

The core of my concern here is not whether adoptive parents may need some form of support. Some will, and others will not. I believe the issue before the House is whether the unemployment insurance program is the proper place to provide the support for those who need it. To answer that question we may have to consider the objectives of the unemployment insurance program, so often stated yet so often misunderstood.

The fundamental objective of the unemployment insurance legislation was, and remains, to provide adequate, short-term income maintenance for workers who, for reasons beyond their control, are unemployed, capable of work, available and seeking employment or temporarily physically incapable of work. Let us examine that definition against the problems faced by adopting parents. The operative words are, first, "for reasons beyond their control". There can be no question that adopting a child is a voluntary decision, however laudable it may be. It is not, I submit, a reason beyond a person's control for being unemployed. Capability for work and availability for work are two cardinal principles of the unemployment insurance legislation. Here, again, the adoptive parent may or may not qualify.

If, for example, the early care of an adoptive child requires a period for one working parent to remain at home, clearly that parent is physically capable of work but not available for work within the meaning of the unemployment insurance program. An adopting parent who has withdrawn from the labour force is physically capable of work but not available for work. But the mother of a natural child, while on unemployment insurance maternity benefit, is presumed not to be physically capable of work within the meaning of the Unemployment Insurance Act. So if the adopting parent is not available for work, in terms of the unemployment insurance program, he or she is not entitled to any benefit. These two principles of capability with availability and incapability function as clear instruments to define those who are entitled to unemployment insurance benefits.

To pay benefit to adopting parents, laudable though this may seem in principle, would be to pay people who while capable of work are not in the labour force by their own decision. There is no question here of physical reasons beyond their control, as I mentioned earlier. In the adoption process, the particular needs of the child are carefully explained to the parents. Virtually, at the outset, the possible need for one parent to remain at home becomes apparent. If both parents are working when they decide to adopt a child and the adoption requires that one parent stay at home to supervise the child, adoption becomes a conscious decision that one parent leave the labour force at least for a short time.

Were the government to consider extending unemployment insurance benefit to adopting parents, this would set a precedent which would begin to cut away at the very roots of unemployment insurance principles. It would open the door to any capable but unavailable insured person whose unemployment was caused by exigencies not directly related to the labour market. Any person could, by this reasoning process, elect to become unavailable for work for any good purpose in their own mind, arguing that they were entitled to unemploy-

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ment insurance benefit on the grounds that their decision made them unavailable for work.

Let me stress, again, that I am not attacking the valid and worthy process of adopting children, because I am an adoptive parent. As I have said, adoption plays a vital role in our society in providing good homes for disadvantaged or parentless children. It also makes it possible for parents who cannot, or choose not to, have natural children, for whatever reason, to experience the wonder of becoming parents.

The question before this House is clearly not a vote for or against adoption. Nor is it a vote for or against some form of aid for those adopting parents who may need transitional aid in caring for their adopted child. The real issue, I submit, is that the Unemployment Insurance Act is not the proper vehicle to provide adoptive parents with income security. It must be admitted that some adoptive parents need financial aid and others certainly do not. But in neither case are they involuntarily out of the labour force. Adopting a child remains a conscious decision and, for a working parent, perhaps a conscious decision to leave the labour force at least for a time.

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Let us all remember that the basic purpose of unemployment insurance is to provide income maintenance where interruption of earnings has occurred, and to do so in a way which ensures that the worker will return to the labour force as soon as possible. This is the basic purpose of unemployment insurance.

Unemployment is a serious problem in Canada today. But unemployment insurance is not a welfare program. Neither is it a sort of catch-all mechanism which can be used to provide general support to every social need which arises, legitimate though it may be. My own conviction is that the unemployment insurance program is not the proper vehicle to provide income support to parents who choose to adopt and who must, for very valid reasons, drop out of the labour force for a short time.

At first glance there appears to be authority in the Unemployment Insurance Act for aiding adopting parents. Because the unemployment insurance program already provides maternity benefits, I can easily understand why some believe that these benefits should be extended to adoptive parents. Viable as this may seem at first glance, it would entail a radical shift away from the insurance principles upon which unemployment insurance benefits are provided. Maternity benefits are paid because of physical incapacity to work. Adoptive parents are not physically incapable of work, though adoption societies may require one parent to stay at home with the new child for a period.

Especially at this time the unemployment insurance program must not become a substitute for other social aid programs which are really needed. It is one of the great fallacies of our time that unemployment insurance is the general aid mechanism through which the federal government can solve virtually any legitimate social need of Canadians. Unemploy-