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Mr. Dean Allison

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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•(1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to the order of reference of Tuesday, September 29, 2009, Bill C-50, an Act to Amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits, we will start today.

I want to thank the witnesses, once again, for coming on probably short notice, although I'm sure that if you saw the bill passing through the House, you'd be coming to see us at some point.

I don't know who's going to be speaking on your behalf, Mr. Thompson, but we're going to turn the floor over to you. You guys know the routine. The microphones will come off and on for you as I acknowledge you, and then what we'll do is get through some rounds of questioning.

I'm probably going to suggest to the committee that we break at around 5, because we have some committee business to take care of. So we'll look at dealing with questions and answers over the next hour and a half.

Mr. Thompson, welcome again. It's good to see you. The floor is yours, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Thompson (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Skills and Employment Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

[English]

I'm here today to speak to the committee about Bill C-50, an Act to Amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits. With me today I have Mr. Louis Beauséjour, the director general of employment insurance policy, and Mr. Philip Clarke, the director general of benefits processing with Service Canada.

The purpose of this bill is to temporarily provide additional weeks of employment insurance regular benefits to long-tenured workers. Let me explain to whom the legislation is referring when we use the term "long-tenured workers". These are experienced workers who have paid EI premiums for years but have made limited use of EI regular benefits. Some of them, in fact, are unemployed for the first time in their lives. More specifically, they're workers who have paid at least 30% of the annual maximum EI premiums for a minimum of seven out of 10 years.

[Translation]

This allows claimants to remain eligible even though they have had temporary absences from the labour market.

[English]

Bill C-50 also allows for the use of up to 35 weeks of regular benefits in the past five years. This is in recognition of the fact that it is customary in some industries for employers to shut down for a few weeks every year for retooling or retrofitting. In these situations, industry sectors often have to make use of EI.

[Translation]

There are long-tenured workers all over the country and in every sector of the economy.

[English]

It's estimated that about half of Canadians who pay EI premiums qualify as long-tenured workers and that about one-third of those who have lost their jobs since the end of January 2009 and have made a claim would qualify as long-tenured workers. This proposed legislation would give these workers more weeks of EI income support while they look for jobs.

Let me take a few minutes to explain how the bill itself is laid out. First it deals with the benefit period. This is the period during which claimants must use their entitlement. This benefit period is normally 52 weeks, but it will be extended, through the legislation, where necessary, to accommodate the additional weeks of EI regular benefits being provided to eligible long-tenured claimants.

•(1535)

[Translation]

The second part then sets out how many additional weeks of EI regular benefits will be provided to eligible long-tenured claimants. It also deals with the gradual transition out of the measure.

[English]

Specifically, Bill C-50 would provide from five to 20 weeks of additional benefits, depending on how long a person has been working and paying EI premiums. For example, to be eligible for five weeks of extended benefits, long-tenured workers must have paid at least 30% of the annual maximum EI premiums for a minimum of seven of the last 10 calendar years. This 30% threshold represents the most inclusive definition of full-time workers and is based on what a full-time worker at minimum wage would contribute throughout the course of a year. For every additional year of contributions, the number of weeks of benefits would increase by three weeks, up to a maximum of 20 weeks.

[Translation]

The third part of the bill sets out how many additional weeks of EI regular benefits are to be provided to eligible long-tenured claimants who live outside of Canada.

[English]

The last part of the bill addresses the coming into force of the legislation. It states that the measure takes effect two Sundays prior to royal assent.

The bill concludes by listing the sections that will be used once the measure is terminated after September 11, 2010.

Mr. Chairman, it is estimated that about 190,000 workers will be eligible for the assistance provided under Bill C-50. This number is based on information pertaining to three key factors. The first is the current population of long-tenured claimants. Second are the benefit exhaustion rates of long-tenured claimants in the past. And third are private sector forecasts of the national unemployment rate. Those are the three component parts that underpin that estimate of 190,000 workers.

[Translation]

Among those 190,000 are many workers who have been in the same job or the same industry all their lives and now face the prospect of having to start all over again.

[English]

Bill C-50 is a temporary measure designed to provide additional support to long-tenured workers while they look for jobs in a recovering economy.

As I said, eligibility for the extended benefits for long-tenured workers will continue until September 11, 2010. This means that the payments of those extended benefits would continue to the fall of 2011, approximately one year later.

This measure to extend the benefit applies not only to new claimants, but also to existing claimants. In fact, eligibility extends back nine months from the coming into force of the legislation. This will reach back as early as January 4, 2009.

In order to ensure a smooth and gradual transition out of the measure, the additional weeks of benefits would be reduced in five-week increments, beginning in June of 2010.

[Translation]

Mr. Chairman, this temporary measure for long-tenured workers builds on other measures introduced under the Government's Economic Action Plan.

[English]

There is one program in particular that is closely linked to this proposed measure that I would like to draw attention to. This is the career transition assistance initiative, which helps this same population of long-tenured workers.

Under the career transition assistance initiative, long-tenured workers who have opted to undertake training are already eligible for extended benefits of up to two years to help them make a transition to a new field or a new occupation. We have already sent out more than 370,000 letters since January to individuals who qualify as long-tenured workers. In addition, these workers can also get earlier access to EI if they pay for part of their training using their severance package.

The economic action plan also provides other measures to help all unemployed Canadians, measures such as providing nationally the extra five weeks of regular EI benefits and increasing the number of weeks in regions of high unemployment from 45 to 50.

[Translation]

Mr. Chairman, many of the Economic Action Plan measures as well as the legislation before us are temporary.

[English]

Bill C-50 is intended to help workers faced with the difficult challenge of finding a new job. The goal is to help them bridge to new employment.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I would be happy to answer your questions about this bill with the help of my colleagues, Louis Beauséjour and Philip Clarke.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Thompson. We appreciate having you back here again.

We're going to start, as we always do, with the Liberals, followed by the Bloc, the NDP, and the Conservatives. The first round will be seven minutes and then we'll move to rounds of five minutes.

I'm going to start with Mr. Savage from the Liberal Party for seven minutes.

The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming. I always enjoy it when you come here and provide your wisdom for our benefit.

I got to experience that wisdom more often this summer than I normally would, Mr. Thompson. I appreciate the work you did for the EI working group, and I certainly respect your understanding of the employment insurance system.

On this particular bill, I have a couple of questions.

First of all, I want you to take me through the math that gets to 190,000 workers. You indicate on page 4 that it's based on three factors, and you outline those factors. Can you put numbers on those factors for me, those factors that take us to 190,000 workers?

