

Supply

Mr. Joe Comuzzi (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the minister some questions with respect to the department for which he is responsible.

His department as we know is twofold, immigration and employment. He and I have talked many times about our thoughts on immigration. We have asked many questions in this House about the immigration problems this country is facing and the horrendous costs that some of those decisions his government has made are adding to this terrible deficit that we are all trying to come to grips with.

I want to concentrate my questions to the minister today on the area that involves employment. As he was making his remarks just a few moments ago on the amounts of money he is requesting to administer his department, the thought just occurred to me that if we could get our economy in some kind of shape, we could create the jobs necessary because it is on his department of employment that the whole country rises and falls. Sometimes he has no control over the amount of expenditure because of the situation and the tragic condition of our economy.

I would think if his government could create these necessary jobs, which I give credit to him for trying to do even though it is simply not working, that the deficit of our country then would come under some kind of control. The very amounts that he is talking about in the expenditure for unemployment is the very amount that this country is in deficit on a national basis.

The creation of employment is really twofold. First we have to look after those people who are entering the work force on an annual basis, the students and those who are coming into the work force for the first time. Unfortunately during this economic period we also have to take care of those people who find that they no longer have a marketable skill and therefore find it necessary to be retrained.

It is in that first instance that I ask the minister why we have not used the technology available to us in Canada in order to enhance that position where we can handle those who are coming into the job market for the first time but more particularly those who need retraining. That involves the unskilled, the issue of upgrading and the issue of the retraining program itself.

The minister and I both know how costly this is to his department this year. I am appalled that we have not used the technology that is available to us in order to enhance that program.

• (1725)

This past weekend I visited friends in one of the northern United States which has the same problems as we have. They have developed, using the technology available to them, a communication network. It has 67 university campuses, college campuses and high school campuses within the state, which is a little smaller than Ontario. It has connected those electronically. It will be providing to those citizens who need upgrading of skills the ability to receive that knowledge in their homes. It will be providing a training program for those who want to enhance their present skills because we know that it is always cheaper to keep a job than creating a new one.

The third item it is going to be progressing with is the ability to take those people whose jobs are now redundant and retrain them for the jobs of the future. Using the technology that we have available in the marketplace we can offer those services at a much lower cost than we are presently paying.

I ask the minister if his department has considered this or if he would like to meet with me afterward to pursue the use of this technology to upgrade and retrain our work force.

Mr. Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member points to what is a very important and crucial part of the challenge that all Canadians are facing. This has to do with the necessity of having a framework in this country that allows youth and workers who are displaced by technological change to be able to retrain and acquire the skills and the knowledge they need to be active participants in this economy.

The hon. member will recall that this government, with the changes that we made to the Unemployment Insurance Act, has activated some of these passive funds that were used to give income support and to try to activate them to help unemployed Canadians.

I would point out to the hon. member the fact that in this fiscal year we will be spending \$2.4 billion under the UI developmental use portion of that training program which is a 400 per cent increase from two years ago.