

most generous in the world. This can create serious disincentives to upgrade skills, to work and to move to find work.

I would like the minister to comment on whether he agrees with that assessment of the unemployment insurance system. Assuming he does, would he share with Parliament his view on what features a new comprehensive social security program would have to combat those problems in the unemployment insurance system?

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate very much the hon. member's good wishes. We will certainly be in need of those as time progresses.

I look forward to the full co-operation of his caucus in this period of very substantial reform we wish to undertake.

There is the question of unemployment insurance. Over the years the evolution of that program has gone from one that provided temporary assistance to workers who were in between jobs to one that has provided a great deal of income security. This is especially so in industries where there are a lot of seasonal variations and where we have had to deal with very serious disruptions.

We are facing this now in the fishing industry. There have been times in his own province in the resource industry, in forestry and in the oil and gas industry where the unemployment insurance system has been an extraordinarily important base of support. It has also been a very important element in making the labour market work.

If I may be allowed one small digression. One of the false divisions we have in our country is that there is a thing called social policy and a thing called economic policy. That is not so. Good social policy leads to good economic policy and vice versa. If there are workers who feel that they have some security and some ability to move and change jobs then that helps the labour market work.

• (1655)

Therefore, I would say to the hon. member that there are some problems with unemployment insurance. There is no question that over time the program no longer meets many of the requirements. One of the things our Prime Minister has talked about and we feel strongly about is how to begin to make some transformations to have a system of employment insurance where the form of income security is designed to allow people to move back into the labour market, to create new work and to get new employment opportunities.

However, that must be linked up with the social assistance programs and the training programs. One cannot divorce them. That is really why I ask members opposite once again to agree with us. If we are going to make these reforms we must do them

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together. There are linkages in all the programs. Stop thinking for a moment about unemployment insurance or the Canada assistance plan or student aid. Think for a moment about the problems I outlined of displaced workers, changes in industry, new demographics and the problems of young people. If we start identifying the real root causes of those problems then we can begin to design the programs to meet them. That will be the intent of this Parliament.

I can say to the hon. member that he should get his shoes on because he is going to be running fast very soon.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to participate in this debate on the speech from the throne.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Speaker on his being elected as Speaker of the 35th Parliament. Indeed, I would like to pass on my congratulations to the Deputy Speaker. I want to assure the Speaker that we will endeavour to make your job easier and you can always count on us.

Mr. Speaker, with your permission since this is my maiden speech in this Chamber, I would like to dedicate my remarks today to the memory of my late father, Glen Johnston, who served from 1952 until 1967 in the Alberta legislature, in fact in the party that the Prime Minister this morning referred to as the grandfather of the Reform Party. In those years he served as the member of the legislature for Ponoka—Rimby.

It is my pleasure to carry on the legacy of hard work and caring support of his constituents, many of whom I represent today. To those people of the federal constituency of Wetaskiwin I thank them for their overwhelming support and their vote of confidence in me. I would like to assure them that I am dedicated to serving them and their interests in this House.

Let me say a little bit about the constituency of Wetaskiwin. It is located in central Alberta just north of the constituency of Red Deer and south of the Edmonton ridings. We are bounded on the north and northwest by the North Saskatchewan River and the terrain varies from heavily treed areas to the west to the prairie-like grain fields on the east. I am proud to say that we are a resource rich area. Agriculture, gas and oil are the engines that drive our economy. Our rich farmland is ideal for raising prime Alberta beef.

The Ponoka Stampede is an annual event. It is the second largest stampede in the west. I would like to invite the Speaker of the House and all members to join us on the Canada Day weekend for an exceptional stampede and rodeo.

Over the last year I have travelled extensively throughout the constituency speaking with many people and the message was loud and clear. People are concerned about the economic future of Canada and what kind of Canada their children and grandchildren are going to inherit.