Mr. Paul Thompson: Sure. I think I will turn to my colleague Louis Beauséjour, who's a little closer to the actual analysis. He's in a better position to explain the calculation of that 190,000. I did outline the three factors, but Louis can provide more specifics.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Beauséjour (Director General, Skills and Employment Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): In fact, the values were estimated based on 2006 data. Our 2006 data base contains different kinds of information on claimants. We have updated these values by changing the unemployment rate which was used. In 2006, the unemployment rate was about 6%, and our hypothesis was that the unemployment rate, based on private sector predictions, would stand at about 8.8% in 2009 and 2010. We therefore increased the number of claimants based on that ratio.

We also noted, using the same database, that approximately 30% of claimants qualified as long-tenured workers. So that is the ratio we used. Further, nearly 21% of long-tenured workers had run out of benefits. Again, we used that information.

Consequently, on an annual basis, there would potentially be 120,000 claimants availing themselves of this measure, in one year. The measure will be in effect for more than one year. We used January 4 as the start date for collecting benefits. The measure starts to end in June and ends completely in September, which represents a total period of 19 months. In fact, it is a period of 21 months, namely one year and nine months, from January to September. Based on these values, we increased the total number because we reached the figure of 190,000 long-tenured workers who would qualify.

• (1540)

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage: That's 120,000 for 12 months, which extrapolated is—

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: There are 190,000 workers. Over 12 months, the number was 120,000, but the measure covers a longer period.

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage: So it's 190,000 because it's one year plus another nine months. And 30% of people would qualify as long-tenured workers?

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: That's right. It is very difficult to get the real number for the coming months, but based on historic data of 2006, 30% of claimants would qualify.

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage: The exhaustion rate is 21%. So that's the percentage of the long-term workers who exhaust their benefits.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Exactly. We noted that 21% of long-tenured workers had run out of benefits.

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage: Is this something that had to be done in this type of legislation? Could this not have been done as a pilot project, as other changes to EI have been done?

Mr. Paul Thompson: Maybe I'll take that question. The approach that was taken with the previous economic action plan measures, such as the five weeks, was to introduce the measure as part of the response to the economic downturn. So a similar approach was taken with these measures: to introduce it as a temporary measure that would run its course and then revert back to the regular benefits regime.

The purpose of pilot projects, as you know, is really to test a measure for future application in the EI programs.

Mr. Michael Savage: But it could have been done as a pilot project without having to go through legislation and all of the stuff with this. Is that correct?

Mr. Paul Thompson: The purpose of a pilot project, as I said, is to test a measure for application for future implementation in EI. So the preferred method here—the more relevant method and the one that was used with other similar measures in the economic plan—is to do it on a legislative basis because it's been set out as a temporary measure with a hard end date in September 2010.

Mr. Michael Savage: I understand that. But it could have been done as a pilot project.

Mr. Paul Thompson: If there had been a different objective, to test something for future application, yes. It could have done as a pilot project if it were positioned differently from the way it is in this legislation.

Mr. Michael Savage: We want to hear from a number of witnesses on this bill, and some have expressed their points of view through the media and in other ways already. The head of the CAW, Ken Lewenza, said that what Canadians need is a full loaf of bread and suggested that this was crumbs. We heard from the CAW, indicating that only handfuls would meet that long-tenured definition. Andrew Jackson of the CLC has indicated that there's a problem with it because it only goes back to the beginning of this year; it doesn't go back to the beginning of the recession but to the beginning of this year.

This bill comes into effect for people who would qualify as of January 2009, correct?

• (1545)

Mr. Paul Thompson: That's correct. It would be nine months prior to royal assent, and as far back as January 4.

Mr. Michael Savage: What would you say to people who would argue that this divides people who are unemployed into what the government considers to be the worthy unemployed and the unworthy unemployed?

Mr. Paul Thompson: Do you mean around the date in January versus some other date?

Mr. Michael Savage: No, I mean around the qualification of long-tenured workers.

Mr. Paul Thompson: This is intended as a targeted measure to deal with those who have worked for a considerable length of time and made little use of EI. There are other measures in the economic action plan that have broader application, including the five weeks and the investment in training. So this measure is intended to serve a targeted client base.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thompson.

Thank you, Mr. Savage.

We'll move to the Bloc now and Monsieur Lessard for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would also like to thank our witnesses for being here and for the information they are sharing with us.

I would like a clarification, Mr. Chairman. I think there is a typo on page 4 of your brief. Indeed, in the fourth paragraph it says, and I quote: « Afin d'assurer un retrait graduel et en douceur de cette mesure, le niveau de prestations supplémentaires serait réduit progressivement par tranche de cinq semaines, à compter de juin 2011. »

You mean 2010, don't you?

Mr. Paul Thompson: You're right. That's a typo.

Mr. Yves Lessard: You calculated that 190,000 people would benefit from this program and that it would cost \$935 million. We have already talked about this, but to work out the numbers you have to target people who are covered and those who are not. You based your calculations on 2006 figures. Can you break down for us, by region and activity sector, how many unemployed workers will benefit from these measures? In other words, do you know how many unemployed workers would be covered by these measures, by province and by activity sector?

Mr. Paul Thompson: First, it is difficult, even impossible, to segment, by province and sector, the number of claimants who would be covered by these measures. Indeed, as my colleague just explained, the numbers are based on a forecast of the national unemployment rate and not regional or industry unemployment rates. Therefore, the number of 190,000 claimants for the length of the program is a national projection.

When we developed the criteria for the program, some parameters were based on past experience, including a 35-hour work week. I indicated that certain sectors rely on employment insurance from time to time. The EI system allows for this.

Mr. Yves Lessard: You cannot work out specific figures, but you are presenting specific results concerning the number of unemployed workers who would be eligible and how much the program would cost. Could you submit to us in writing the method used for your calculations and the results by period, beginning in 2006, and for 2009 and 2010, as you had indicated? As for the number of so-called long-tenured workers, about 30%, 21% of them have run out of benefits.

Based on your method of calculation, which yielded a result of 190,000 workers and \$935 million, 85% of unemployed workers would have to run out of benefits. So please understand that we are skeptical with regard to your numbers. It is extremely important that you send us in writing your method and results. We want to know how you reached these results. I don't know if you have those details with you this morning. If not, we would appreciate your sending them to us within the next few hours.

Further, is it fair to say that these measures, in fact, discriminate against women? We have to take into account women who take parental or maternity leave and who, as a consequence, don't pay EI premiums for long periods of time. As a result, these women face an additional hurdle if they want to qualify for the program. Please correct me if I'm wrong.

