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HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Youth Employment Levels

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

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THE SENATE

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YOUTH EMPLOYMENT LEVELS

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

With the release of the Statistics Canada monthly Labour Force Survey last week, we learned that over the month of May the economy added just 1,400 full-time jobs and 6,300 part-time jobs, a much weaker performance than previous months.

What alarms me the most of this newly released survey are the unemployment rates for youth aged 15 to 24. These figures remain overwhelmingly high, at 14.3 per cent compared to 10.9 per cent at the start of the recession in August 2008. The real unemployment rate, which includes discouraged workers and those waiting for a job to start, is even higher, at 22.7 per cent of youth aged 15 to 24. This means that there were 45,800 fewer youth employed in Canada in May 2012 than there were a year earlier.

Why is this government not acting in view of these alarming statistics affecting thousands of young Canadians?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, as the Honourable Senator Tardif pointed out, the Statistics Canada job numbers came out last Friday. They were generally in line with what economists were forecasting, especially in view of the extremely high job growth in the two previous months.

Canada continued its economic growth for the first quarter of 2012, and May's job numbers mean that nearly 760,000 new jobs have been created since July 2009: 90 per cent full time and 80 per cent private sector. Of course, these are all positive signs that the government is on the right track.

With regard to the number of unemployed youth, honourable senators, obviously these are of great concern to the government. Those numbers were largely impacted by a lot of young people leaving university. Some of them are students that are planning to go back to university, post-secondary education, in the fall. Of course, the government, as honourable senators know, has many programs for student jobs over the summer.

However, I would be remiss if I did not express on behalf of the government some concerns about the numbers.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, I have a supplementary question.

Young workers continue to bear the brunt of unemployment in Canada. The unemployment rate for youth between 15 and 24

is twice as high as the national unemployment rate. That is shameful, Madam Leader. The financial crisis of 2008 has destroyed every increase in employment that had been made since 2002. Ken Georgetti, president of the Canadian Labour Congress said that:

Ottawa prefers to chop public sector jobs and provide tax breaks to corporations in the hope that they will create jobs but they are not doing that. Young workers are the victims of poor public policy.

Mr. Georgetti added that older workers are afraid to leave the workforce because their pensions have been eroded and that means there is less room for young people to enter the workforce.

• (1820)

Madam Leader, a better youth employment strategy is needed, given these worrisome statistics. A dollar invested in Canadian youth is a dollar invested in the future of our country. What is the government going to do to address this serious problem?

[English]

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, I think it was backed up by many economists who were reporting on the job numbers last week on the youth side that we must not lose sight of the fact that 760,000 jobs have been created since the economy took that bad hit in 2008-09.

With regard to youth employment, the government has invested considerably to help youth get jobs and work experience. In 2010-11, through the Youth Employment Strategy Program, we helped 57,000 youth get the job skills and work experience needed to successfully enter the labour market. Budget 2012 commits \$50 million over two years to enhance the Youth Employment Strategy Program. This program will be required in view of the numbers.

Previously, we permanently increased Canada's Summer Student Employment Program by \$10 million; 3,550 additional jobs were created per year for a total of over 36,000 jobs for students during the summer. Budget 2011 supported the Canadian Youth Business Foundation for the creation of hundreds of businesses and thousands of jobs. It also supported Career Focus, Pathways to Education and Skills Link.

Honourable senators, I think the government has made a concerted effort for those youth who do not aspire to university education to have the opportunity to take part in trade schools and skills training because there are labour shortages across the country in the skills trades.