

*Government Orders*

I listened to the complaints about changes to the unemployment insurance by the Official Opposition. Its concerns show us just how off track the unemployment insurance program is. It proves that unemployment insurance is perceived as a way for social engineers to redistribute income. It proves that unemployment insurance is no longer a true insurance program but a glorified welfare program. The Reform Party would like to change all that. The Reform Party wants to return unemployment insurance to a true insurance program, not a welfare program. We want to get this standing on all four feet, sound and well supported.

• (1600)

Reformers take great pride in getting the principles right before us, starting right at the beginning in reforming the program. The government has launched a two year process to reform our social programs and not once has the minister described the principles on which the government's reforms are based. We find this appalling that no principles have been put forth which this program would stand on. Canadians deserve better.

I challenge the minister and the Official Opposition to ask their constituents some hard questions about the future of our social programs and the future of our unemployment insurance program. I did not describe unemployment insurance as a social program because it is not, it is an insurance program.

If we are going to truly reform the system, then we have to start with two fundamental principles, two fundamental questions. First, why is the government in the unemployment insurance business? Second, why is unemployment insurance compulsory?

Reformers do not think that the government is qualified to answer these questions, but know that the Canadian taxpayer and the workers and the employers who pay the bills are. Reformers have been asking Canadians what they think for years now and we believe it is time the government started asking the same people what should be done.

If the government has the courage to ask ordinary Canadians what they think, it will be surprised by the answers. Here are some of the questions, and I want to spend most of my time outlining the questions that the government should be asking.

First, would taxpayers like to have social programs designed so that they eliminate all duplication between the federal government and other levels of government? Would they like programs designed that way?

Many Canadians see unemployment insurance and welfare as basically providing similar support for the same people. They see little reason for two large bureaucracies, one federal, one provincial, doing essentially the same thing.

It is time to make clear distinctions between income supplements and income insurance and to clarify exactly which level of government is responsible for delivering those services.

I also believe that the level of government that is closest to the people is most often in the best position to effectively administer these types of programs.

Second, would taxpayers like to have social programs structured to lessen the dependency on the system and encourage clients to become economically productive? This is the question the government should be asking.

Third, would taxpayers agree that our social programs should be designed in such a way as to encourage administrators to achieve the stated goals of the program, for example lower unemployment?

Fourth, would taxpayers like to have social programs that are financially sustainable? In particular, should the unemployment insurance program be self-financing? I wonder what the answer would be if we asked taxpayers those questions.

Fifth, if the government is going to initiate large scale reforms to our income security system and unemployment insurance programs, should the government hold a national referendum to ask for the approval of the majority of Canadians? If we make all these changes, should they not be given some say in the final outcome?

Six, would taxpayers prefer to have the UI program operate like a true insurance program, meaning that workers who make repeated claims on the system and employers who repeatedly lay off workers would have to pay higher premiums for the higher risk that they represent?

• (1605)

Seven, would taxpayers like to make our income security and unemployment insurance programs truly accountable? Would Canadians like to receive annual statements indicating how much they paid into each program and how much they received in benefits?

Eight, do taxpayers think that income security programs should be targeted to those who need them most?

Nine, would taxpayers prefer to have income security programs and the unemployment insurance program treat all Canadians equally regardless of the area in the country in which they reside? Should they be treated equal no matter where they are? While reformers believe that Canadians have a right to live anywhere they want in this great country we also believe that no one has a right to become a permanent ward of the state.

The next question is would taxpayers agree that the goal of the unemployment insurance program be to minimize and if possible eliminate all abuse to the system? I am sure that people would agree.