

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

program designed to help unemployed workers test new business ideas.

In the northern end of my riding, the Highwood Economic Development Corporation, which serves the Municipal District of Foothills as well as the County of Vulcan, is administering and investing \$1.9 million over five years from the Community Futures Program. These programs are providing realistic responses to genuine needs.

The Government has renewed and invigorated its commitment to the Community Futures Program. The changes we are proposing to the unemployment insurance system will result in an extra \$50 million every year for the Community Futures Program. This will ensure that this very important program will continue to provide areas of higher unemployment with assistance to diversify and develop their own economies.

I know how important this program has been in my own riding. I am sure that all Members of the House are pleased that the Community Futures Program will now have more resources.

I confess, my constituents have often told me that they feel the UI system is being abused. This is regrettable. They feel cheated and angry when they see some Canadians quitting their jobs without just cause and taking advantage of UI benefits.

• (2300)

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Hughes:** These voluntary quitters cost the UI fund and the people of Canada—

**Some Hon. Members:** Come on.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski):** Order.

**Mr. Volpe:** Even the Speaker is cutting you off.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski):** I know it is the summer solstice and I realize that this will be the longest day. I hope we could get finished without getting too warm in this Chamber. The Hon. Member for Macleod has the floor for another nine minutes.

**Mr. Hughes:** This may be the longest day, but this will not be the longest speech.

It is regrettable that Canadians should feel cheated and angry when they see others taking advantage of the

system. I think the people of Macleod are justified in getting angry.

This Bill will amend the Unemployment Insurance Act to make it more difficult and less tempting for people to take advantage of the system.

**An Hon. Member:** Less tempting?

**Mr. Hughes:** The Bill proposes that workers who voluntarily quit their jobs will not only have their benefits delayed, but they will also receive a reduction in the over-all level of benefits. As a result of this Bill, people seeking to take advantage of the unemployment insurance system will be disqualified from receiving benefits from seven to twelve weeks. Once their disqualification is over, they will receive benefits of only 50 per cent of their insurable earnings.

This Bill also substantially increases the penalties for both employers and employees who try to defraud the UI fund. This is as it should be.

When the unemployment insurance system was set up in the 1940s, it was designed to provide temporary assistance to unemployed workers. The UI fund was not created to replace other forms of social assistance. It was created to assist workers in getting through tough times of unemployment. This Bill represents a return to some of the fundamentals of the unemployment insurance system, and the people of Macleod whom I represent are pleased that these changes are taking place. They are pleased that there will be less abuse of the system. They look forward to the training programs, the economic development programs, and the maternity parental benefits provided by this Bill.

They are pleased that the UI system will no longer discriminate against older Canadians. They are glad that the Government has had the guts to undertake these reforms and start to put the UI fund to work for all Canadians.

The people of Macleod firmly support this important initiative of the Government. The Government is taking positive steps with these unemployment insurance changes. We are talking about investing in individuals. We are talking about investing in moms, dads, sons, and daughters. We are talking about Canadians who have aspirations to get ahead and use their own strengths to earn a living and meet their own challenges by investing in themselves to make a constructive and a real contribution to Canadian society.