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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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

Tuesday, October 27, 2009

• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): I call to order meeting 52 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities on Tuesday, October 27, 2009. Pursuant to the order of reference of Tuesday, September 29, 2009, we are studying Bill C-50, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits.

Today, we're going to be doing clause-by-clause consideration, and afterwards we still have some committee business to deal with—Mr. Martin's motion, as well as our budget for travel, which we'll handle afterwards.

I'm going to start with clause-by-clause consideration.

Mr. Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Chair, since we have officials from the department here, I would like to put a question to them, the one I asked about apprentices. I want some clarification. To my mind, the intention is certainly not to exclude people who work. The way I see it, if someone is working and has to take training, that is part of their job. The person was not laid off. The question put to our witnesses last week was whether these people could be eligible under the special program for parental leave, maternity leave and so forth.

Should the committee members put forward an amendment, yes or no? I would like to hear the government's answer to that.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Clarke, I think you probably heard the question as it deals with apprentices.

Mr. Philip Clarke (Director General, Benefits Processing, Service Canada): Yes, I did. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm sorry to say that Monsieur Beauséjour, who would be most appropriate to respond to that question, hasn't been able to arrive yet, and neither has Madam McLean. I suspect they're stuck downstairs in security on their way through. I'm not sure how you'd like to proceed. We're in your hands, sir.

Oh, here they come.

The Chair: Why don't we just wait until they get their coats off, and then we can proceed with the answer to the question.

Mr. Godin, when they have had a chance to get settled, I'll ask you to direct the question back to them again and we can go from there. How does that sound, Mr. Godin?

If you guys are all set now, I'll just ask Mr. Godin to ask the question again.

Mr. Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Last week, we heard from operators and representatives from the international union of engineers. The question had to do with apprentices. Perhaps the government did not see this coming, but there are apprentices who are working and who are sent to community college to complete their apprenticeship module. Then they go back to work. But they receive employment insurance benefits. They were not laid off because of a shortage of work. It is a special apprenticeship program.

Should we move an amendment, and is it valid? What does the government intend to do? Can these people be considered special cases, similar to those who are on sick leave, maternity leave or parental leave? What does the government intend to do?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour (Director General, Employment Insurance Policy, Skills and Employment Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): In Bill C-50, the excluded weeks are defined as regular benefits. Under the legislation, the term “regular benefits” excludes benefits payable under work sharing agreements. That also excludes benefits paid to those who are on training recommended by the commission or an authority designated by the Employment Insurance Commission.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Does that mean they will be included in Bill C-50?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: That means that the definition of “regular benefits” excludes those benefits received by individuals in a training program approved by the commission.

Mr. Yvon Godin: So the union does not need to worry.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: It does not need to worry.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The weeks during which those individuals are at community college will not be calculated as regular EI weeks.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: If they are taking training on a full-time basis and that training is approved by the commission, no, it will not be taken into account.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): They are not excluded, but no weeks are added. According to the provisions in Bill C-50, workers who have worked for less than seven years and who lose their job are all excluded.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: The definition of a “long-tenured worker” is an unemployed worker who has paid 30% of the maximum EI premiums for 7 of the past 10 years.

• (1540)

Mr. Yves Lessard: So it is not accurate to say that apprentices will benefit from the new measures. They will receive benefits that they are already entitled to.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: If they are apprentices, they have to meet the requirements set out in both parts of the definition of a “long-tenured worker”. For example, if an individual satisfies the definition of a “long-tenured worker” and if they received benefit weeks while on training, those weeks will not be included in the 35 weeks in the last 5 years before their EI claim.

Mr. Yves Lessard: But....

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Furthermore, the individual has to satisfy the definition of a “long-tenured worker”, that is, they must have paid at least 30% of the maximum EI premiums for 7 years, and they must not have received more than 35 weeks of regular benefits in the last 5 years.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Precisely. It could be a worker who was not an apprentice before but who was a long-tenured worker. That person could change jobs or occupations and become an apprentice. They would be eligible under clause 2 of the bill, which stipulates that when you have worked more than 7 years, you may be eligible if you have met the other two requirements. Is that correct?

There is one question from the outset, and it will apply to every clause in the bill. No one who has worked for less than 7 years will be eligible for these benefits.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Yes, we agree.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Then it increases in levels, from 8 to 15 years, regardless of whether you are an apprentice or not. That needs to be very clear for everyone.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Godin, do you need another clarification?

