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EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REFORM

Question by:

The Honourable Diane Bellemare

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

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Hon. Diane Bellemare: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate. Senator Gold, perhaps you saw the ad published in Saturday's edition of *Le Devoir* by Quebec's Conseil national des chômeurs et chômeuses. The purpose of the ad was to draw attention to the urgent need to reform the EI system.

On October 23, the Institute for Socio-economic Research and Information published a research paper on a proposal to reform the employment insurance system to meet the challenges of the 21st century. These public statements are the latest in a series of policy stances taken by a multitude of stakeholders representing the private sector, workers and several community groups.

In its 2021 budget, the federal government promised consultations on EI reform. The budget provided \$5 million over two years to conduct these consultations. However, the Speech from the Throne did not mention EI once.

Senator Gold, where is the government on its EI reform plan? What is the status of the consultations planned in the last budget? Can you provide us with a clear road map of the steps in the planned public consultations? Can you also provide us with a written response to that effect? I think a number of groups would be happy to have that information.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question. I will be pleased to provide a written response when I receive the information. My oral response will no doubt be somewhat predictable in that I will inquire with the government and come back with a response.

I would like to note that although it wasn't mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, I am advised that the government knows that Canada and Canadians need a modern employment insurance system. This issue hasn't been forgotten just because of the COVID-19 pandemic or the election.

Senator Bellemare: As you know, Quebec is dealing with a serious labour shortage. In September, Quebec's job vacancy rate was 7.3%, which amounts to 280,000 unfilled positions. This is unprecedented in Quebec or anywhere else.

In the meantime, the number of people actively looking for work was more than 255,000. To address this problem, yesterday the provincial government announced a \$3.9-billion five-year plan to provide bursaries and allowances for people willing to participate in training and skills development in certain key sectors.

Senator Gold, don't you think we could make better use of EI to address these problems?

As the Government Representative in the Senate, you are also able to share our questions with the government. I would like to make a small suggestion. Why doesn't the government task the Senate with conducting public consultations on employment insurance in the provinces? These reports could then be sent to the government with a view to reforming the system. What do you think?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the suggestion. In spite of differing opinions on the matter, we agree that the Senate is increasingly independent from the government. That said, I'd be happy to discuss this more with you, dear colleague, to see what role the Senate can play in getting this important issue on the political radar.