

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. George Proud (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for veterans affairs.

Last week the acting deputy minister informed employees that there were no plans to cut up to 400 jobs. However, I understand that in a letter to all departments, Ian Clark of the Privy Council Office called for further cuts of up to 10 per cent in all departments.

Would the minister please explain how these two contradictory messages can be reconciled. What is really going to happen to veterans' programs and what is going to happen to the employees?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, because of the aging of our veterans, our programs at veterans affairs are all experiencing growth. In any program there is always an opportunity to reduce overlap and duplication. We are attempting to ensure the programs meet the original objectives.

Canada has one of the most generous veterans affairs programs in the world. We continue to maintain our commitment to keep it that way. The hon. member can be sure that veterans will not suffer as a result of any changes in administration.

Mr. George Proud (Hillsborough): Then will the minister unequivocally say there will be no further program cuts and no further cuts of employees?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I can understand where the hon. member is coming from. The role of the Department of Veterans Affairs is to take the tax money we allocate and make sure it is used to the benefit of veterans as much as possible.

Oral Questions

If from time to time it means being a little more productive in terms of delivery per person and so on, I am sure he would find that a useful direction in which to proceed. That is what the minister is trying to do.

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UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister in charge of unemployment insurance. Earlier in Question Period he tried to make it sound as if the thousands and thousands of people that were parading through Montreal yesterday in -25C below were doing so because the opposition parties had misled them.

Does he not realize that when so many people show up in those types of temperatures, they are expressing a real concern? Their concern is that this government is changing the playing field. It is tilting so badly it is being completely unfair to any worker in this country. Is that not so?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, what it shows is yes, some people are concerned. I guess that as elected representatives of the people we have a duty to address these concerns and this is what we are doing.

If the hon. member is trying to tell Canadians that the NDP stands for the proposition that we should pay benefits to a person who voluntarily, without any reason whatsoever, chooses to become unemployed, I think he is wrong. Canadians would not support him.

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the same minister. In today's unemployment scene and recession Canadians are not quitting jobs to go skiing. Canadians are quitting jobs because they have to quit jobs.

The minister should understand that by changing the playing field, by making harassment such an issue, he is making it very difficult for people who should be receiving unemployment insurance. Why is he doing that? Why is he making sure that many Canadians will not receive unemployment insurance when they are entitled to it?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member can