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Last week, a witness talked about long-tenured workers. Since they had gone to community college every year, they were on

training, and would automatically be ineligible. Will those people be treated the same as those who are on maternity or parental leave? Will they be put in the same category, or will they be put in a training category? So the answer is that apprentices who are long-tenured workers have to meet the same requirements as everyone else, contrary to what the union was saying last week.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Yes.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: My colleague's question is a very important one, because this can lead to confusion. They have to meet the same requirements as those set out in Bill C-50. So they do not get any preferential treatment.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: No, there is no preferential treatment. The only thing that needs to be clarified is that when calculating the number of regular EI weeks that an individual has accumulated in the last 5 years, the weeks of approved training are not included in the 35 weeks, in much the same way that special benefits do not count either.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Okay. There is another layer to that question. Apprentices often experience periods of unemployment. If I understand correctly, they will not be treated more favourably vis-à-vis the 30% threshold. That was why the union said that apprentices were more likely to experience periods of unemployment. Many of them will not be able to meet the 30% maximum premium requirement for a certain number of years.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: All of the requirements of a long-tenured worker are the same for everyone who is eligible for additional benefits. That is not changing. There is no special treatment for any kind of unemployed worker. We simply want to clarify what is taken into consideration when the number of regular benefit weeks received by unemployed workers is calculated.

• (1545)

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, on another issue, I think it would be good to ask questions right away as it may speed things up in dealing with the other clauses later.

When an unemployed worker applies for EI, they come with their Record of Employment, which gives the officer the claimant's employment period. From that information, you are also able to see the employment insurance periods that the person has used in the past. Based on the criteria set out in Bill C-50, you need more than 7 out of 10 years or 8 out of 11 years, and so forth.

Based on the fact that we know the period when eligibility will start, January 4, have you considered what will happen in terms of the number of unemployed workers currently collecting benefits? Could you give us the result in terms of that number today and say how many will be eligible at 5, 6 or 7 weeks, based on your data?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: I do not have that data with me right now. I am not sure whether that is something that is possible at this time.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Everything is computerized, I would think.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Yes.

Mr. Yves Lessard: I am not trying to be a thorn in your side with my next question, but the fact that we do not have those results is quite fascinating to me. We have been asking for them for a month now. I would think that with the new technologies and given the fact that we have all that data, we should have those results in order to make an informed decision on the clauses before us.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: To get that information, we have to implement the entire process; our system has to be ready to provide benefits to eligible individuals when the legislation is passed by Parliament. We had to change systems to be able to do that, which takes some time.

The information in our database on the premiums paid by individuals is an integral part of our benefits delivery system. There are pretty big changes that need to be implemented in order to be ready to provide benefits to Canadians when the bill is approved. The computerized component will be ready on November 8, I believe.

Mr. Yves Lessard: In the same vein, we have a decision to make about whether to adopt the bill or not.

I want to really understand how it is that from the moment data as basic as what I just described is entered in the system, we are not able to say how many unemployed workers will be affected at each level, although we can say that it covers 190,000 unemployed workers.

I am not trying to be a thorn in your side.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: No.

Mr. Yves Lessard: We have been asking you for a month now, and yet we do not know how you came up with the figure of 190,000 unemployed workers.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: I believe we sent a response as to how we arrived at 190,000. I do not know whether it was distributed to the committee members.

• (1550)

Mr. Yves Lessard: No, we do not have that. Does someone have it here?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: We used data that goes back to 2006, as we explained. We then extrapolated the implications using the unemployment rate.

We also have other information. We sent letters to people who met the criteria set out in our career transition assistance initiative. At that time, the only criterion was the contribution to the EI system during 7 out of 10 years. We already had in our databases the information for the 10 years before their claim. And so we were able to determine the number of people who had paid into the system for 7 out of 10 years and thus met the criterion. But we did not have the data for years 10 to 15. We obtained that information later, and that is why we cannot provide a breakdown by level for all of the other years.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Lessard, the information came in this afternoon. We're just asking the clerk to hand that information out to you right now, so it'll be distributed momentarily. Thank you very much.

What I want to do is go to clause-by-clause consideration. If there are no more questions, I'll just start.

Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, is there a way to get that information and to have 15 minutes to look at the document? It is pretty odd not to get the information until after the bill has been adopted.

[English]

The Chair: What I will do is give you five minutes to have a look at it.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Five minutes? It depends on what the document says, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: It's a very short document. It's two or three pages long.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Let's have at least 15 minutes.

[English]

The Chair: We'll hand out the document and then we'll resume.

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_____ (Pause) _____

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• (1555)

The Chair: Could we get the members back?