I would also like to know why you did not think of creating a measure which pays out more under the system — we all know that there is a lot of money in the EI fund — and which would benefit all unemployed workers. Why have you penalized some groups of unemployed workers?

• (1550)

Mr. Paul Thompson: As far as measures concerning women are concerned, there are two important provisions in the bill. The first provision contains criteria which allows a person who has paid premiums seven years out of ten to have been out of the job market for three years. Those years could include time spent on parental or maternity leave, or time spent away for other reasons. The second provision provides that special benefits are not included in the criteria relating to the 35 weeks. It does not include maternity, parental or other kinds of special benefits.

Mr. Yves Lessard: I also wanted to know why exclusion was chosen rather than accessibility.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Thompson, you have about 20 seconds. Finish your answer.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Thompson: Discussing politics is not my role. The government decided to adopt a measure targeting workers affected by the economic downturn. As I said, other measures in the Economic Action Plan are more general in scope, such as the five weeks of extra benefits.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard and Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Godin, welcome to the committee. I know you've spent some time here in the past, so it's good to have you back. The floor is yours.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you for coming. In the briefing, we were told about a nine-month extension. If the measure is adopted before October 15, the extension goes back to January 4. Why nine months? You might say that it was the minister's decision, but technically, what is the impact of this?

The economic crisis did not begin in January. This bill seeks to help workers during an economic crisis. If we really want to help everyone, why does the extension only go back to January, when we know that mills and other industries closed down in October or November 2008?

Mr. Paul Thompson: There are two aspects to your question. The first has to do with implementing the measures. Usually, new measures are meant for new clients, but in this case, the measure applies to existing clients.

• (1555)

[English]

That's a reach-back of nine months. The typical way would be to look forward to new clients; this actually looks back. It's a rather unusual way, in our experience with EI, to implement a change. In fact, the five-week measure introduced in the economic action plan was the first time we'd actually applied it to existing clients. So there's an aspect that's operational. The farther you look back, the more challenging it becomes from an implementational perspective. We have more clients who have long since stopped becoming clients. They have to be contacted to come into our office. They may be participating in other programs offered at the provincial level, including training measures, so the interactions with other programs becomes more complicated. With longer periods—as my colleague from Service Canada could explain—you begin to get people who are into a second claim in the same period. That introduces additional complexities. So there are various operational requirements that make it increasingly complex the farther back you go from the coming into force of the legislation.

[Translation]

The second aspect has to do with the labour market. The unemployment rate went up considerably between December and January; it is the highest rate in recent years. From December to January, it went from 6.3% to 7.8%.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you.

You decided to apply a retroactive measure to existing beneficiaries whereas it would normally apply only to new beneficiaries. Let us not forget that some people applied for benefits in January. Normally, they are still collecting benefits. This is why you can go back nine months. These people have not exhausted their benefits yet, and you intend to extend them. I find it hard to accept this argument on this basis. Could you give me an explanation?

Even if we go back, people are already benefiting from the five extra weeks. Besides, in the last budget, the department was very proud of having added five weeks. We are dealing with long-term beneficiaries and not with regular seasonal workers. These people normally would have received 45 weeks of benefits, or 50 maximum, which could have taken them at least to November or December, given that this measure would be in force on October 15.

You identified these people, but the bill could also have included people who are still collecting benefits and not those who have left and are working elsewhere. For someone making their second claim... I would like to hear Mr. Clarke, because I think that if the claimant is making a second claim, he has probably received 35 weeks of benefits and he would not be eligible in any case.

[English]

Mr. Paul Thompson: Louis, did you want to comment?

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Usually, when new measures are adopted, they are applied to new claimants, because the old claimants go by the old rules. In fact, over the past years, when we implemented pilot projects, the new claimants were dealt with under the new provisions, and the old claimants were dealt with under the old provisions.

Regarding the five weeks, as is now the case, we decided to also offer them to existing claimants, and this is quite exceptional.

A certain number of people who used the weeks of the preceding year will not necessarily have access to 40, 45 or 50 weeks. It will depend on the region they are living in. When these people were unemployed, the maximum they could receive varied according to the region where they lived. Not everyone has access to the full 50 weeks, because everyone was not necessarily working full-time when they got laid off. Thus, many claimants will exhaust or have already exhausted their benefits. There will be more and more claimants as time goes on. Things will get more complicated for the people who have exhausted their benefits.

• (1600)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do you think that between January and October 15, some people will have stopped receiving benefits and you will go to see what is happening to them?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Yes, a certain number of claimants will have finished receiving benefits at that time.

[English]

The Chair: That's all the time.

Mr. Clarke, did you want to add to that?

Okay. Thank you very much.

We're now going to move to the first round with the Conservatives.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be sharing my time with Mr. Cannan, so at about three and a half minutes I'd like to be notified.

Thank you very much for appearing before the committee. I get the sense that this particular bill is very targeted and specific and has to do with those who have worked for a significant period of time, a substantial period of time, but for varying years, and who have not used the system to any great degree over those years. So there are two factors working there. When you're talking about someone in those varying years who has not used the system for more than 35 weeks, they would be entitled. In those 35 weeks you talked about a business potentially retooling and retrofitting. I take it then that those 35 weeks are a cumulative total that could be any number of periods of time, or episodes if you want to call it that, of unemployment during those particular years. Is that correct?

Mr. Paul Thompson: That is correct. It could be one period of 35 weeks or it could be claims spread over five years. So it's a cumulative total.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: So it would indicate over at least five years that there would have to be substantial connection to the workforce over a long period of time and someone finding themselves in a position of not being employed through no fault of their own after having been in the workforce for a long time.

Mr. Paul Thompson: That's correct.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: In the 35 weeks you mentioned there were certain special benefits that did not count to the 35 weeks. You recounted some of them—parental maternity benefits perhaps. What other benefits might there be? Sickness, for example?

Mr. Paul Thompson: Yes, all that's taken into account is the use of regular benefits, so that would not include use of all the special benefits. Included in special benefits are maternity, parental, sickness, and compassionate care benefits. In addition, I would add that our work-sharing program is not included in the calculation of use of EI benefits.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: So anyone finding themselves in that category would not be affected.

Mr. Paul Thompson: Those weeks of EI use from any of those categories are not included in this calculation of 35 weeks. It's simply the use of regular benefits.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: And I take the point that not only are you going retroactive in its application for a period of time of up to nine months, but you're also having to calculate from an operational point of view what's happened to a number of claimants over a five-year period for this purpose, and then for a period of seven to 15 years for other purposes. So a number of variables have to be addressed from within the data within the system.

