

Transcript of remarks by SLW on Policy Address initiatives and ERB "Love Upgrading Special Scheme"

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, on Policy Address initiatives and the "Love Upgrading Special Scheme" of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) after attending a radio programme this morning (October 25):

Reporter: Can I ask about the ERB retraining scheme? There are suggestions that the Government can increase the amount of subsidies, not just \$4,000 a month. What is your reaction to that? Also, do we know how popular is this scheme with the citizens?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: For the ERB scheme, the maximum amount of retraining allowance per month is written in law. To change that amount, we have to provide an amendment to the Ordinance (Schedule 4 of Employees Retraining Ordinance). It would definitely take time and, in view of the present situation of the Legislative Council (LegCo), I would not expect it is possible to amend the legislation before the end of this LegCo session. Although there seems to be a point because this particular amount has remained in our law for quite a number of years, for the present moment it is not possible to do so.

The other question related to the popularity of the retraining programme. The number that I saw more than a week ago already amounted to a few thousand (around 2 000), i.e. new applicants to this new scheme that the ERB has launched in early October. I see that the demand for such training, no matter it is skill-related, job-related or any skill enhancement programme – they are quite reasonably popular.

Reporter: We just now heard some listeners calling into the programme and saying that they may not benefit from these general measures that the Policy Address rolled out. Are there any possible measures to increase the general support for other people that are not benefitting from these measures?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: The design of the so-called "N-nothing" programme (One-off Living Subsidy for Low-income Households Not Living in Public Housing and Not Receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance [CSSA]) under the Community Care Fund basically aims at those who are not receiving CSSA or not living in public rental housing. It actually covers almost everybody who are low-income. Because this type of programme is not a regular programme, we need time to prepare for launching the programme. Although we announced the intention to do so in mid-August, the earliest possible time to launch the programme is on July 1 next year. In the Policy Address, the Chief Executive also announced that we will repeat that particular programme for one more time at the end of next year, so we will be launching this "N-nothing" programme twice in the coming year.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)