

*Oral Questions***NORTHERN BENEFITS**

Mr. Réginald Bélair (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. It concerns the task force report on northern and isolated areas.

Two weeks ago the minister told me that he refuses to meet with the mayors of my riding and other ridings of northern Canada. Is he willing to reconsider his decision and, at the very least, let the program remain as is with the distance factor being the only criterion to qualify?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I did indicate to my hon. friend that with the budget coming up it is very difficult to meet with a broad range of people on this particular subject. I appreciate the hon. member's interest in this. If he wishes to convey any specific suggestions to me, I will be happy to look at those.

Mr. Réginald Bélair (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, I certainly will.

[Translation]

In December 1986, you issued a press release that contained the following statement:

The program's new provisions are fair and reasonable. They renew the commitment made by the Conservative Government to residents in the North and isolated posts.

Does the Minister intend to keep his word and honour the commitments he made to residents in Canada's North?

[English]

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member is well aware of the inequities that this program has had, inequities that we are trying to resolve.

We have asked the task force to come up with some proposals. Those proposals were provided by the task force last October. They are under review now. Once we have had an opportunity to have a full study of those, we will be making our decision.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (York North): Mr. Speaker, last Friday we heard the Minister of Employment and Immigration give the government's response to double digit unemployment faced by Canada's students. The response was a 35 per cent cut to the SEED program.

The Canadian Federation of Students estimates that 24,000 jobs will be affected.

Will the minister reconsider these cuts and return to the students their much needed summer jobs as they continue to struggle with higher tuition fees, an increasing debt load, escalating education costs and the future threat of the GST on their education?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I the hon. member and the Canadian Federation of Students know that the average unemployment rate among students aged 20 to 24 last year was 4.7 per cent. That is well below what it is for other people of that age group in other sectors of the population.

I have said that we will make our program sensitive to those regions where there is some higher unemployment than there is in other areas.

I remind the hon. member that in the area that is inhabited by himself and myself there were more jobs than there were young people to fill them last summer.

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (York North): Mr. Speaker, when I get up in this House I speak for students throughout Canada, not merely for students in my own area.

Both post-secondary education students and high school students need much assistance. What made the minister's announcement shocking was the fact that the stay-in-school initiative channels funds away from students and gives it to useless, expensive propaganda machines and a bureaucratic maze of consultants.

I will give you some free advice—

Some hon. members: Order!

Mr. Bevilacqua: Why does the minister not give the money directly to the students, not to the bureaucrats and the various businesses which will be making money on this particular program?