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service for those close to retirement as well as those who wish to accept early retirement options if they are over the age of 55 years.

It is estimated that about 30,000 persons in the Atlantic provinces and Quebec, 13,000 fisherpersons and 17,000 plant workers, will be initially eligible for assistance under the new strategy. All individuals meeting the criteria will be entitled to a minimum of two years of assistance. Depending on the individual's length of time in the fishery they could receive up to five years of assistance.

Following the passage of Bill C-113 Canadians expressed concern about the fairness of some measures in the Unemployment Insurance Act. The government listened to those concerns, and the proposals in Bill C-17 correct the inequities of the voluntary quit and misconduct provisions. For example, we propose that a period of suspension not be treated as loss of employment due to misconduct. That means that time worked prior to a suspension would still count if the claimant applies for unemployment insurance benefits at some time following the suspension.

Similarly, a leave of absence would no longer be considered a voluntary separation from work. A worker returning to work would not at some later date be penalized for the leave of absence and would still be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.

We are also proposing that eligibility rules be made more flexible for workers who leave a job that was about to be terminated anyway. When a claimant quits employment for just cause, the claimant will always receive the benefit of the doubt when the information from the employer and employee is balanced. We propose the legislation be amended to give the claimant the benefit of the doubt regarding just cause.

Bill C-17 also enables the testing of new approaches to the operation of the unemployment insurance program to ease the administrative burdens currently imposed on employers, claimants and the government.

An example of such a pilot project would be measures to reduce the information requirements of the record of employment for employers. The complexity of the record of employment has long been a bone of contention for employers. Changes to the procedure would lead to improved equity, increased accuracy in payments and better service.

A second example of a potential administrative pilot project is electronic filing of claims by employers or claimants. The pilot project will examine the possible service and cost benefits of filing electronically.

In summary, these proposed changes are an important first step in the overall reform of our system. The changes to the UI program are interim in the sense that UI is only one part of the

process of comprehensive reform of the social security system already under way. In the meantime, however, these changes will move us toward revitalized programs to deal with the changing labour market, programs that help people to find sustainable employment while at the same time support those unable to work.

The Speaker: Order. It being 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 30(5) the House will now proceed to Statements by Members pursuant to Standing Order 31.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

PEACEKEEPING

Mr. Gar Knutson (Elgin—Norfolk): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that in the very near future nine members of the Elgin Regiment will be headed to the former Yugoslavia for peacekeeping duties in this most unfortunate part of the world.

It should be remembered that these nine young men are part of Canada's volunteer, part time militia. As such they interrupt their jobs and family lives in order to serve their country at great risk to themselves. They will be following in the tradition of the Elgin Regiment that goes back for more than 125 years.

I am sure all members in this House wish all our members of the armed forces serving in former Yugoslavia the best of luck and safety while carrying out their important humanitarian duties.

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[Translation]

THE LATE RAYMOND GRAVEL

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans): Mr. Speaker, on May 18, Quebec and the people of Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans lost a man of great merit.

Raymond Gravel, former MNA for the Parti Québécois in Limoilou—Beauport from 1976 to 1984, died of cancer on that day. Mr. Gravel was unassuming and always ready to listen to his constituents. Born to a working-class family, through dedication and hard work he became a prominent member of the Quebec National Assembly in the first sovereigntist government in Quebec.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois and the people of Quebec, we wish to extend our sincere condolences to his wife Juliette and the family. We can assure them that the political struggle for the sovereignty of Quebec, of which Mr. Gravel was a part, will continue. Goodbye, Raymond!