It wasn't five minutes, it wasn't 15; I think it was seven and a half, so split the difference there.

Mr. Savage has a point of order, so I'm going to turn the floor over to him for a second, and then Mr. Lessard.

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

We oppose this legislation for reasons that we've made clear, which I won't go into again.

I just want to indicate that it's frustrating. The minister was here on October 8, the officials were here on October 6, and we asked questions. We receive it at the meeting where we're doing clause-by-clause. I remind you, we were going to be doing clause-by-clause last Thursday. This wouldn't have been much use to us if we'd received it now after having done clause-by-clause.

It's typical of what I received when we were working on the EI working group over the summer, trying to get information out of the department. I don't blame the officials for this, but I blame somebody else. This is really unacceptable, and I just want to register that. Our position hasn't changed.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Savage.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, that is downright outrageous. We have been asking for this information for a month now. And now here you are with that information, and you are telling us that we have five minutes to form an opinion. Not only is that undemocratic, but it is also just plain wrong. We have a parliamentary responsibility, and we intend to fulfill that responsibility properly. The way that you and your party are behaving is preventing us from doing that. This is unacceptable. We just received two documents containing very specific and very interesting information, and they require careful analysis. How do you expect us to carry out that analysis and come to an appropriate decision in five minutes?

I am telling you: you have not heard the last of this. It makes absolutely no sense. Just like you, we have a mandate to represent our constituents, and they expect us to have the information we need to make decisions. You come here with all the information on hand. You had time to review it. You are putting us in a position where we are forced to make a decision when we did not even have the information we needed.

You were ready to make us take a vote, while you had the documentation. Once we received the documents, you gave us five minutes to review them. That is not parliamentary behaviour. We do not accept that. Anyone who claims otherwise does not understand what they are doing here.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's seven and a half minutes, actually.

Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): I have a comment on the note from Mr. Lessard and Mr. Savage. I've been sitting in this room, along with my colleagues here, and I don't remember them asking for that more than once. I'd like to see their follow-up correspondence asking where it is. I've heard them at all these meetings, and this is the second time they've mentioned it—the first time and just now. So they can beat the drums and pound on the table as loud as they want; they have the documents in front of them now. I've reviewed them and I'm satisfied by what's in the documents. They can have their five seconds to make their comments and we'll just leave it at that.

The Chair: Okay.

I've got on the list Mr. Cannan, Mr. Komarnicki, Mr. Savage, Mr. Lessard, and Ms. Minna.

Mr. Cannan.

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

I empathize with my colleagues across the way. It's the first we've seen this information.

But to the clerk, it says on the top that it was faxed at 9:03 this morning. I was just wondering why it wasn't distributed to the offices at that time.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Georges Etoka): We did not receive the documents by fax. I had to make copies, and there was no time to send it in separate envelopes.

Mr. Ron Cannan: You just scan it. You have a scanner and it takes five minutes.

The Chair: If the documents had been sent by e-mail, I'm sure they could have sent them out, but faxed documents—

Mr. Ron Cannan: He could have just asked the department to send it electronically. It's not rocket science.

The Chair: It wasn't sent electronically; it was sent by fax.

Mr. Ron Cannan: I know, but just scan the fax. We're in the 21st century. I do it in my office all the time, so I don't understand why we wouldn't get it earlier from the clerk. It's not acceptable, in my mind.

The Chair: Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Just to make a point here, and I don't want to make a smokescreen and get all worked up about it, but the fact of the matter is there was talk about getting this bill passed immediately when we first talked about this bill. We wanted to be sure we got this forward so that those who are entitled to them can get the benefits. We then decided to elongate the process to ensure we could have hearings, and we're going to have departmental witnesses and some additional witnesses, and we extended that for yet another day to benefit Mr. Lessard, who wanted additional witnesses called. We did that, and we heard the issues back and forth and what they are. The long and the short of it is we need to see if the essence of the bill is passed or not, and we're saying it needs to get passed.

As to the fact of the numbers, he's going to argue whether it's 190,000 helped or 180,000 helped. We do know what the definitions are, very clearly, and those who fit the definitions will be helped. They will be into the thousands, somewhere in the area of 190,000, give or take. That material explains how it came out to it and how they came out to cost it.

We need to get on with the business of having this matter go forward, and I would suggest that after some opportunity for debate, we need to go to clause-by-clause, and I would so move.

•(1605)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: I just want to respond to Mr. Lobb's comments implying that, if the government is asked by a committee for information, they're not obliged to give it unless we ask two or three or four more times. That is an abdication of responsibility not only to this committee but to Parliament and further beyond that to the people who will be affected by this bill.

