

Government Orders

Where they do in those particular circumstances, I do not see how any reasonable member of this House or of the public could say: "Oh well, it does not matter, they can just go and get UI". It was not the intention of UI nor do I think it is fair to the contributors, the employees, the employers and the general public who are involved in this program. UI is there for a very important specific purpose. It has been around for many, many years and will continue for many more years.

This bill with these changes can lead us forward by recognizing such issues as sexual harassment as well as verbal or physical harassment. There is a good definition that has been set out for harassment. Those persons who may be victims of harassment do not have to continue in those circumstances. They will be dealt with fairly at all stages of the process.

They will continue to be eligible for unemployment insurance and hopefully be able to get on with their lives. We can begin to deal more effectively with the whole issue of sexual harassment in the work place. This government believes it is a serious issue. It is one in which we all want to work together.

We want partnerships with employers, employees and unions to eradicate harassment from the work place so all individuals can be productive in their work lives without having to suffer from the fear or actuality of harassment and particularly sexual harassment.

That component of this bill combined with the broader measures to bring government spending under control is good news for the women of Canada. Women of Canada who are increasingly involved in the business community can take advantage of some of the new provisions that are being provided under our Small Businesses Loans Act. There is a time of grace when they will not have to contribute to UI and that will encourage the employment of more people. All of these measures will help us get our economy on track and encourage and improve the situation for women and all Canadians.

Mr. David Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond):
Madam Speaker, I have listened attentively to the

minister's intervention. Knowing her interest in the subject matter, I guess it would be safe to assume the minister had a fair amount to do with the provisions contained in this particular bill. I am making reference, of course, to the phrase and subject matter of sexual harassment.

Since the minister is responsible for the status of women, my first question is with regard to staff training. Since the minister has been so seized of the subject matter would she indicate to the House, in response to my question, how much money has been allotted for the purpose of training staff in order to make them more sensitive to the concerns which could be raised by potential claimants as they relate to sexual harassment? I am sure the minister has that in her briefing book.

The second question I ask the minister is that on page 2 of the news release from the minister, she indicated that the board of referees will be given a clear mandate. That is what the minister said: "a clear mandate with regard to the privacy of the victims".

In fact the news release says on page 2:

Boards of referees would be given clear authority to protect the privacy of victims of sexual or other harassment.

That is what the minister says. That is what the news release says but the law says something different. The law says:

That the chairperson of the board may direct that the hearing be held in camera or that the details concerning the circumstances not be published.

It is also discretionary for the applicant. I am not asking the minister to make a decision right now but would the minister consider the possibility of just changing that? Would she make it very clear that on the claimant's application it would say "shall" and not "it may" or "it may not"? I point out to the minister there is a discrepancy here.

There may be one kind of decision made by the board of referees in British Columbia and quite a different decision made by the board of referees in Newfoundland.