

I can say with pride that the present law provides very well for the majority of pregnant workers who wish to remain in the labour force and who can do so without any great difficulty.

However, the law is not written only for the majority. We must also remember and make allowance for, the group of pregnant workers who, for whatever reason, encounter problems that make it difficult for them to continue working at their normal job.

Such difficulties may arise from medical complications of pregnancy. For although pregnancy is not in itself an illness, as I have said, women are susceptible to certain conditions requiring medical treatment as a result of their pregnancy. In this case, the existing provisions for sick leave certainly would apply.

A second kind of difficulty that pregnant women may encounter arises from conditions within the workplace; conditions which, though a normal part of the job, may cause concern because the pregnant woman is especially susceptible.

It is precisely this kind of situation that my colleague's motion is intended to address. I agree that the legislation should be examined to see if there are ways to strengthen and clarify the protection afforded to pregnant workers.

After all, federal legislation prohibits the discrimination on the basis of sex. I think we all agree that it would be discriminatory not to make allowances for a woman's pregnancy.

To this end, the minister has directed Labour Canada officials to consider changes to the Canada Labour Code that would guarantee a pregnant worker's right to be reassigned to more appropriate work for the duration of her pregnancy. If a reassignment is not possible, the worker should have the option of taking precautionary leave, during which time her job would be protected and her benefits would be continued.

Labour Canada is currently consulting with federally regulated employee and employer groups regarding the fairest and most practical way to achieve this objective.

I cannot over-emphasize the importance of the process of consultation with the representatives of labour and industry, which is now under way. For some time now, consultation has been the key ingredient in the

development of all new laws and regulations in the federal labour jurisdiction.

It has been our experience that the legislation with the best chance of being accepted by everyone concerned is that which has been developed with co-operation of both employers and employees. Especially in these times when productivity is of the essence, we seek an atmosphere of co-operation rather than confrontation in the workplace.

No one else has a better understanding of the actualities of the work place than those responsible for its maintenance and those who spend every working day in it. As legislators, we have much to learn from the workers and employers in our jurisdiction, and I know that Labour Canada is committed to listening and learning.

Therefore, to ensure that our legislation proposals on this matter are workable and acceptable to those most affected, we will give full consideration to the viewpoints expressed by labour and industry in drafting any amendments.

My friend may rest assured that his concerns are indeed under consideration. Amendments, when they are introduced in the House, will take account of the whole range of issues that are involved.

Again, we thank the member for Abitibi for bringing this important issue to the attention of the ministry and of the government.

Mr. Lyle Kristiansen (Kootenay West—Revelstoke): Mr. Speaker, it is with considerable pleasure that I rise today to support the initiative in the motion brought forward by the member for Abitibi. To read it again briefly:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider including in the Canada Labour Code a provision for precautionary withdrawal from work for pregnant women working in federally regulated businesses in Quebec and Canada.

The motion is timely, not only in regard to the remarks of the last speaker who indicated, as I was aware, that the government is in the process of some broad consultations on the subject matter at the moment, but also in coming into the House for debate the day before International Women's Day. That in itself makes it seem doubly appropriate that we should be dealing with a question of this nature at this time.