Is the system well-prepared to handle that within the confines of what's in this bill, and would any changes affect that?

Mr. Paul Thompson: As I indicated in my remarks, fortunately one of the advantages is that we're using the same definition we've used for the existing economic action plan measure or the career transition assistance, so it's a definition that's already programmed into our system.

I'll ask Philip to elaborate on our readiness to implement the measure from an operational perspective.

Mr. Philip Clarke (Director General, Benefits Processing, Service Canada): We're fully ready. We'll be automating the extension of payments as of November 8. We have a process in place to treat them manually between coming into force and November 8, when the system will be ready, so we're ready to go.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Thank you.

With that, I'll pass it over to Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you to the witnesses. I can tell you've put a lot of time and thought and effort into preparing this bill, which unfortunately is required in this economic situation. Coming from British Columbia, forestry is a big economic driver for our community, and I know it is

for Quebec and Ontario and other members around the table. Forestry is a big sector for Canada.

In B.C., I guess we had the perfect storm, with not only the housing crisis but the high Canadian dollar, and of course the nasty pine beetle that has devastated a lot of northern British Columbia. I wonder if you are able to elaborate on how this bill would help the forest workers.

• (1605)

Mr. Paul Thompson: I would be happy to speak to it.

Before I get into certain sectors, maybe I should note again that this isn't a measure that's targeted for particular industry sectors or parts of the country. It is targeted at certain types of workers, but those workers are found across the country. In fact the distribution of long-tenured workers in our analysis roughly mirrors the distribution of the labour force as a whole. We find long-tenured workers showing up across the country in proportion to the distribution in the labour force, which I think is an important point.

Other parameters of the bill are certainly sensitive to the issues facing different industry sectors. When we established this 35-week limit on prior EI use, it did take into account the use of EI by certain sectors. I mentioned manufacturing, but it's important to note that included in manufacturing are parts of the forestry sector, any of the processing parts of forestry. Forest products are statistically part of the manufacturing sector.

If you look at patterns of EI use, a 35-week threshold does allow a high degree of access for sectors across the economy, including the forestry sector.

Mr. Ron Cannan: I appreciate the fact that it's long-tenured workers.

Don Drummond, who is a well-respected TD Bank economist, said:

Without the extension, their benefits would soon expire... ..the measure will alleviate some of the pain in the hard-hit auto, forestry and manufacturing sector....

Those are, in many cases, the long-tenured workers.

For my last question, Mr. Clarke, there are tens of thousands of people who are going to be eligible for this. What provisions have you taken to help the transition within the staffing of Service Canada?

Mr. Philip Clarke: Thank you.

As you're aware, I believe, we've hired significant numbers of people to ensure we're able to pay benefits in a timely manner. This measure will be done primarily by the systems automatically. As soon as we get the coming into force, we can finish the computer programming. On November 8, we will be all ready to go. For people who are already getting pay, there will be no interruption for them going forward. We'll be able to take care of that in a manual intervention, but as of November 8 it will all flow through.

Mr. Ron Cannan: So basically they're briefing all the Service Canada personnel.

Our constituency office often gets a lot of questions as well, and we work closely with Service Canada, so we want to make sure these unemployed workers get their dollars in their hands as soon as possible.

Mr. Philip Clarke: Training has been provided.

It's ready to go as soon as we get the go-ahead.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm now going to move to Madame Folco.

We're going to start five-minute rounds.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, gentlemen.

My question has something to do with the question that Mr. Cannan just asked regarding, once again, the choices that you made, or the government made, with regard to the 190,000 beneficiaries of the program. Given the fact that huge preparations were made, I suppose, with regard to this legislation, that you have produced a study of the origins of the 190,000 beneficiaries, by region, by gender, by field of activity etc.?

The reason why I am asking this question is that it is a well-known fact that in general, women on the labour market very often do not work the same hours nor do they work according to the same standards as men do. Men tend to work from 8:30 or 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Women very often have split schedules, which means that they are working part-time, sometimes for a few hours in the morning and a few hours in the afternoon. Therefore, they were the first ones to be laid off and they generally do not participate in employment insurance programs.

I was wondering whether they were included in your analysis on the one hand, and on the other hand, in sectors such as forestry, or automobiles, as my colleague said. Did you seek out specific sectors or did you do a sector-by-sector study to see how much workers will benefit from this program in some sectors that were hit hard by the economic downturn?

• (1610)

Mr. Paul Thompson: Regarding the first question, the estimated number of 190,000 workers who will take advantage of these measures cannot be divided by regions or by sectors, because it is based on a projection of the national unemployment rate, and these

figures are not available for specific genders, sectors etc. Nevertheless, the bill has provisions that cover the needs of all beneficiaries, including women.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: What about women who have worked part-time? Could you give me some concrete information?

Mr. Paul Thompson: This measure targets full-time workers. This is the objective of the bill, and with regard to full-time workers, we are looking at a proportion of 7 out of 10 in terms of premiums, which means that some of them may have been absent from the labour market for 3 years. Moreover, we are not including the use of special benefits. We did these two things to allow more people to become eligible.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: If I have a moment left, Mr. Chair, I would like to say that it is a pity. To me, it's a real pity that in the 21st century in Canada, with all the instruments available to the Canadian government, no preliminary analysis was made and that there was not more focus on the one hand on the regions, on the other hand the kind of sector and industry, and the gender of the beneficiaries, because we know that the kind of work done by men is very different from the kind of work done by women, and I am referring just to this example. The ways in which women work, their working hours and the sectors in which they work are very different from those of men. I find that it is a pity that no such analysis was done.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Vellacott is next for five minutes.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First off, in my own province there's wide support, obviously, for this kind of initiative. The past social services minister of Saskatchewan, Janice MacKinnon, says that it would be better—and she's speaking in reference to the 360-hour proposal—to expand coverage and improve the benefits of those who have paid into the program for years but find themselves unemployed. Bill Ferguson, the president of the United Steelworkers Local 8782, says that it's going to be quite good and will give workers a little more time, that it's a good thing to extend benefits to people like that.

I think on the main there is very widespread support for the merits of the measures being taken here, and I commend you as individuals in terms of the work you did to put this together.

I guess I would like to also know, and maybe have reiterated for all of us here and for the public as well, about some of the other measures that the government has taken in the recent months to help long-tenured workers and older workers through the economic action plan. Second, how does this particular legislation before us now relate to them, to the older workers, the long-tenured workers? I'm thinking of particular things like the career transition assistance, the targeted initiative.

Could you give us a quick summary on each of those, and then talk about the extra five weeks that was in the prior proposal?

