

Private Members' Business

This means that maternity leave may last as long as 17 weeks after the birth of a child.

In addition to maternity leave, either parent (father or mother) is entitled to a maximum of 24 weeks' leave to care for a newborn or adopted child.

Although the maternity leave and parental leave provided under the Canada Code are leave without pay, eligible employees can receive unemployment insurance benefits during those periods, which relieves the financial burden somewhat.

• (1740)

The most important aspects of the maternity and parental leave provisions may be the safeguards concerning employment and fringe benefits. Seniority is not affected by the time spent on maternity or parental leave and entitlement to pension and health plans, for instance, are maintained, provided the employee keeps paying her premiums.

The employee also has the right to be advised of any training or promotion opportunities during her leave, so she will not miss career advancement opportunities simply because she is away. Upon her return to work, she has to be reinstated in her former position, or at least in an equivalent position, and in the same workplace.

Mr. Speaker, these provisions of the Canadian Labour Code give working women the assurance that they will not have to give up their careers to start a family. Knowing this helps reduce the stress which inevitably surrounds the birth of a child. With this weight off their mind, the employees can pay more attention to their jobs during the time they are at work.

The legislation is also beneficial for the employer, because with the assurance of having their jobs back upon returning from maternity leave, employees are likely to be more conscientious and more productive. Recognizing the value of these employees, many employers keep paying their employee's UI premiums for the duration of the leave so that they incur no financial loss because of their pregnancy.

All these provisions serve the objective of assisting women who want to go back to work after giving birth, as long as medical problems and reactions to conditions

existing in the workplace do not cause complications when they are pregnant. The motion put forward by my colleague from Abitibi is intended only to extend the same benefits to a few women who would encounter medical problems during pregnancy. That sounds only fair.

At the present time, a woman who has health problems during the first six months of pregnancy is entitled to a maximum of 12 weeks of sick leave without losing seniority or benefit entitlements. But if her problems keep up and it remains impossible for her to work after that period, she usually has no other choice but to take her maternity leave earlier than she would have liked, which gives her less time after the birth of her child to devote herself to that extremely important task of taking care of her newborn.

It seems there is also a floating period of two weeks between the end of the six months of pregnancy and the beginning of the eleventh week before delivery; the employee may then have no recourse but the goodwill of her employer.

I think we have an excellent system of assistance to pregnant employees, but the motion points out one of its few shortcomings. It would be appropriate, in the name of fairness, to eliminate that deficiency.

Mr. Eugene Bellemare (Carleton—Gloucester): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate and thank my colleague from Abitibi for moving a motion amending the Canadian Labour Code and seeking to protect the pregnant worker. We know very well that, pregnant workers are often single parents with very limited financial means. They often have different needs: financial needs, social needs, the need to be encouraged.

Maternity is something extremely sacred. We should respect the pregnant worker and encourage her. We know fully well that presently maternity leave and parental leave are legally protected. But, as was saying the member who just spoke, there are flaws in the Canadian Labour Code, and the pregnant worker should get some protection when, during her pregnancy, which can be difficult at times, she is forced to take some days off. This person could have a sympathetic employer, but she could also have one who is far from being sympathet-