

Supply

• (1615)

We are not through with these boards because, as members opposite have said they want, we should have a national apprenticeship program. That is a very commendable idea and nobody is going to say that it is not a good idea. We support the idea of apprenticeship programs in Canada and we have asked the labour force development board in conjunction with that other group that the opposition pooh-poohed, the prosperity initiative, to see if we could not bring together the parties involved.

It is not just a matter of the federal government coming down with an iron fist and saying this is how it will be done. First of all, we would not accomplish very much with that approach. Second, to a degree it is outside our jurisdiction.

That approach, apprenticeship programs, would be much more successful if we could convince the provincial governments that they ought to be on board for their share of an apprenticeship program, if we could convince industry that it ought to be on board for its share of an apprenticeship program and if we could convince the labour unions across Canada that they ought to be on board for their share of a program.

We have taken that approach to try to convince all the parties to come together to let us establish this apprenticeship program. No one is debating the merits of the idea. It is an excellent idea. The difference is over how to arrive at the result of having it.

The opposite side believes that the federal government is all powerful and can simply order it to happen. We on this side believe that the way it can happen best is by encouraging all of the participants to actively join together to make this happen. We cannot legislate a result of that magnitude. We need co-operation, and the way we have gone about it is to seek that co-operation.

I have talked about the labour force development board and the \$1.8 billion. The other item that we cannot ignore is the almost \$2 billion that will be put through the Minister of Employment and Immigration into the whole issue of retraining programs. Training for those who are on social services, those who have lost their jobs and young people is very critical. It is critical to meet the needs of industry that these people have access to

retraining programs. We have established some retraining programs and that means that in total the Government of Canada is spending some \$3.8 billion a year on retraining when it is combined with the Labour Force Development Strategy. Is that enough?

I guess we would like to have more but the only way we can have more is by raising taxes or by raising unemployment insurance premiums, neither of which Canadians can afford or want.

We have taken an approach to try to encourage people to hire. In the budget of last month, which the opposition condemned, the minister presented a program that was a continuation of the December announcement in which those companies who want to hire new or additional employees, particularly a small business, would be given a waiver of increased premiums on unemployment insurance. That was a positive step. It is a small sum, about 2 per cent or 2.5 per cent of the cost of hiring a new person, but it was a contribution that the federal government through the Unemployment Insurance Commission made to encourage people to hire additional employees. That was condemned by those opposite but it was a small step to bring some people back to work.

There are a number of other programs that the federal government did deal with. One of the members opposite yelled out: "Cancel the helicopter program and that would solve the problem". The problem that we on this side of the House have been facing for nine years is the method and attitudes of Liberal governments of the past. Unfortunately we face the same problem right now in Ontario because of the policies of the Liberal Government of Ontario in the past. It got on a spending track that made absolutely no sense.

Members opposite say cancel the helicopter program and we will save \$4.4 billion. We know that is not correct. We will not save \$4.4 billion because we have to do something with the existing fleet of helicopters in order to keep them flying.

In the first year we may save several million dollars by repairing the old or keeping it flying rather than buying new ones. If one spreads that expenditure out over the life expectancy of the helicopter fleet we are talking about, and I believe it is through the year 2010, our