

Unemployment Insurance Act

Canadians for the challenges that a competitive workforce is going to create.

This Government is not creating that international competition. It is simply allowing Canadians the opportunity to respond to the pressures which we face internationally.

This Bill proposes to change the schedule of benefits under UI to make it more responsive to varying regional unemployment rates. Not only will this legislation achieve this goal, but it will also free up resources within the UI fund to be spent on training. Almost \$1.3 billion will be redirected toward training, providing benefits to older Canadians, and increasing maternity or parental benefits. I am sure all Members of the House will agree that these are important and laudable goals.

At present, once an employee reaches the age of 65 he or she is no longer eligible for assistance from the UI fund. Indeed, if an employee turns 65 while collecting benefits, those benefits are immediately cut off. My constituents have expressed to me that they found the situation intolerable. I am pleased to see this Bill before the House since this unfair and previously discriminatory provision in the UI system will finally be removed. This Bill will extend UI coverage to older Canadians who choose to delay their retirement.

More than this, the changes as a result of this Bill to the UI system will enable the Government to develop a \$100 million program to help displaced older workers. We will be assisting older Canadians to advance their skills, to retrain, and, if necessary, to upgrade their education.

I cannot stress enough how important this issue is. I have talked to constituents on the streets of High River and other communities in southern Alberta. I cannot count the number of people who have mentioned the special difficulty faced by older Canadians seeking work. This is a very fair, compassionate and practical measure.

This Bill will also provide much needed assistance to Canadian families. These are challenging times in which to raise children. I know that the Government should continue to provide support to Canadian families. Changes to our tax system have allowed parents more flexibility in choosing how to care for their children. This Bill and the changes it will bring to the UI system reflect

the Government's continuing commitment to help strengthen Canadian families.

A full \$450 million has been earmarked for maternity or parental benefits. Like other initiatives the Government has taken, parents will have more flexibility in how they choose to care for their new-born baby. Canadian families will be able to count on having as much as 30 weeks of UI benefits to help them through the financial struggle of having a child. It will also provide more flexibility to the system so that potentially both parents will have an opportunity to be with their youngster during those exciting first few weeks.

Mr. Wappel: What a joke!

Mr. Hughes: My colleague mentions jokes. I note this for interest because colleagues opposite talk of how reallocating UI funds is not acceptable to them. It is nothing new. The Opposition which today is so strongly against this idea are members of the Party which was involved in changing the allocation of UI funds in the first place.

Let us go back to 1976. The Minister of Manpower, Bud Cullen, said: "Amendments will also allow us to take a more positive approach to unemployment through resource allocation. It will permit experimentation with the use of unemployment insurance funds for programs of training, work sharing, and job creation". Today, the crowd opposite tries to oppose these very kinds of principles. It is remarkable.

I turn my attention to another important aspect. As part of this Government's efforts to assist areas experiencing unreasonably high unemployment, the Community Futures Program was developed. In my riding of Macleod, just as one example, there are areas, as there are in other parts of the country, in real need of economic development and diversification. The Government has made long-term substantial commitments to provide assistance to these areas.

For example, in the Crowsnest Pass, which includes a number of communities, the Government has committed over \$2 million to the Business Development Centre of the Crowsnest Pass Economic Development Board.

The Government has also committed \$400,000, approximately, to the Crowsnest Pass through the Self-Employment Incentive Program, a very practical