Mr. Paul Thompson: Certainly.

I mentioned briefly the career transition assistance initiative in my opening remarks because that's a fairly significant measure that was introduced in the action plan targeted at the same population that we're dealing with in this legislation. The difference is that the extended benefit was for a longer period of time, but targeted at those people who make the significant decision of undertaking long-term training for up to two years. So if an individual wanted to make a fairly fundamental change in their occupation or career, they would work in conjunction with their provincially delivered training providers, and the federal employment insurance program would provide income support for up to two years.

There's also a related measure. At present there's a period of time, if you're in receipt of severance, to wait before benefits can start. If that individual decides to invest part of their severance package in training, they can claim EI and receive benefits much earlier than before.

Those are two measures that were done as part of the career transition assistance for the economic action plan and are being unfolded.

The other measure specifically targeted to older workers—is this isn't specific to EI eligibility—is the targeted initiative for older workers, focused on smaller communities, less than 250,000 population, that are facing particular challenges. This is supporting fairly innovative projects across the country to deliver group-based projects for groups of older workers who are facing similar challenges. There are projects unfolding across the country. There were previously a limited number of provinces participating in the initiative. We've now signed new agreements with Manitoba, Nunavut, and Ontario, so now all jurisdictions except Alberta are participating in the targeted initiative for older workers that saw some enhanced investments in the economic action plan.

• (1615)

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Thank you, Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thanks again.

Being from southwestern Ontario and a community that had a significant amount of manufacturing and has seen some losses, I can really see how this bill will help many people with extending their benefits, many of my former colleagues, both male and female. Specifically in the one community I live not too far from, there was definitely an older workforce there.

Again, I wonder if you could elaborate a little more about what is going to be put forward for older workers.

Mr. Paul Thompson: These two measures are very significant investments in the income support for older workers, whether they need additional time to find a new job—which this measure is intended to do—or whether they are undertaking training. These two EI measures are providing the income support.

The targeted initiative for older workers is really another project delivered in partnership with provinces. The Government of Ontario is fairly new to this program. It is figuring out ways of launching the kinds of innovative projects that we've seen in other parts of the country where, as I say, groups of older workers facing very similar

challenges can come together and tackle their problems collectively, whether it's to enhance their skills, market their skills for new jobs, or learn how to prepare CVs—how to face the fairly fundamental challenges that an older worker would.

It's proven to be a pretty successful initiative in other jurisdictions, and we hope to see Ontario ramping up quickly in that project as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Thompson.

We're going to now move on to Madame Beaudin. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, gentlemen, for being here.

I imagine that you have estimated the current unemployment rate in Canada. What is this rate?

Mr. Paul Thompson: The estimated number of clients who will benefit from these measures is based on a projection of an 8.8% unemployment rate during the period in question.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: How many unemployed people does this represent in Canada? I would like to know the number.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: We do not necessarily use the number of unemployed people. We take into account the number of beneficiaries who—

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: My question is not about the measures you are proposing. I want to know how many unemployed people there are at this time in Canada.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Currently, 1.6 million people are unemployed.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Today you said that 190,000 people could take advantage of these measures.

When I look at the situation in my riding—and I imagine that it is the case in the ridings of all my colleagues present here—I note that many people are not affected, given that there might be up to 1,400,000 people. People will wonder what kind of program will be offered. In many cases, in fact, we have to do with women in very precarious positions and also with many young people. In many cases, women will become welfare recipients in the provinces instead of taking advantage of help from employment insurance.

Therefore, let me repeat the request that we made at our last meeting and that my colleague made just a moment ago. You have confirmed that we could have a written copy of the calculations you made to obtain the figure of 190,000 workers who could potentially take advantage of these measures. You can tell us about how many people are currently unemployed, your estimation of the number of long-tenured workers and of those who might exhaust their benefits. Could you give us these calculations in writing?

• (1620)

Mr. Paul Thompson: We have no problem with providing committee members with the methods that my colleagues explained. We can provide them in writing.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Very well then we can get the figures fairly quickly.

Earlier, you said that you had statistics regarding long-tenured workers divided by regions. Could we also get those numbers in writing? When you answered my colleague opposite, you said that you had statistics on long-tenured workers, region by region.

Mr. Paul Thompson: Yes, along with the figures for management, we have the distribution of long-tenured workers.

[*English*]

It's proportional to the labour force that we find in each province. That can be provided in writing as well.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: All right.

Once again, I want to be sure that I understand. All the workers who have filed an employment insurance claim since January 4, 2009 are likely to meet the criteria. They must have filed their employment insurance claims on or before January 4, 2009. Am I right?

Mr. Paul Thompson: The distribution is not made on the basis of a projection of the number of beneficiaries. It is based on current experience from January to—

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: The information that we have shows how many people we sent letters to. Thus, we have some information and we can obtain the distribution for this group of people. We began sending out letters which were actually meant to implement the employment transition initiative. In this case, the measures began to apply at the end of January, and not on January 4. We can get the information beginning with the end of January up to the most recent data for August or September.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Thus, all the workers who are in a precarious position, many women, are in this situation. At least, this is the case in my riding, I am sure that there are currently such people in every riding. In fact, there are about 1,300,000 unemployed people to whom nothing is being offered. They will end up as welfare recipients in the provinces.

A report just came out today that shows that many young people are in a precarious position after having gained little advantage from summer employment. All these people who are in precarious positions, those who are less privileged and even those workers who may have accumulated 40 weeks, as compared to those who have accumulated 30 weeks, do not meet the criteria.

Why did you not propose universal measures?

Mr. Paul Thompson: As I explained, the government decided to introduce measures targeting certain persons, certain workers, people who have contributed over a period of several years and who have not collected many weeks of benefits during the five past years.

[*English*]

There were other measures taken in the economic action plan with the universal application, such as the five-week benefit extension for a more targeted group of recipients facing particular challenges in the downturn.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In July 2009 there were about 787,700 persons receiving regular benefits, and nearly 1,583,000 were unemployed. So people receiving benefits were 50% of the unemployed. You just said that this measure is to assist people who have particular difficulties. In my riding, I have a lot of new immigrants. Some of them will have been working for nine straight years. You're saying they need seven out of 10, so they would not qualify under this program. Your minimum is 10 years, right?

• (1625)

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: It's a minimum of seven.

Hon. Maria Minna: Seven years is your minimum?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Seven years of contribution.

Hon. Maria Minna: What's the minimum?

Mr. Paul Thompson: And those seven years can take place over 10 years.

