

Oral Questions

[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, while the government is trying to take credit for a drop in the unemployment rate, more than 20,000 young people are said to not even bother stating that they are looking for work. They are disillusioned with the job market and the government's apathy.

Will the Prime Minister face reality and recognize that, at a time when some 200,000 jobs are needed in Quebec to return to pre-recession levels, the drop in the unemployment rate is largely due to the fact that young people are disillusioned and have given up looking for work?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I believe that the employment situation has improved but we are extremely concerned with the unemployment rate among young people. This is why the Minister of Human Resources Development is working with the Secretary of State for Youth to set up a special program to create jobs for young people. I hope that we will be in a position to make an announcement on this program in the next few weeks.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, how can the Prime Minister keep defending his job-creation strategy when the bad reaction to his budget in the financial community, as well as the loss of credibility of both his finance minister and his government, are the main causes and obstacles to job creation in Canada?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we have a program to stimulate employment. This program was the main element of our election platform in 1993. We clearly stated what we intended to do. We are following our agenda. We are on the right track. So far, results are rather positive, but it will take time. We started off with an unemployment rate of 11.6 per cent. We do not think we can turn the situation around in just a few weeks or even a few months. We must continue to work; we have a well-thought-out plan which Canadians have accepted, and we need everyone's support if we are to succeed. The hon. member could also help. Indeed, if he talked about employment instead of always discussing separation, our country would be better off.

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[English]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

During last fall's election campaign any suggestion that a reformed UI program should be jointly funded by employers and

employees and should be run like a genuine insurance program was greeted with ridicule by Liberals.

Will the minister tell this House, as has been suggested in the media, if he is now considering funding the UI program solely on the backs of workers?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, by this time members of the Reform Party should learn not to trust everything that is printed because it comes from somewhat dubious sources.

In this case the story the hon. member is alluding to was a rumour that was apparently put forward by some bureaucrats from a couple of provincial governments. I do not think that is the most authentic source for proposals for changes in the federal UI program. I would suggest that once the hon. member gets his sources straight he may get his questions straight. Then I will be prepared to answer them.

● (1435)

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat): Mr. Speaker, it was a pretty straightforward question. I suggest the minister learn a little humility lest he end up unemployed as well.

Government reports over the last several years have recommended that the government move away from control of the UI program. Will the minister heed this advice and let employers and employees administer their own programs?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows we are presently engaged in a very major undertaking to look at a variety of the programs run by the government in order to achieve higher levels of employment.

We made some changes in the last budget which reduced UI premiums. That has been one of the contributing reasons there is a new sense of confidence in the economy, especially among small businesses.

I met with them and they told me that they feel this government is on the right track for job creation. We have consulted with business, labour and community interest groups, all of which have made various comments about the way in which we can apply a more effective unemployment insurance program.

I want to make one thing very clear. The unemployment insurance program does provide a very important service to millions of Canadians. We will protect the integrity of that program. What we want to do is improve the program and that is not the interest of the hon. member who wants to take the program apart.