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HOUSE OF COMMONS
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Robert Morrissey
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S. Forrest (Bush) Dumville
Prince Edward Island Legislative Assembly
PO Box 2000, Charlottetown PE
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November 27, 2017

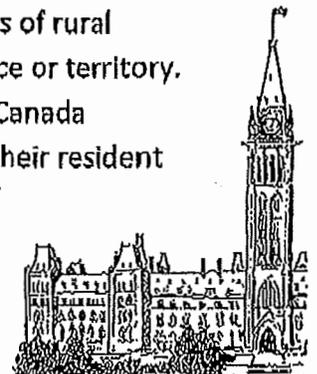
Dear Mr. Dumville,

Thank you for your letter outlining concerns raised by the UPEI student union regarding access to EI benefits.

To quote from your letter "However, a commonly reported criticism of the program is the access to benefits is not equal due to the fact that PEI is split into two EI regions for administrative purposes. Students who are otherwise equal in terms of course load, hours of work, financial burden, and other factors can receive unequal access to benefits purely on the different eligibility requirements of the Charlottetown and non-Charlottetown EI regions."

As the employment insurance program is a national program covering 66 EI regions, students attending UPEI from various regions of Canada qualify for EI benefits based on the criteria of the EI zone where their personal residence is located.

EI regions are established based on the availability of jobs in an area, and the distances between where individuals have to travel to find work. The Charlottetown region encompasses the strongest job market in PEI, therefore, its low unemployment rate. Every province and territory has multiple EI regions which recognize the diverse economic conditions of rural Canada versus urban centers, PEI is defined no differently than any other province or territory. There will be students attending UPEI, and indeed every university or college in Canada receiving access to EI benefits based on the different eligibility requirements of their resident



regions. Students from the Charlottetown and rural PEI regions are treated similar to all other Canadian students.

Indeed, if one used similar logic, should the province of PEI then address the living allowance for rural students attending UPEI who face accommodation and living costs estimated over \$6000 every academic year, while their fellow Charlottetown students can live at home?

The argument that PEI should be an exception to the norm due to its small size and short commutes simply doesn't hold water. Examples of almost identical situations exist across the country. In fact, the 2011 census determined that the average commute time for Canadians is over 25 minutes. But the issue of economic region boundaries is more about location than size or commute.

Economic region boundaries exist to provide support for those who are at a disadvantage due to where they live. Perceived inequality for workers who commute into regions with lower requirements is exactly that: perceived. In the case that these commuting workers become unemployed, they have a significant and quantifiable advantage over their rural counterparts. This is a necessary part of a system that is adapted to help the unemployed weather economic hardship. If it were eliminated, rural Islanders would lose an estimated \$8 million in benefits each year.

I would be interested to hear if the members of the legislature from rural PEI support the position of the UPEI Student Union.

Sincerely,



Bobby Morrissey

Member of Parliament for Egmont

CC: Members, Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development