

predecessor, Mr. Jack Harris. They took people off the street. Do you know what they have done? They have trained them to be masons, not licensed masons who can go to Westminster Cathedral, but good enough that people around the province are asking them to come to give them advice.

There is a professor at Memorial University who has an ongoing program. She brings in one or two people. Some of those people are now in law school. People who were unemployed, who had no options, no opportunities are now in university taking science degrees. I see this kind of thing happening all the time.

On the last point, I will take criticism for what I say in this House but I will not take criticism for my motives and I will not sit here and have an hon. member tell me that I do not believe a word I say. That is an insult to me and an insult to this House.

Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak in favour of the motion now before this House.

[*Translation*]

The motion urges the government to do something very simple and quite reasonable, namely re-introduce in the House a bill aimed at extending for only a few weeks the 10-to-14-weeks' variable entrance requirements which now determine the number of insurable weeks of work the applicant must have to qualify for unemployment insurance benefits. This extension would enable Bill C-21 to get the normal consideration, which a bill of the magnitude deserves. It would enable the Senate to weigh the implications of this bill which will affect thousands of working and unemployed Canadians. The Senate would feel free to call in witnesses who have not been given the opportunity to air their views on this bill, witnesses such as provinces, municipalities, independent experts, research organizations like the Economic Council of Canada, witnesses who might shed more light on the impact of Bill C-21 which was rammed through the House at every stage. We want to avoid the possibility that normal consideration of this piece of legislation might be curtailed or cut off as a result of an altogether specious provision.

[*English*]

The so-called variable entrance requirement provision of the unemployment insurance program was introduced

Supply

in 1977 with the adoption of Bill C-27. It was meant to expire after 36 months and be replaced by a fixed 14 weeks unless extended by resolutions of Parliament.

Each year since 1979 Parliament has passed such a resolution extending the life of the VER by one more year. This government introduced this same resolution which has become a standard piece of legislation during each of its first four years of power. The exception is 1989 when instead we got Bill C-21.

Bill C-21, by altering the structure of the variable entrance requirements and the unemployment reference levels used to determine eligibility for UI in each of the UI regions across the country, makes a dramatic change to the workings of the unemployment insurance program in Canada.

In addition, the 48 UI economic regions used to determine eligibility will be replaced in January by 62 new regions and the boundaries will be substantially modified. These new regions were introduced to this House only after Bill C-21 had passed third reading.

The changes in the application of the UI program will occur simply as a result of the introduction of these regions and will touch virtually every member of this House. Yet we as members have been provided with very little information on how the introduction of these new regions will affect the unemployed. We do not even know what the unemployment rates will be that will apply to these new regions. We certainly do not know which unemployed individuals will be denied benefits as a result of the application of these new boundaries.

• (1740)

We do not have an independent economic analysis of the impact of the changes in the UI benefit rules on unemployed workers and on the labour market in general. Are the jobs out there for the workers who will need extra weeks to qualify? How will the new rules affect local labour markets? Will industry have a harder or easier time obtaining workers? Will there be an increase in migration from one region of the country to another as a result of this bill? In which direction? Will the bill encourage or discourage seasonal job patterns? How? What will be the consequences of the new financing arrangements which has the government withdraw from financially contributing to the UI program, on the