Hon. Maria Minna: So if you've worked six years you don't qualify.

Mr. Paul Thompson: That's correct.

Hon. Maria Minna: So if you work six years straight and you've lost your job through no fault of your own and you can't pay your rent, you don't qualify.

Mr. Paul Thompson: People who have worked six years would continue to receive the five weeks under the EAP and—

Hon. Maria Minna: You've exhausted that now. You're at the point of exhausting it, so you can't get this extension.

Mr. Paul Thompson: I'm saying that after six years you'd be entitled to the existing five weeks. The people with seven years or more get five weeks and then an additional three weeks for each year on top of that.

Hon. Maria Minna: But in choosing who benefits and who doesn't, we're saying that if you've worked six years, you don't qualify for this program, but if you worked seven years, you do.

Mr. Paul Thompson: And if you work eight years, you qualify for three more; nine years, three more. It extends. There are distinctions—

Hon. Maria Minna: I understand how the grid works. What I'm trying to say is that we're picking and choosing people. Some are going to pay their bills, others are not; some will end up on welfare, others will not. That's not your decision—you didn't make that decision and that choice. With respect to young people, it's the same situation.

I need a clarification on the women with respect to parental leave. If I'm not mistaken, you responded earlier to a question put by the Bloc that a year taken off for parental leave is not counted as part of the seven years. What about the 30% of maximum premium? Are you considering excluding the 30% calculation for the weeks when claimants receive parental leave? It says here the criteria are that you need to have worked seven years out of 10, and that you need to have reached a threshold of 30% of the maximum premium for the years in which maternity benefits were received. So your 30% threshold does not apply either?

Mr. Paul Thompson: The requirement is to have paid a minimum of 30% of the EI premiums for seven of the last 10 years, which allows for up to three years of absence without paying the premiums.

Hon. Maria Minna: But if one of those years is parental, then the 30% threshold might not be met.

Mr. Paul Thompson: The difference between the three years, the difference between the seven and the 10, is intended to accommodate absences from the labour market, including time spent on parental leave, where premiums would not be paid. The period of employment would still be seven years out of the last 10.

Hon. Maria Minna: The 30% doesn't apply in that case.

When you were looking at the sectors and groups in society that benefited and those that did not, did you by any chance do an analysis of the impact, or lack of impact, on women, youth, and various age groups? Was that analysis done at all?

Mr. Paul Thompson: In coming up with the definition of seven out of 10 years, one of the primary motivations behind that was to allow for absences from the labour market. So that would have been motivated by some gender analysis of how women versus men might access this measure. That's one example, in addition to the exclusion of the use of special benefits.

Hon. Maria Minna: But was there a gender-based analysis impact done on this particular piece of legislation?

Mr. Paul Thompson: There was analysis done—

Hon. Maria Minna: I understand we're supposed to have this at HRSDC now. It's supposed to be common practice. Was there one done?

Mr. Paul Thompson: There was analysis done of the measure in coming up with the analysis that fed into—

Hon. Maria Minna: A gender analysis?

Mr. Paul Thompson: There was gender analysis around this—

Hon. Maria Minna: Could we receive that analysis at this committee?

Mr. Paul Thompson: There is some information we can provide in that regard.

Hon. Maria Minna: No, but could we receive the actual analysis done? Could this committee receive that?

Mr. Paul Thompson: We'll provide analysis on—

Hon. Maria Minna: The gender-based analysis done.

Mr. Paul Thompson: We can provide analysis based on gender, yes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thompson.

That's all the time we have. We're a little over time.

I'm going to move it back to Mr. Godin. We're going to give you another round, and then if we want to pick up on anything...

Mike, you wanted to ask a couple of questions.

Mr. Godin, you have five minutes, sir.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: You mentioned January 4. Normally, after January 4, you would know who is eligible, would you not? What problem would be solved if the bill were adopted on October 20? The government's heart is apparently in the right place regarding long-tenured beneficiaries. After having passed through Parliament, through the committee and through Senate before being adopted on October 20, would there be a problem with this bill if everything was scheduled for January 4?

Mr. Paul Thompson: As my colleague explained, some people have exhausted their benefits even after nine months. If this period was extended, the implementation of the measures would become more and more complicated because there would be more and more beneficiaries who have already exhausted their—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do you already know who these people are? It is not as if you did not know them. It looks very easy, because thanks to the computer program, apparently, you would punch one key on the keyboard in November and everything would get done.

Mr. Paul Thompson: They must be advised by letter that their status has expired. Perhaps then another kind of program would be used at the provincial level. The longer the period, the more complicated things get.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to have some things explained. We all read the news in the newspaper and we watch television. It is as if Quebec were the only province in Canada to be excluded from this. However, I believe that there is also an economic crisis in Quebec, just as there is one here.

You said that you sent letters out to people regarding the five extra weeks. Thus, we should already know if Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and Manitoba will take advantage of them.

Why could we not say that things are about the same everywhere with regard to the number of people? It seems to me that you can explain that, because the letters have already been sent out. I am sure that Human Resources and Skills Development Canada knows to whom the letters were sent and in what provinces.

Mr. Paul Thompson: Yes, that's right. One thing that we cannot do is to divide the projections over the 19 months that the measures will last. It is difficult to do this without a projection of the unemployment rate for each region etc.

However, it is true that we now have a list that gives the names of individuals who received a letter from Service Canada, and the distribution was made in proportion with the labour market.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You are saying that it is distributed in proportion to the labour market and that each province will have its fair share. In fact, this has to do with workers and not provinces, because the workers are the ones who lost their jobs.

Mr. Paul Thompson: Yes. For example, beneficiaries in Quebec province received 24% of the letters, which corresponds to 23% of the labour market. The distribution of these letters is proportional to —

Mr. Yvon Godin: Twenty-four per cent went to Quebec. Comparatively, in Canada, this is one province out 10, including the territories. As the beneficiaries in Quebec received 24% of the letters, it means that those people could be eligible.

Mr. Paul Thompson: Yes, the distribution is made in proportion to—

Mr. Yvon Godin: With regard to the 190,000 unemployed people that you mentioned, was this figure determined before the famous so-called five extra weeks? The prevailing conditions in the spring are not the prevailing conditions for this autumn. Have you calculated the percentage of difference? Do you have these figures at hand or are you relying on the old figures?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: We are relying on the old figures. We did not adjust them because it was very difficult to find out what proportion of long-tenured workers would exhaust their benefits. As for the people who are eligible for five weeks, we have already granted them more than four by now. We suppose that the rate would remain steady.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do those figures include severance pay? Would it be something like parental leave or maternal leave or sick leave? This has to do with long-tenured workers. After applying the five-week measure, do you consider the fact that long-tenured workers probably received some severance pay?

