

Oral Questions

architects and engineers would be appointed by April 15. It was also announced there would be a progress report on September 30 this year. However, the people of the South Shore and the greater Montreal area complain that nothing has been done. What is happening on this score, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, since the hon. member for Longueuil used to sit on this side of the House, he ought to know that the Space Agency is a very complex dossier and that it is part of the overall plan for space development in Canada.

The Space Agency itself has proceeded with a number of operations, including the transfer of a number of people to Saint-Hubert and Montreal. In a matter of weeks I should be in a position to announce that not just the agency but the whole space program has been finalized, and I think the people in Saint-Hubert and Montreal and across this country will be delighted with the announcement I intend to make in the weeks to come.

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[English]

BILL C-21

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

This year, for the first time in 14 years, the government refused to pass the variable entrance requirement bill for unemployment insurance. In the face of a recession the government held thousands of Canadians in high unemployment regions hostage to the passage of the bill, which regrettably passed last night in the Senate.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Tobin: Mr. Speaker, now the applause has died down, perhaps the government can tell us, then, why the government announced today that it will take four more weeks for this bill to be implemented and an additional four weeks to process UI claims, so that the net effect of the passage of the bill is that thousands of Canadians in

high unemployment areas right across this country will not have any income for Christmas.

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I think there are three or four things that the hon. member should know. First of all, at least part of the delay having to do with the fishing benefits concerned a compromise between the Senate and the elected House through our desire to be reasonable. Had we accepted the amendment originally proposed by the Senate, it would have taken longer.

Second, I would like to point out it was this elected House of Commons that passed this act originally. It is the policy of this elected House, and it is about time it went into place. Third, let me point out that when the Liberal government changed the law with Bill C-69, Royal Assent was on December 20, 1975 and the bill went into effect only on July 4, 1976, six months and 14 days later.

• (1500)

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, the minister has obviously, inadvertently, given completely false information to the people of Canada. It must have been inadvertent because the fact remains a VER bill was before this House on December 19 and again in June, and on both occasions her party voted down the VER, not the Liberal Party of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, my question is very simple. For 14 years her department has been administering a 10-week rule, there is nothing new. Why are we waiting eight weeks for people to be eligible for their unemployment insurance? Why are we stealing Christmas from thousands of the poorest of the poor families of Canada?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member was so concerned about the unemployed, I do not see why he did not urge his Senate colleagues to pass this bill months ago.

The changes to the fishing benefits for self-employed fishermen go into effect on November 4. The changes to the entrance requirements and durations go into effect on November 18. We are all ready to move as fast as we can, in terms of sending out the cheques and processing claims. But the hon. member knows as well as I do that under the law of the land our hands are tied, in terms of