

Government Orders

encourage job seeking; and 85 per cent would make alterations in order to produce a more skilled workforce.

In 1988 the UI Act allowed more than 105,000 claimants to get skills training. We propose now to reallocate \$350 million of UI funds to further increase training opportunities for claimants. With the help of the private sector sponsors an additional 60,000 claimants will be prepared for a lifetime of labour force participation.

As well, we intend to offer even more assistance to the unemployed. Early in their claims they will be referred to job search information counselling services and job training programs on an individual basis. This is the extra help Canadians are asking for.

The reallocation of UI money will also boost entrepreneurship by allowing claimants to use their benefits to start their own businesses. To enhance re-employment prospects we will also provide financial aid to claimants who choose to move to find jobs.

In addition, this bill adds another chapter in the evolution of UI as a fair and just income security program. In line with some human rights concerns changes are being made that will benefit older workers and enhance parental benefits. Currently, the UI benefits cease after a person reaches age 65. This bill will extend regular benefits to all workers regardless of age.

In addition, the current inflexible sickness and maternity benefits are being improved. A new multi-tiered system will allow 15 weeks of maternity benefits, 10 weeks of parental and 15 weeks sickness. All together 30 weeks of special benefits will be available to eligible workers. For parents such progressive income protection allows flexibility in making the arrangements to care for children. For those workers who become sick while claiming UI this bill will provide greater income security.

This fall I travelled across the country with the committee to look at the implications of this legislation. Media coverage, I am afraid, has unduly focused on the negative and inaccurate comments. The changes we are proposing are not intended to take away benefits from certain regions or deny assistance to unemployed people. This bill, in fact, will allow more individualized and increased assistance for claimants in addition to channel-

ing more income security in most of the disadvantaged regions.

Most importantly the changes proposed by this bill are not intended to save money for the government. The employment development measures will be funded by re-allocating up to 15 per cent of the funds used for UI benefits. That money will become available under new measures that will shorten the benefit period and increase the entrance requirements in regions that are economically more buoyant. However, if the unemployed rate rises the entrance requirements and benefit period may be modified accordingly.

For example, in a region such as Toronto where unemployment is below 6 per cent, the new program will require 20 weeks of work to qualify instead of 14 weeks under the old system. Toronto claimants who had worked the minimum amount to qualify for benefits would receive a maximum of 17 weeks of benefits under the new system. For the same amount of work they would receive 20 weeks of benefits under the former system.

By contrast, in parts of Newfoundland where the unemployment rate is 15 per cent and over, qualifying requirements will not change. As before, the claimant will need 10 weeks of work to qualify for a maximum of 50 weeks of benefits. In regions that are economically disadvantaged the unemployed will continue to be covered by UI. They will be able to take advantage of the new training programs we are developing.

Bill C-21 is part of the solution to a labour market problem that has great implications for Canada. Without developing the skills of our workers the standard of living Canadians enjoy now is doomed to diminish. Our UI program cannot continue just to provide income security to unemployed Canadians; it must also help them learn how to survive in the competitive market our country is now developing.

This government has called upon business and labour to co-operate in this challenge. Canadians have told us that they want the UI program to reflect current market trends. With our partners we are now making it possible for unemployed Canadians to break away from the cycle