

Oral Questions

Every premier and every health minister across the country recognizes that point. The five principles that are enshrined in the Canada Health Act are clearly the basis upon which the Government of Canada bases its policies.

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POVERTY

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, in an interview this weekend the Conservative member for Don Valley North said, and I quote: "There are many people who go to food banks and who are not there because they absolutely need the food; they are there because that gives them more money to spend on other things".

I want to ask the Acting Prime Minister this: The member's comments are clearly insulting to the two million people whose only choice is to rely on food banks, the one in six children in Canada who live in poverty.

Does the Acting Prime Minister share the views of the member for Don Valley North or does he believe that instead of blaming the victim his government should come in with a program to really address poverty in this country?

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship): Mr. Speaker, we know that unfortunately there are poor and hungry people in this country. Our approach has been to improve the well-being of all of our citizens. This we have been doing through our economic initiatives and the agenda that has been put forward by the finance minister and Deputy Prime Minister. The best form of assistance is a job. We wish that everybody could contribute in a meaningful way to the building of our society.

• (1425)

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister. There was no answer as to whether this government agrees that in fact we should be addressing the issue of poverty.

[*Translation*]

It is shocking, it is incredible that the chair of the poverty committee thinks that the solution to poverty is just to change the definition of the word.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister as well deny that one child in six lives in poverty and that 4 million people are poor in this country? Does he too deny that poverty really exists?

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship): Mr. Speaker, we have already taken some initiatives. We increased the child tax credit to \$2.1 billion and the new "Brighter Futures" program announced by the Minister of National Health and Welfare provides about \$500 million.

We are suffering from the current situation in our country, and we want all citizens to have an opportunity to contribute to a better life.

I am working with all community groups, which are doing an outstanding job in this field to help people who need a hand, and I appreciate all they do.

[*English*]

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, the minister responding should work with the Minister of Finance who has cut many of those community groups that were in fact defining poverty in the community. The reality is that one in six children in this country lives in poverty. The minister says the answer is greater employment. We agree.

My question is: When is this government prepared to bring in a jobs plan for Canadians, when is this government prepared to admit that poverty exists, that employment is the solution? We agree. Where is the jobs plan?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member would have to agree that the latest GDP statistics are very encouraging: .4 for the month of February which means if we take the last three months, December, January and February, we have got annualized growth of something in the order of 4 per cent. There have been over 200,000 full-time new jobs created since last August. The employment growth rate since November on an annualized basis has been growing at the rate of 2.8 per cent.

It clearly demonstrates some of the initiatives that we took in last February's budget and the complementary actions that we took in the December statement, such as the investment in physical and human resources, the investment in infrastructure, the investment in more training, the incentives for small business, the initiatives