

*The Address*

**Mr. Hoepfner:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know if there have been too many adopted. There is an old saying on the farm that kind words and good intentions do not feed any critters. That is pretty well all I have heard in this Parliament during the first few weeks I have been here. I think that is all the farmers and the unemployed heard in the last Parliament.

I think it needs action, not just words and good intentions.

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville):** Congratulations, Mr. Speaker, on your election and appointment. I also wish to congratulate the Prime Minister and each of the members elected to this House.

I pledge to support the positive reforms the government introduces and condemn any and all policies and legislation which does not have the support of the majority of Canadians or my constituents.

I have lived in a number of countries in the world and I always keep coming home to Yorkton—Melville, the heart of Canada's parkland area.

An issue which has been raised in the House more than any other is which riding is the most beautiful riding in Canada. I suggest, when the more pressing issues are behind us, that this matter could be resolved once and for all in a special day-long debate.

The voters of Yorkton—Melville deserve a special thank you for their participation in the democratic process and for electing me as their servant. I pledge to faithfully represent my constituents' views in Ottawa regardless of the party or candidate they supported. I am their spokesperson. Through me their voices will be heard in this Chamber.

I saved my most important thank you for the last, that being to my wife Lydia, my family and friends. Without their support I would not be here.

The throne speech mentions a lot about the need for reform of the social security system. Unfortunately our so-called safety nets have been catching more people than the fish nets in Newfoundland have been catching cod in the last few years. In fact, in addition to the 1.6 million unemployed there are another 869,000 workers who are so discouraged that they have given up looking for work. If this is not discouraging enough, the *Globe and Mail* reported last week that almost a third of Canada's work force is locked into insecure jobs. The end result: unemployment insurance now costs employers, workers and taxpayers almost \$20 billion a year.

Between 1972 and 1992 the number of welfare recipients has more than doubled to over 2.7 million people. In 1992-93 it cost the federal government \$7.3 billion. Taxpayers get hit again and again as the provincial and municipal governments have to pay

their share as well. These statistics are clear evidence of a failing economy.

In Newfoundland it seems that the only nets that are full are the safety nets. The system, not the people, is to blame.

The replacement of both unemployment insurance and social assistance with an income supplement plan which would direct over 85 per cent of the money currently spent on these programs to the people in Newfoundland who are most in need was recommended by the Economic Recovery Commission report recently published.

The report is a condemnation of the existing social security system. Page 6 of this report states: "On the whole, the current system has induced an unconscionable degree of dependency which is unfair to contributors to the unemployment insurance fund and, in light of recent fiscal restraints, is not sustainable".

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In Saskatchewan our safety nets are also full and overflowing. In the last 20 years the amount of money spent on social assistance programs has increased seven times. In 1991-92 the case-load was over 28,000 people, 47 per cent were considered fully employable. The taxpayers would not feel so bad if they saw that the money we were spending was actually solving the problem. But it is not.

It does not matter whether you live in Cornerbrook, Newfoundland or Yorkton, Saskatchewan, the system is sick and getting sicker.

I would like to commend the government for the commitment to announce an action plan for a major reform of the social security system within the next two years and for its commitment to involve Canadians in the consultative process.

I also wish to commend the provincial governments that are leading the way on income security reform in this country, particularly the provinces of New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Alberta. The time for protecting each other's turf is long past. The time for true innovation and common sense solutions is at hand. Canadians not only expect this of us, they deserve it.

While we are encouraged by the government's commitment to undertake a consultative process for the next two years, we are surprised by the lack of detail about what direction modernization and restructuring might take. Yes, Canadians want to be directly involved in the process of change, but they expect some leadership when we are embarking on what appears to be a complete overhaul of our income security system.

If the government's action plan is to succeed it will have to pass several tests. First of all, will our social programs be financially sustainable or will we keep mortgaging our children's future?

Second, will unemployment insurance be returned to the principles of a true insurance plan?