

in terms of the present Act. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has commented upon them and many women's organizations across Canada have indicated very clearly that the present system of maternity benefits is unfair.

I think we should also underline that these amendments which we propose to introduce at Committee will also speak to a very critical change in the work force. Women are no longer simply secondary workers in the work force but full-time workers and, therefore must be recognized as such under the Unemployment Insurance Act. As well, we must recognize that in major social and economic change we must still try to provide full protection for the concept and values of the family status. As a result of particular provisions of the Act, people were forced to make choices and so were employers. We hope these amendments will clarify that very quickly and take into account changes taking place in our society.

The first amendment which we propose goes back to the 12-year-old maternity benefit. Under the proposed amendment, the outdated Section 46 would be deleted. This restrictive clause now prevents pregnant women not qualified for maternity benefits from drawing regular or sickness benefits in the weeks surrounding the birth. Such women will now only have to show that they are unemployed, capable of and available for work like other Canadians. We estimate that this legislative change will cost the fund \$50 million, but would benefit close to 20,000 Canadian women in the work force.

We also propose to provide more equity to women by eliminating the so-called "magic ten" rule. Under this rule, a woman now has to prove that she worked for ten weeks around the time of conception. The intent of this requirement was to prevent women who found they were pregnant from seeking work to qualify later for unemployment insurance. Now, when women are such an integral part of our labour force, such a barrier is obviously not in tune with the times. It is also unfair to those women who have a long work history but do not happen to meet that rule at the particular time they become pregnant. According to the proposed amendments, any claimant who has worked 20 weeks in a qualifying period will be eligible for maternity benefits, the same as for all other special benefits.

Finally, I propose to alter the time in which maternity benefits can be claimed by providing additional flexibility. This flexibility will permit many mothers of premature and sick babies more time in which to receive maternity benefits. A maternity claimant who has been on regular unemployment insurance for 15 weeks or more has not been able to switch to maternity benefits under the present Act. That is because maternity benefits could only be paid in the first 15 weeks of a benefit period. Under our amendments, benefits would also be paid at any time during a 25-week period rather than being restricted to the first 15 weeks of the initial benefit period.

The new flexibility in the system will add an extra \$80 million to costs in 1984-85 but the changes are expected to benefit some 65,000 women in the work force who would otherwise find the Act too restrictive.

Unemployment Insurance Act

We also propose to extend the same rights under the Unemployment Insurance Act to adoptive parents as natural parents have. The federal Government must enable parents to offer their new children the best of care. The amendment, if approved, would authorize benefits of up to 15 weeks to either of the prospective parents. Claimants will simply have to show that they have at least 20 weeks of insurable employment in the last 52, much the same as if they were claiming sickness or maternity benefits. Approximately 7,500 adoptive parents could benefit from the new legislation at a cost of some \$22 million in 1984-85.

Unemployment insurance benefits for adoptive parents have been discussed for a number of years. In the past couple of years, I have received some 120 letters from Members of Parliament endorsing this change. I expect this is one clause in particular that will have full support from both sides of the House. The Task Force Report on unemployment insurance also adopts these recommendations. With the support of Hon. Members, we can have these provisions for adoptive parents and changes to maternity benefits in place by January 1, 1984.

That summarizes both the amendments in the Bill itself as well as the amendments we propose to introduce at second reading and Committee. Once again, I appreciate the support of the House for allowing us to undertake the debate of this Bill in one day. I believe that Bill C-156 reaffirms the Government's commitment to maintain income protection for those people without work as well as to try to redevelop the Unemployment Insurance Act as a vital act. It will enable Canadians to use the unemployment insurance system not just for income security but also as a way of protecting jobs. I call on Members of the House to support these amendments and give them swift passage.

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, first I want to say to the Minister that he is right when speaking to the consensus in the House to give this Bill passage at all stages in one day. It speaks to the consensus which exists in this place on the urgency of the matter and the serious unemployment situation which exists in the country today.

I also have to say to the Minister that while I do not hold him personally accountable, since he does not have much to do with the management of the business of the House, I believe this is a sleazy way to treat Parliament. Let me explain why. This Bill did not receive first reading until May 18. The Bill that received first reading on May 18 contained only the sunset clauses that will expire on June 4 and the clauses dealing with the Supreme Court decision on the Vicky Silk case.

Approximately at the first reading of the Bill on May 18 I was handed a letter from the Minister. I had a discussion with the Minister's Parliamentary Secretary. I was handed further additional amendments with which the Government intended to proceed if we in the Opposition agreed to a one-day debate. But here is the position in which we are placed. Obviously, we had to agree to a one-day debate on the sunset clauses because today is June 2 and the provisions regarding variable entry