We did indicate we were opposed to this bill for discriminatory reasons. We asked the minister those questions about where the 190,000 came from. Mr. Lobb and others will recall that I asked a number of witnesses if they'd been able to do any analysis on this bill, on their own, to identify the 190,000, because we had heard early on that there might be 60,000. But who knows that? Who has the resources to do this kind of analysis? The department does. Everybody else said they don't have the numbers to know that, but at some point in time you have to believe....

I would remind members that the government came up with a cost for a 360-hour national standard of \$4.4 billion, about which they themselves later said they were sorry but it was \$2.5 billion. In fact, it was \$1.2 billion. The government still uses that \$4-billion-plus account in the House of Commons.

If we ask for information as a committee and the minister and officials oblige us by saying they'll get back to us, they should get back to us. We shouldn't have to beg them for the information.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Savage.

I have Mr. Lessard and then Ms. Minna.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, the remarks of our friend, Mr. Lobb, make me think that he must have missed a good number of meetings.

The day that the bill was introduced, we attended a briefing with officials. It was supposed to be a half-hour, but we made it go to an hour. Most of my colleagues who are here today were there. We asked for precisely this information. The next day, in the House, when we discussed Bill C-50, I again asked the parliamentary secretary here today to get us that information. It could not have been more official, Mr. Chair. Every time that the issue was debated in committee, we repeated our request. When the minister appeared two weeks ago, we asked for the information yet again.

How can you tell us that we have only five minutes to review the information? Mr. Chair, that is downright outrageous, and flies in the face of the democratic process and our responsibilities. I asked for 15 minutes. That is not a lot, when you consider that it will give us time to examine the basic data and get some clarification about the bill. You said that we could have 5 minutes, not 15. But 5 minutes is not even enough time to finish reading the second document.

Mr. Chair, I am not a computer. You cannot even enter the data in a computer in such a short amount of time, and you expect me to do more than that in 5 minutes? Something is wrong with that picture. Of course, we want to be as effective as possible, but that is ridiculous.

For these reasons, I would like 10 minutes more so that we can review the documentation and form an opinion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. I actually gave you seven and a half, so I'll give you another seven and a half. Let's finish what I've got on the list and then I'll add another—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Let's not play that game, Mr. Chair. We have been waiting for these documents for a month and a half. Give us enough time to review them properly. Then we can proceed quickly.

[*English*]

The Chair: We can do that, not a problem. I'll finish the list and then we'll give another 10 minutes for Mr. Lessard to look at that.

I have Ms. Minna, Mr. Godin, and then Mr. Komarnicki.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): My comments are very simple, Mr. Chair. If it means that some members need to have 10 or 15 minutes to read it so we can go on to clause-by-clause, we've used up that much time in this discussion.

The only thing I would ask is that Mr. Lobb and any members who suggest that when a committee asks for information...to say show me the correspondence for all of the other requests...we don't have to request.... When standing committees ask the minister or officials or anyone for documentation, and they make a commitment to send, there is no need to follow up. In fact the onus of that is on the chair or the clerk to follow up to get that information. The onus is on the minister and the officials to get it in good time for the committee to use, not for us to have to chase it. I just want to make that clear; that is proper procedure.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Minna.

Mr. Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, I want to add something.

This is serious; there is a reason for all this. Mr. Lessard did indeed request the information during the briefing. I was there. I can say in all honesty that the Bloc Québécois made the request directly to the House of Commons and once again after that. To think that the committee should get down on its knees and beg for documentation is just wrong.

It is a sad state of affairs when the document comes in at 9 o'clock this morning, and we are in the midst of arguing before going to a vote. In case some of you did not know, we have messengers who deliver documents to us. The documents could have been photocopied and hand delivered to us directly.

This is not how we should work. I will not waste any more time. We should take the 10 minutes and then go back to studying the bill, because workers are waiting for it.

•(1610)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. We're going to suspend for another ten minutes.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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•(1620)

The Chair: I hope everyone has had enough time to look at that now.

I apologize, Mr. Lessard, for maybe cutting off discussion a little bit quickly on that. I want to come back to you to see if there are any more questions, and if there aren't, then I'm going to look at clause-by-clause consideration.

Are there any more comments?

Mr. Lessard, go ahead, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Beauséjour, are you the one in charge of sending the letters?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: No, operations did that.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Okay, so....

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: They go out automatically.

Mr. Yves Lessard: There is someone who can give us the information.

