

Supply

● (1055)

We know we have to invest in those areas. We also know that increasingly people need to get re-employment much quicker and faster than they do now and that there are useful tested means of achieving that.

We spent the last two years working on various projects using wage supplements where the small business community that wants to hire a new worker but does not have quite the cash flow or is concerned it will not get full productivity or full learning in the first six or eight months is reluctant to make that commitment. Wage supplements open the door. We have seen in place after place that we have 70 per cent to 80 per cent improvement in job retention as a result of that measure and that we can extend work by 14 or 15 weeks. This is what is important, that we add about \$4,000 to \$5,000 additional income.

In talking about the employment insurance program, people get tied down talking about their benefits. What we have to talk about is their income. How do we improve people's income? The best way to improve income is by employment. That is the best way of doing it. If people simply rely year after year on a benefit program they begin to lose the ability to be in the job market and also their income does not grow. Governments are having tight times. Provincial governments everywhere are cutting back on those assistance programs. The real thing is to have a spring-board back into the job market.

We have said we are going to take all the programs we have, 39 programs, and bring them down to five simple employment measures. These are not programs with their own organizations and their own bureaucracies, but a basic set of measures that are available to individuals to get back to work. They make the choice.

I find it amazing that the members of the opposition do not have much trust in individual choice, that they really do not believe that individuals can exercise the right to decide how to get back to work and how to make these tools work. They really have lost faith in the right of individuals to be able to choose and decide, not exclusively but with some support. We know that oftentimes individuals thrown totally into the market by themselves do need some assistance, but assistance that works.

However, the opposition members talk about transferring from one government to another and all these kinds of things. They have lost the sense that individuals are what really count and that they should be given the opportunities to make those choices. At the same time, they have also lost something else that is very important to recognize. It goes back to the fundamental importance of the employment insurance system: it is a federal constitutional responsibility and people pay in premiums.

The hon. member from the Bloc Quebecois shakes his head. This is a party that spends its entire question period and its entire existence in the House arguing about federalism in the Constitution. Yet this hon. gentleman does not know that in 1941 the provinces ceded responsibility for unemployment insurance to the federal government. That is incredible ignorance for someone who likes to say he knows what he is talking about. He does not know a simple reality of the history of this country.

When people pay a premium they have a right to a benefit. That is what they are investing in, the right to that benefit. Now the Bloc Quebecois is saying no, just turn the money over to a bunch of bureaucrats and they will decide whether they get the benefit for not; it is no longer his or her right as an individual to have that benefit. That is what the Bloc members are saying in this motion, that individuals in Quebec who pay a premium no longer will be assured of the right to get the benefit of that because it is going to be decided somewhere else. As a result, the fundamental principle of the insurance program is taken away.

I do not think that is a very popular notion in Quebec or anywhere else. What is recognized is that they are fundamentally undermining the philosophy of the insurance program, which is that people contribute to protect themselves against the risk of unemployment. That is what it is all about.

● (1100)

I am surprised at the lack of understanding of the hon. member about the history of federalism in the country wherein that was ceded by the provinces to give us the insurance program. I am even more concerned about the sense of neglect of the principle of insurance, that is that people pay for the protection.

Basically we are saying that they will be eligible for an income benefit and an employment benefit. The employment benefit has within it five basic measures, including a wage supplement, with highly effective evaluations in terms of getting people back to work.

Income supplements tested out in New Brunswick and British Columbia over the past year show that people on lower incomes who would not take jobs because the income was not sufficient to pay for their family needs will take the jobs if there is a small top up. Thirty-three per cent are now back to work today compared to only 3 per cent in the general area of proven success.

Canada is the self-employment capital of the world. We are generating more opportunities for individuals to start their own businesses. In a matter of two years of testing the program for unemployment insurance, over 30,000 people started their own businesses. Each created a job for another person. In other words 60,000 jobs were created as a result of the measure.