social security reform.

The Department of Human Resources Development Canada has produced a wealth of information on the reform that is available to the public. The information is not only available in print and alternative formats, but much of it is also available to Canadians on the information highway.

The Standing Committee on Human Resources Development is the focal point for the consultations on this reform. All other forms of consultation will be fed into the standing committee for its final report.

We should not forget that the committee is comprised of members from the three largest parties represented in this House. I am pleased to say that there is significant interest in appearing before that committee. More than 80 national organizations appeared before the committee between October 26 and November 8 of this year. In general, these national organizations supported the need for reform and the principles laid out in that discussion paper. Most groups expressed a wide range of concerns about the specific options available in that paper.

The committee has now started its consultations with Canadians. Fifteen members of the committee will travel for five weeks to 22 cities and towns in provinces across this great country. This will present Canadians, whether they live in an urban or rural setting, in the far north or in downtown Toronto, the same opportunity to participate. Once again, interest from the public has been overwhelming. Nearly 500 requests came into the committee from the western portion of its trip. The committee is making every effort to hear from as many groups and individuals as possible.

Those who cannot appear have the opportunity to submit a brief before December 9, 1994, so that committee members can benefit from the widest range of views and ideas. We would encourage Canadians who may not be able to appear before the committee or attend any of the local workshops presented by members of Parliament to submit a brief to the committee before December 9.

• (1815)

Social security reform consultation encourages each member of Parliament to become involved in these consultations. Working within their own constituencies to inform the electorate, MPs provide Canadians with yet another avenue to express their concerns, ideas and solutions on how to redesign Canada's social security system.