

Government Orders

We have to bring it back to the community level. We have to engage people at the community level. It is for this reason that one of the initiatives speaks to a communities opportunity pool, allowing individuals to develop and contribute to community based projects and initiatives where they live.

We are also cognizant of the fact that we live in a changing world where the environment and sustainable economic growth are extremely important to the lives of Canadians regardless of which region they are from. It is for this reason that we introduced, as part of the package, green projects that connect the environment and the community with the view to improve the skills and long term employment opportunities for those people who choose to participate in this initiative.

Fundamental to this program is also mobility assistance, to provide relocation support for those who wish to find work outside their community and of course portable wage subsidies to allow employers outside the fishery to hire people and provide on the job training.

It is extremely important to note that where these initiatives are concerned we have built safeguards that will ensure there is no abuse of the programs and services offered.

• (1215)

We must remember that while TAGS is an active support measure, the fish plant older worker adjustment program is more in line with the traditional way of giving support to people. It will provide income support to older workers who have worked all their lives and, may I add, worked very hard. This program is an investment in their dignity and in their self-worth.

I believe it is essential to reiterate the Atlantic groundfish strategy. One of the key features of this strategy is that it is built on mutual responsibility. That is a very important principle. As such, it represents a significant change from the traditional way of giving income support provided by the previous groundfish programs that ended on May 15, 1994. Of course I am referring to NCARP and AGAP.

No one is obliged to participate in the strategy. Anyone can opt out for an alternative. That is their personal choice.

In addition to active income support, the strategy is a departure from the traditional, ineffective at times, ways of the past. At no time under this strategy program will participants be trained for jobs that do not exist. They will work at jobs that need to be done or trained for employment that will give them a chance at a future job.

In short, what is fundamental to note about this program is that TAGS is the opposite of a cynical, short lived, make work program. Those types of programs are part of the history books.

As a nation in financial, social and economic terms we simply cannot afford to go on in the same manner in which we have for decades. Conditions are simply not the same.

Other measures to encourage and assist workers include continued employment counselling, literacy programs and general education upgrading, all with the objective of connecting people to the emerging reality of a diversified economy, of giving people the skills and opportunities required to meet the challenges of this century, to meet the challenges of a nation in a global economy that is changing at a very fast pace.

When we say that people must continue to upgrade, when we say that most jobs by the year 2010 will require over 16 years of education, when we say that the future really belongs to the learners, the people who are willing to upgrade their skills, the people who are willing to take risks and challenges, the people who are willing to take the time to acquire the new economy skills that are required, those individuals are going to be the winners of the new economic system, those people who are willing to challenge future trends.

That is a message not only for the Atlantic fish workers and plant workers we are talking about today, but that is the challenge for all Canadians regardless of where they come from.

• (1220)

Atlantic Canadians are faced with diminishing resources on one hand and a changing economy on the other. This program we are speaking about today speaks to the challenges they are facing, adding to the effectiveness of the strategy that will be implemented in a context of wider commitments to eliminate duplication, overlap and to support development efforts in a co-ordinated manner. This means we must bring government departments together and toward this end the initiatives of the Atlantic groundfish strategy will complement the functions of regional economic development agencies such as ACOA and FORD-Q.

Even within government we have to accept change and even within government we must adapt to the realities of the new economy.

As members are aware, FORD-Q is focusing on economic diversification for eastern Quebec and the north shore. This initiative has as its clientele fishers and communities affected by the crisis, small and medium sized businesses, entrepreneurs, new business start-ups and non profit organizations such as Alliance des pêcheurs du Québec. FORD-Q serves an umbrella function, facilitating local and regional initiatives in concert with the Quebec government.

ACOA will place a similar emphasis on community economic development in finding innovative ways to enhance the potential of the communities, of the people, of the labour force; their potential within an Atlantic Canada context.