

Private Members' Business

UI benefit recipients who ask to be exempted from jury duty do so because the compensation is inadequate. Mr. Speaker, I think that judges who believe compensation paid by the provinces to persons who do jury duty is inadequate should do something about this problem. Mr. Speaker, despite the good intentions of the hon. member who proposed the amendment, the answer is not to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act but to ask the provinces to increase amounts paid to individuals who perform their civic duty by serving on a jury or working as volunteers in their communities.

I have reached the end of my speech, and I thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the Liberal member who tried to intervene during my speech listened to what I had to say.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by the hon. member for Abitibi. I must tell you that I accused him of reading a speech that was not his but, Mr. Speaker, I did so as a compliment, a tribute to him because I know that his own speech, one that he would have written himself, would be thirty times better than the one he was given, Mr. Speaker.

I trust the hon. member opposite, but I have no confidence in those who wrote that speech because obviously they are not at all as intelligent as the hon. member for Abitibi.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Abitibi and the hon. member for Athabasca were telling us earlier that unemployment insurance is a system that exists to provide benefits so long as the beneficiaries want to look for work—no exceptions. But that is not true, Mr. Speaker. I will quote section 14 of the present law to you.

14. A claimant is not entitled to be paid initial benefit for any working day in a benefit period for which he fails to prove that he was either

(a) capable of and available for work and unable to obtain—employment—or

(b) incapable of work by reason of prescribed illness, injury or quarantine on that day, and that he would be otherwise available for work.

So recipients of unemployment insurance who are sick, quarantined or have other valid reasons given in section 14 can still receive benefits.

Mr. Speaker, we are not here today to see whether or not there are exceptions to the rule. There are exceptions. What my colleague from Restigouche—Chaleur is telling us today is that there should be another exemption, not that there should be exemptions—that is already established, it is in the law and the government has not challenged it or tried to eliminate it. So it is there. My colleague is saying that there should be other exemptions.

[English]

Let us listen to rules on how it is today. If a person serves on a jury, that person is technically unavailable for work that day and cannot draw unemployment insurance. Some members across say that is the fault of the province because it does not pay enough for jury duty.

Another hon. member said that was fine but those people who are not rich enough to serve on juries should ask the judge to exempt them. I thought it was a principle of common law that we had a right to be judged by our peers, not that we had a right to be judged by the rich. What kind of mind-set is that?

I have an article here from the *Mountain Times Transcript* of February 6, 1991. I ask my colleagues across the way to take note of this. Never mind the speech that the officials of the department gave to them to read. It says: "Calls UI rule stupid. Judge excuses potential jurors". This explains how the judge in this case allowed a juror to go home because the person would lose her unemployment insurance benefit. The judge called this ruling stupid. The members across want to favour a ruling that is described by a judge as being "stupid". Is that what they want to stand for by reading the documents given to them by functionaries of the department? I say to my colleagues across, never mind that nonsense. Speak your mind. Never mind what the officials told you to read. They are not the boss. We are. We were elected to this place by our constituents to make laws that are fair and reasonable for all Canadians, not to read junk prepared by some minion in the employment department or by a sidekick to the minister.

The members across have referred only to jury duty. They have some sort of a bent that only people who are rich have a right to serve on jury duty. What about the firefighter, the volunteer firefighter, the flood control