

Government Orders

load is too great. Who suffers? It is mostly the people who are employed by them. Therefore our unemployment rates go up.

We need to decrease government red tape which is severely restricting the ability of companies to function properly. We must also decrease the debt.

We are not a slash and burn party. We have put forward constructive plans to enable us to decrease the debt, to get the deficit to zero, to prioritize social programs, to provide alternatives to social programs, to prioritize spending and to give people the skills to take care of themselves.

Ms. Hedy Fry (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I too should like to speak to Bill C-96.

The bill is simply a housekeeping bill that brings together a number of departments under one roof. Yet it has inflamed the emotions of both opposition parties. Their criticisms are so completely unjustified that I must wonder if in making the accusations both parties are really speaking to their not so hidden agenda.

Some members opposite see Bill C-96, particularly clause 6, as a power grab. I have no idea how they came to this conclusion because clause 6 simply states:

The powers, duties and functions of the Minister extend to and include all matters over which Parliament has jurisdiction and relating to the development of the human resources of Canada not by law assigned to any other Minister, department, board or agency of the Government of Canada, and are to be exercised with the objective of enhancing employment, encouraging equality and promoting social security.

Any reasonable objective analyst not fixated on a separatist agenda or decentralist ideology would see that clause as a statement of purpose. It lists clear and legitimate limits for the minister, whose mandate is and always has been to devise policies that enhance employment, encourage equality and promote social security.

Bill C-96 does not change federal or provincial powers at all. It does not tip the balance one way or the other. It neither increases nor reduces the minister's range of authority. The statutory powers of the department in place now are unchanged. I am sure members of both opposition parties who have basic reading comprehension skills must know that.

The bill does not establish new initiatives or alter existing ones in any way. Only those members opposite who have chosen to play the victim role to the hilt and who apparently see a potential humiliation in every act of the federal government would see a power grab in the bill.

The three objectives set out in clause 6 of the bill, enhancing employment, encouraging equality and promoting social security, have always been key objectives of the federal government, especially of Liberal federal governments.

If a national government is not in the business of creating jobs, promoting equality of opportunity and establishing a social safety net, what is its business? Any federal government on the globe that is not totally anaemic, corrupt or viciously insensitive must have these fundamental objectives, especially the government of a country that has been named for the third year running the best country in the world in which to live. If the Canadian government were to drop these objectives, the official opposition would be the first to scream unjust and declare yet another humiliation of Quebec.

The Canadian government is constitutionally responsible for unemployment insurance and for creating and operating programs that help unemployed Canadians find employment no matter where they live in the country. In my riding in British Columbia COAST and FOCUS YWCA have provided and continue to provide invaluable services, especially for single moms on welfare. Currently many of these programs do not receive funding from the B.C. government when they are actually saving tens of thousands of dollars in welfare payments.

• (1050)

The federal Government of Canada has an international obligation under a convention of the International Labour Organization to provide national labour market information and exchange for all Canadians. The federal government is responsible for national economic growth and development. Therefore it is common sense that it must be involved in training.

If we have learned one thing over the past decade it is that a well trained workforce is absolutely essential if we want to remain competitive in the global marketplace and to maintain our standard of living as number one in the world. The strongest most innovative economies in the world today, Japan and Germany, have become what they are largely because of their national policies that emphasize training.

The federal government must be able to assist those affected by special situations that go beyond the jurisdictions of any one province, such as workers in the fishing industry, older workers displaced by restructuring of the economy or the dispossessed youth of Canada. In my riding Youth Service Canada projects have benefited youths very directly.

The federal government has absolutely no interest in having powers just because it wants them. The Minister of Human Resources Development said it very well when he said that we must combine resources across the country so that when one area is facing high unemployment another area helps to support it.

That is the Canadian way. That is why we have a federal country and a federal government. One part of the country supports another when it is undergoing trouble. It is a family in which we all help each other in times of need, because we know