• (1635)

Mr. Paul Thompson: The eligibility of a person who has received severance pay is based on the date of the claim.

Mr. Yvon Godin: If the severance pay amounts to 10 weeks of pay, for example, the calculations will be based on the date of the employment insurance claim. This means that the person will not be penalized.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: As we said, people who are eligible for these measures are all those who have filed an employment insurance claim after January 4.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Let us suppose that I worked for a company, that I was laid off on January 6 and that I subsequently filed a claim for employment insurance. I was told that I could get severance pay equivalent to 20 weeks of pay so that I would not be entitled to employment insurance for these 20 weeks, although I would be eligible for benefits during the 45 or 50 following weeks. Would I be eligible for benefits after that?

[English]

The Chair: We're over time, but I want you to answer the question and we'll wrap up with that and move on to the next question.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: The bill provides for a longer period of benefits that takes into account the extra benefits. We should verify whether the reception of severance pay would extend the period of benefits. Generally, people have a maximum of 104 weeks to claim their benefits.

Mr. Yvon Godin: This is important. It would have an impact on the numbers.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Yes, I will have to send you some information about the interaction between these two factors.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: We're pretty much done with the questions now. I know Mike wanted to asked another follow-up, and we do have a little bit of time here.

So Mike and Mr. Lessard, we'll have a couple of quick questions from both you guys.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you very much.

Is there any labour market implication to this measure?

Mr. Paul Thompson: I wonder if you could clarify that.

Mr. Michael Savage: Labour market implication in terms of whether this will affect who's going to work and when they'll go to work. You talked about labour market implications for other EI measures. The fact that they're going to 360 hours, the government suggested, would increase unemployment by 2%.

Mr. Paul Thompson: This is a temporary measure, and as such, we wouldn't expect there to be any permanent impact on the labour market. It has a gradual phasing out of the measure. It's being provided to people at a pretty challenging time in terms of the economy, and we expect there would be take-up.

Mr. Michael Savage: I understand that, but I would remind you that the Liberal 360-hour proposal was a temporary measure too, for one year, the same as this, and we were told it would have a 2% increase in unemployment. So there was no labour market implication done or study done on this piece of legislation.

Mr. Paul Thompson: I would say that with this population of long-tenured workers who have a long history of attachment to the labour force, combined with the fact that this is a temporary measure...most economists would argue that this is very limited.

Mr. Michael Savage: As they would also argue with the Liberal measure of the 360 hours because of its temporary nature.

There seem to be a lot of unanswered questions. How long have you been working on this in the department?

Mr. Paul Thompson: How long have we been working on this in the department? The tabling date of the legislation...I don't have it in front of me. Do you know that?

Mr. Michael Savage: September 18, I think.

Mr. Paul Thompson: September 18. Obviously for a period of time some policy work was done in the department leading up to that.

Mr. Michael Savage: Was it weeks or months?

Mr. Paul Thompson: It's hard to pinpoint a date at which work on a measure begins, because it's an evolution and you arrive at a finished product on the date of tabling the legislation.

• (1640)

Mr. Michael Savage: I'm just curious why it wasn't presented to the EI working group.

Mr. Paul Thompson: I believe there was some discussion, if I'm not mistaken, on long-tenured workers as one of the subjects.

Mr. Michael Savage: There was a point of discussion. There was no proposal or anything. So either it was something that was worked on that wasn't presented to the group—which was the purpose of the group—or else it's kind of a haphazard thing in reaction to later events. In either case, it seems to me that it's one of the reasons we need to have witnesses to have a look at this and find the loopholes and perhaps assist you.

One of the concerns about the EI system in the last number of years, for which we all probably bear some responsibility, is that it's become increasingly complex. This bill seems to make it even more complex. Even the Prime Minister indicated back in June that we should be trying to simplify the system, when you look at regional rates and a whole bunch of other things. Under this bill, subsection 12(2) becomes subsections 12(2.1), 12(2.2), 12(2.3), and 12(2.4). It creates a distinction as to when EI benefits are claimed. There are four periods; it sets out six possible types of extension, different payments. This seems incredibly complex.

In light of that, have you added new people to Service Canada? Have you hired new people to administer this? The last time new measures came in there were delays as a result of that.

What is the cost to the department for the administration of this new program?

Mr. Paul Thompson: I will ask my colleague, but we have not sought additional resources to implement the measure.

Mr. Philip Clarke: That's correct. We aren't staffing up additionally to take care of this measure. We're redeploying staff to be able to deal with the manual work that falls out of here.

Mr. Michael Savage: That doesn't sound great.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Savage.

Mr. Lessard, maybe just a couple of minutes and then we'll wrap it up.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to come back to the figures that we were provided with. This is important because it helps us to understand the scope of the program in its application. More specifically, I am addressing Mr. Beauséjour.

Let us begin with the fact that 30% of all beneficiaries are considered as long-tenured workers. We agree on this point. In July 2009, 787,700 people received employment insurance benefits. Let us round the figure off to 780,000. Taking 30% of this figure of 780,000, we get a figure of about 200,000 long-tenured workers who would be affected. Of these 200,000 long-tenured workers, about 21% would be eligible. This amounts to about 40,000 long-tenured workers.

Would this not be the result of implementing Bill C-50, Mr. Beauséjour?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: No, and I would like to give you a more elaborate answer.

Mr. Yves Lessard: In that case, you will have to do it in writing.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: We will do it in writing, but let us continue anyway.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Do it in writing, because these are the results we came up with.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: We must make a distinction. You said that there were 780,000 people—

Mr. Yves Lessard: —in July.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: These people, on the average, do not receive benefits for a year. The average period of time is more generally 20 or 30 weeks. They do not stay as long. For every unemployed person, there are about 2.5 to 2.6 clients in any given year—

Mr. Yves Lessard: —who would be affected.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Let us suppose that on the average during one year, there are about 780,000 unemployed people for the entire year. Given the fact that the claimants do not receive benefits during the full year, there would be 2.5 different claimants.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Excuse me for interrupting you—

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: This is why there is a greater number of people who are affected.

Mr. Yves Lessard: You understand how important it will be to do this.

I would like to discuss another aspect, that my colleagues also discussed. You can determine in a targeted way the number of older workers whom you will help because of the aging of a part of the population and of the populations of the smallest communities, as you call them. The last time we met you, we learned that you could get your data straight from the income tax returns.

