

*Oral Questions*

market. We are seeing a substantial increase in housing sales from a level of about 2,500 to a level of close to 6,000 from January to February.

I quote from Mr. John Winter, who is a leading retail analyst in Toronto. He says: "I think March will be better than February and, quite frankly, I think we have seen the bottom of this slump." This is consistent with what we have been saying as a government. It is consistent with what the Royal Bank and what the Conference Board have been saying.

If the hon. member would quit walking around with a little cloud over his head, only talking doom and gloom, he might be able to see that as well.

**Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West):** Madam Speaker, I do not know why this minister is revelling in the problems caused for millions of Canadians due to the policies of his own government for which he was taking credit.

Why is the minister continuing to rely on the same policies to get us out of the recession that he admits got us into the recession? If the minister will not give us a commitment today for new policies of full employment, I ask him to tell us what his government is doing right now for the more than 1.4 million Canadians who are standing in the unemployment lines all across this country. Give us an answer right now. Give Canadians some hope.

**Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance):** Madam Speaker, I do not know what the hon. member is thinking about when he says I am revelling in the difficulties that Canadians are having. I am not revelling at all. I do not like it at all. What I do know is that the policy prescriptions that we are following are the right ones to get us out of the recession that we are in today.

We saw, from 1984 right through to the spring of 1990, where those policies brought us record growth, that Canada was number two, only after Japan, of the major industrialized countries. There were 1.6 million jobs created in that period of time. So these policies are working.

I say to the hon. member, if he has any ideas, if he has any alternative policies, let us know and let us have them, but I have yet, in the six and a half years that I

have been Minister of Finance, heard anything from the Liberal Opposition as to what alternative policies it has. Canadians are looking for more than just straight negative opposition, what they are looking for is a positive policy approach.

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**UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Fred J. Mifflin (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception):** Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

In Atlantic Canada, unemployment insurance recipients are experiencing extraordinary delays in having their UI claims processed; in many cases, from 10 days to 2 weeks. This is devastating in an area where unemployment is running over 20 per cent. For those people whose only source of livelihood is their UIC cheque, it is totally unacceptable, even tragic.

I would ask the minister to explain why this is happening and what is being done to rectify it.

**Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Madam Speaker, I sympathize with the hon. member's question and its intent because we have had some processing problems in some of our offices. What we have been trying to do as a result is do more through the mail and more on the telephone, and we have improved our claims processing. We are putting more people in our offices to ensure that we can speed up the processes for getting cheques to people as rapidly as possible.

Sometimes it comes as well from people coming in to us with incorrect information which delays the process and takes up some of our personnel time. But we are doing the best we can to ensure that the backlogs come down, and they are being reduced very quickly.

**Mr. Fred J. Mifflin (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception):** Madam Speaker, whatever the reason for this delay, there is hope that we are witnessing a temporary interruption and that this greatly reduced level of service is not something that can be expected on a long-term basis. That is the concern. So I would ask the minister to undertake to assure this House that her department will not accept a degradation of service for UI claimants as a regular occurrence.