

Supply

Mr. Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear the hon. member has a few questions and is critical of the wording of the motion.

Perhaps he should talk to his colleague from Jonquière, whom I quoted literally. Those are not my words. Everything in quotes was said by his colleagues and, more specifically, his colleague from Jonquière. If he does not agree with the hon. member for Jonquière, it is not my problem. My motion expresses what his colleague said. The hon. member is laughing. He just doesn't get it. His colleague from Jonquière is condemning the government. If anyone accuses me of political rhetoric, I can say it was said by a member of his own caucus. Maybe he should talk to him.

[English]

Hon. Pauline Browes (Minister of State (Employment and Immigration)): Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity I have had to speak in the House of Commons since being appointed to the position of Minister of State for Employment and Immigration. I am very pleased to join my colleague, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, in this ministry and I want to thank Prime Minister Mulroney for appointing me to this position.

I am pleased to respond to the motion concerning the government's policy on the unemployment insurance changes. As we know, Canada's unemployment insurance program has been in existence for some 52 years. We have offices across the country. We have excellent employees who administer this program. Canadians are really quite familiar with this program and it serves as tremendous purpose.

I suppose each of us in our own communities has heard of or knows of someone who has abused the unemployment insurance system, who simply quit because they did not want to continue to work.

Is it fair for those who pay UI premiums to support people who choose not to work? What is equally important is that the government will demonstrate that the proposed changes will be administered fairly with the benefit of the doubt continuing to be the rule of the day.

Here is the real question. Do Canadians who are working—some 12,240,000—want to support those who quit their jobs for no good reason? I believe that Canadians are fair-minded people who find it unacceptable to support those who do not want to work.

Ask Canadians who believe that UI is there for protection against unemployment and not a substitute for employment whether they believe that the amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act are too severe, too tough, unfair, extreme or unacceptable. The answer would be a resounding no.

Canadians would reply that it is unfair, tough, and unacceptable to support people who do not want to work. What is fair is to ensure that UI is there for those who need it. The government believes and has repeatedly stated in recent days that it is unfair to ask Canadians to subsidize those who quit their jobs voluntarily in what is a very tight job market today. It is even more unfair to misrepresent these changes.

As members of the House of Commons are aware, these changes to the unemployment insurance provisions affect only those who voluntarily leave their jobs without just cause or who are fired for misconduct.

Through the UI program our government remains committed, as always, to supporting those who leave their jobs with just cause. Thanks in part to the self-serving hand wringing or plain misinformation coming from certain quarters the question, of just cause is one of several areas of these constructive changes around which unjustified fears have arisen.

Just cause has always applied and will continue to apply to five specific areas set out in the UI legislation. These areas that constitute just cause include leaving a job because of discrimination on a prohibited ground of discrimination within the meaning of the Canadian Human Rights Act; an obligation to accompany a spouse: if someone is accompanying a spouse to another part of the country that is just cause; an obligation to care for a child; working conditions that constitute a clear danger to health and safety; and sexual harassment: if someone is sexually harassed in the work place and leaves his or her job that is just cause.