

M. Boudria: First, Mr. Speaker, I should like to congratulate my colleague the Hon. Member for Gatineau—La Lièvre (Mr. Assad) for his election. As neighbours we share a common boundary, and he happens to live just a few kilometres from my home. I am very pleased to see him as Liberal Member representing that riding. I must admit it is quite a change from the previous representation in that riding, quite a change for the better, of course. Quite an improvement over the Conservative Party Member who used to sit for the riding. The former Conservative Member was not quite as competent as my colleague, and again I extend my congratulations to him.

Like me, my colleague from Gatineau—La Lièvre (Mr. Assad) represents a riding located very close to the national capital. I am sure my colleague knows that the unemployment rate in the national capital region is very low, I mean on the Ottawa side, of course, something like 5.7 per cent.

• (1300)

Outside the City of Ottawa and the neighbouring region of Ottawa—Carleton, however, at least on the Ontario side, the unemployment rate is much higher, so much so that in Hawkesbury in my riding, for example, the unemployment rate now stands at 13 per cent as compared with 14 per cent last month. Our constituents are severely affected by unemployment. What I want to point out to my colleague is the fact that in recent days the Government imposed even stricter restrictions on unemployment insurance, the idea being that in low unemployment regions the thing to do is to tighten up the screw a bit, if I may put it that way, because people really do not need as many benefits. True though it might be in low unemployment regions, Mr. Speaker, I am not prepared to admit that. It is certainly not the case in Hawkesbury in my riding or in Cornwall or elsewhere in rural areas where unemployment is rampant. I should like to ask my colleague whether the situation is the same in his riding where rural unemployment is already quite high, and whether he agrees with me that the new measures imposed by the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mrs. McDougall)—henceforth, more weeks of contributions to be eligible for benefits which in turn will be payable over a shorter time—are totally unfair to Canadians living in rural communities, particularly those in the vicinity of urban areas, because the statistics as I have just described them are erroneous?

Mr. Assad: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Hon. Member for his kind words.

The Address—Mrs. Browes

The cuts in unemployment insurance benefits are going to affect rural areas. Previously, I had the privilege of representing a rural riding in the provincial government, and every time the unemployment rate went up, the impact was greatest on rural ridings. The cuts that were announced will affect these people first of all.

I would also like to draw the attention of the Hon. Member to a study on unemployment and unemployment insurance benefits, made several years ago by the Fraser Institute in western Canada. The study showed that in urban areas where the unemployment rate was much lower, people were less dependent on unemployment insurance. The study found that in urban centres, unemployment insurance recipients were people who earned \$22,000 annually, compared with people in rural areas who earned barely more than the minimum wage. This means that the proposed measures tend to ignore the rural areas that are most severely affected. I think that as time goes by, the Minister responsible will realize that rural areas will be affected far more severely than urban centres, and that adjustments will be necessary.

[*English*]

Mrs. Pauline Browes (Scarborough Centre): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to represent the people of Scarborough Centre in this Chamber. I am truly grateful for the trust and confidence they have shown in me. I am privileged to continue to represent the concerns of the people of Scarborough Centre in the nation's Parliament. It is here in Parliament that ideas, principles and policies are debated. But Parliament without democracy is meaningless and democracy without freedom is useless. Democracy and freedom are not just concepts or words with philosophical meaning, they are living principles that define a society and its heritage.

For over 200 years Canada has shaped, moulded and defended our own heritage of democracy. It is a heritage unlike any other in the world. History has given us a sense of independent freedom and a willingness to challenge new risks. From the native nations who first inhabited this land, to the explorers, to the fur traders, to the homesteaders and the pioneers who came later, Canadians have gained a very special spirit of enterprise and freedom.