

Routine Proceedings

official languages, the government's responses to several petitions.

[*Editor's Note: See today's Votes and Proceedings.*]

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[*Translation*]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE—CONFIGURATION OF ECONOMIC REGIONS

Hon. Monique Vézina (Minister of State (Employment and Immigration) and Minister of State (Seniors)): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present today the new distribution of economic regions for the purposes of the unemployment insurance program, which will permit the Government to offer a fairer treatment to those who are without work.

In August 1988, as Minister of State for Employment and Immigration, I announced to Parliament that my Department would undertake a complete review of the economic regions used under the unemployment insurance program.

We must recall that the admissibility of a claimant is determined partially by the region in which he or she lives. The number of work weeks necessary to qualify as well as the duration of benefits depend on the unemployment rate of the individual's region of residence. From this, Mr. Speaker, comes the importance of defining economic boundaries that best reflect the unemployment rate in each region. Since the last revision twelve years ago, many changes have occurred within the Canadian labour market.

• (1120)

[*English*]

Allow me, Mr. Speaker, to briefly provide some background information, putting into perspective the reason for the new configuration of the economic regions. The essential goal we set for ourselves was based on the principle of equity that underlies our system of unemployment insurance benefits. The concept of regional differentiation introduced into the unemployment insurance program in 1971 recognized the fact that the various regions of the country did not all offer the same employment opportunities and stability. At that time the

country was divided into 16 economic regions as used by Statistics Canada.

[*Translation*]

In 1977, the introduction of the variable eligibility requirement for extended benefits made the program more sensitive and fairer towards regions with varying degrees of unemployment. Because of this, boundary definitions became a determining factor in qualifying for unemployment insurance benefits.

In 1978, the number of regions increased to 48, with a revision of the system and a structural adjustment to the new realities of the country. Since then and especially since the last recession, the different regional economies have developed throughout the country. The regions defined in 1978 no longer fully meet the new socio-economic realities.

[*English*]

Labour markets change constantly depending on whether the number of key industries in a region is increasing or decreasing. They also undergo significant alterations as changes occur in population trends. We must take these fluctuations into account to deal fairly with the unemployed.

[*Translation*]

As the unemployment insurance program must closely match regional unemployment levels, it is important that the economic boundaries coincide with Canadian realities. We are talking about a fundamental question of justice and willingness to better serve our clientele. It is therefore essential that we define and set up the economic regions so as to reflect the regional variations affecting employment prospects.

Our Government wishes to promote equal opportunities, ensure a fair distribution of available resources and reach our clientele in an efficient manner no matter where they live in Canada. These are the principles that guided us in our study of the economic regions. We did not hesitate to do everything necessary for a serious, thorough study to reach our objectives.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that this study of the Canadian labour market is one of the most thorough and detailed since the 1960s. Certainly the task was complex. However, one type of geographic unit constitutes a distinct labour market: the large urban centre. Therefore, metropolitan census areas were separated from