I understand that you did not go through the exercise of determining the number of people by region and by sector, but I think that it is possible to do this. Could you give us the figures by region and by sector of activity, for things like forestry, the oil sands, the fisheries and other things? Will fishers from the Gaspé Peninsula or from the Acadian region, for example, benefit from these measures? At first sight, these people will not receive anything. I wish I were wrong, but nothing up to now shows that this is the case. You could tell us if this is so.

• (1645)

[English]

The Chair: I'll get you to wrap up with that question and we'll finish on that note.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Thompson: As we explained, it is very difficult to make projections. We have historical figures regarding employment insurance benefits and premiums. We have done some studies of the use of the benefits by the beneficiaries of the program, but it is important to note that it is not the same as making projections on the way in which the measures will be used.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Maybe something was omitted. If the crisis lasts for a long time, is there any question of extending the measures if, perchance, it was found to work well?

Mr. Paul Thompson: The bill provides for very precise dates for implementing and for winding up the measures. It will be up to the government and to Parliament to decide whether or not to extend the measures.

Mr. Yves Lessard: All right. Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much Mr. Clarke, Mr. Thompson, and Mr. Beauséjour. We appreciate your being here today.

You gentlemen can leave when you want. We have some committee business to take of.

Members, I have a couple of motions before you. The first motion I would like you to look at is for witnesses:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities be granted an operational budget of \$21,100 for its study of Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits.

It's the standard motion the clerk makes up so we can have witnesses come to hearings and present to us.

Do I have any discussion on that?

Do you want to move it?

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I so move.

[English]

The Chair: All those in favour? Any objections?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next motion we have is from Mr. Martin. Mr. Godin, if you'd like to read the motion, sir, and then speak to it, we'll then talk about it.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, the motion reads as follows:

That the committee schedule all meetings related to the study of Bill C-50 in the week of October 5-9, 2009, in order to return it to the House prior to the next break week and in time for its speedy passage, in order to ensure that employment insurance benefits begin to reach long-tenured workers without undue delay.

It's quite clear that it is before the break week. The bill should undoubtedly be sent back to the House by Friday, before the break week.

[English]

The Chair: Do we have any discussion on this? I'm going to start taking names.

Mr. Lessard, you are the first one. I'll start with you, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Perhaps we could listen to our colleague to understand what he's afraid of.

Last week, we had adopted a schedule for our business, so four days this week and two when we return. It seems that this does not involve any delays to the schedule already set out in the bill. We have checked, and to date, I don't think that this will delay anything.

What is important, Mr. Chair, is that we be able to hear from witnesses. Last week we had agreed to submit a witness list, and we did so. I think that it would be unrealistic to sit more often than scheduled this week, because we are already all extremely busy, unless we add meetings next week. We could look perhaps at that option.

For now, I would like to hear more from our colleague, in order to learn why he is concerned that the deadline will not be met, when last week, everything seemed to be fine.

• (1650)

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: When the four meetings had been proposed, I must admit that we had not taken into consideration the fact that Parliament would not be sitting the week of October 15, I wasn't here when you discussed that.

To respond to Mr. Lessard's question as to the urgency, it is that, every day that we lose after October 15, is a day that a worker will also lose, meaning January 4, 5, 6 and 7. We want to do something for workers, but we are in danger of losing workers, and I don't want that to happen. That is the reason for this proposal. I want to make sure that workers can benefit from this measure.

For our part, we are prepared to add a meeting this week, either Wednesday or tomorrow afternoon, it doesn't matter to me. I would be okay with working in the evening too. I used to be a miner, and working the night shift does not bother me. We could do it for workers, especially if it is to help them as soon as possible.

[English]

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Godin.

I have on the list Mr. Vellacott, Mr. Lessard, and Mr. Savage.

Based on looking at the schedule, this won't affect benefits at all. It was my understanding, and looking at our getting it back, this will not affect anything in terms of making sure it comes into effect. That is my understanding, but we'll keep moving up the list.

Mr. Vellacott, do you want the floor?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Just temporarily—I think it is an important enough measure that we want to get it through expeditiously. We had this previous agreement from other parties here, and I think we want to hear from the witnesses to confirm the merits of the bill. If Michael has questions about loopholes or whatever, then those need to be responded to, and they will be fulsomely, I'm sure.

I don't think we want to be just flipping into this without the due diligence, but in an expedited fashion. That is the whole point.

The Chair: That is the balance we were trying to strike when we met last time. We would not hold this up unduly, but we would hear from some witnesses.

I'll go to Mr. Lessard, then Mr. Savage.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: First, Mr. Chair, I understand why our colleague wants to move quickly. However, I don't want it to be a futile exercise for our witnesses. If we invite witnesses to come, we need to respect their own occupations. These people are extremely busy. We can't ask them to come here in two days just like that. We need to give them notice, plan, etc. By acting quickly, the only thing that's guaranteed is that not many people will be able to come and testify. I do not think that is my colleague's objective. I think that he has too much respect for workers and the unemployed for that. That concludes my point.

Second, if there is a majority who truly agrees to pass the bill and if delaying it for one week hangs on one small amendment, Mr. Chair, our NDP colleague who is sponsoring this bill with the Conservatives could make a small amendment when the time comes. That way implementation could perhaps be delayed one week so that people can be consulted.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm starting to get a consensus around the room that this is probably not going to work, but let's hear from Mr. Savage. Then, if there aren't any further comments, we'll have a vote.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you, Chair.

As usual, our colleague Monsieur Lessard has said it all and said it very well. I think the original schedule makes sense. We have prepared an amendment we would use if necessary. It would amend the bill to replace subclause 8(1) so that subsections 1(1), 2(1), and 2(3), together with sections 3 to 7, would be deemed to have come into force earlier. That can be done to ensure that there would be no delay in getting benefits to people.

I think we go with the schedule, we do our due diligence, and we get the work done. If we need to make a change at the end, we'll be happy to consider it to make sure nobody suffers.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thanks.

All those in favour of the motion?

(Motion negated)

The Chair: It looks like we'll go with the original schedule.

We already have witnesses booked for Thursday. The minister will also be here then. We will continue with the schedule.

Madame Folco.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I wanted to ask a question on a point of information about the papers you circulated on travel to Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, etc.

The Chair: That is just to bring in witnesses, actually; it is not complete right now.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I was wondering about the second part, which is the north.

The Chair: Right. It has not been completed yet. We're going to keep you updated as we move forward on it.

Is there anything else?

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: Due to the importance of the bill, does it make sense to ask that all the hearings be televised?

The Chair: That has been done. We're going to move on that right away.

The meeting is adjourned.

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