If I understand correctly, you sent two letters, one in the spring, as you told us during previous meetings, and another just recently?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: There were two types of correspondence. One was sent when the measure came into force, in May. Since then, letters have been sent out automatically as soon as someone files a claim. That is standard correspondence.

Mr. Yves Lessard: How many letters did you send out in the spring?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: I do not recall the exact number of letters that went out when the measure came into force. I just know that from the beginning until now, meaning up to October 2, around 379,000 letters have been sent out.

Mr. Yves Lessard: 379,000 letters were sent out.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Yes.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Were the letters you sent out up to October 2 addressed to the same people as those in the spring or to others as well?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: The new letters are personalized; they are part of the correspondence when someone files a claim. The procedure is the same as when we notify people that they are eligible for benefits, when they apply. We let them know that they qualify for benefits, and we tell them how many weeks they are entitled to. At the same time, we let them know that if they satisfy the definition of a "long-tenured worker", they may qualify for the new career transition assistance initiatives and should contact their local or regional centres for information.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes.

From what I understand, those 379,000 letters were sent to the 30% of people who will exhaust their employment insurance benefits.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: No, it means that out of all the claimants, there are 30% or so who satisfy the definition of a "long-tenured worker". The letters are sent to those who meet the criteria of that definition. They are not necessarily people who will exhaust their benefits; it is really those who satisfy the definition of a "long-tenured worker".

Mr. Yves Lessard: In a previous meeting, you, or someone on your staff, told us that 28% to 30%, depending on the periods, of all those who collect EI benefits will exhaust those benefits. Do you agree with that?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: I do not recall what was said at the time, but as indicated in the letter explaining how costs are calculated, 30% of claimants meet the definition of "long-tenured worker" and of that number, 20% will exhaust their benefits.

Mr. Yves Lessard: I see. Of this group of individuals who stand to exhaust their benefits, how many are salaried workers? Are we talking about 379,000 people?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: No. When evaluating costs on an annual basis, for 2006, we see that approximately 120,000 claimants meet the definition of "long-tenured worker", and will exhaust their benefits.

Mr. Yves Lessard: And these are people who will have reached the end of their benefit period?

•(1625)

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: That is correct. They are long-tenured workers and they will reach the end of their benefit period. In all, 120,000 people will be affected in a one-year period.

Mr. Yves Lessard: A total of 120,000 people in one year.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: That is correct. That explains why the measure will apply for more than one year. Mention is made on page one of the briefing notes that the measure will apply for approximately 20 months. It is estimated that up to 190,000 people could benefit from Bill C-50.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Does the figure of 120,000 also include those who will become claimants during the course of the year? Some people will stop receiving benefits, while others will become claimants.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: No. This is an estimated number for a full year. We are basing ourselves on observations made in 2006, on data compiled for 2006, taking into account the increase in the unemployment rate. We found that on annual basis—taking into account all those who begin receiving EI and those who stop receiving EI—120,000 clients meet the definition of "long-tenured worker" and will exhaust their benefits.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Since the eligibility period covers 18 months and the benefit period extends beyond that to October 2010, is it fair to say that in addition to these 120,000 annual claimants, we must also include 60,000 new claimants for six months of the following year?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: The measure will apply for 20 months. However, there will be a transition period because fewer and fewer people satisfy the criteria. Consequently, on an annual basis, there stands to be 70,000 more claimants than the 120,000 originally estimated.

Mr. Yves Lessard: So then, we can say that 190,000 recipients will reach the end of their benefit period.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: That is what we have concluded.

Mr. Yves Lessard: So then, 190,000 claimants will exhaust their benefits. According to your report, 21% of them will be eligible for the measures set out in Bill C-50.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: No, that is not what we say in our report. We say that of all EI claimants, 30% meet the definition of “long-tenured worker”.

Mr. Yves Lessard: I'm not trying to give you a hard time, but over a 20-month period, does this 30% add up to 190,000 claimants?

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: No.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Fine then.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: This 30% is calculated on an annual basis, meaning that 570,000 claimants meet the definition of “long-tenured worker”.

It's simpler to use the methodology. We observed that in 2006, there were approximately 1.35 million unemployed workers. If we adjust the unemployment rate which stood at 6.3% in 2006, we estimate that this rate will be 8.8% in 2009 and 2010. Based on these estimates, we place the number of claimants at 1.9 million in 2009. Based on 2006 data, the number of claimants who meet the definition of “long-tenured worker” is estimated to be 30%. If we multiply 1.9 million by 30%, we come up with a figure of 570,000 claimants, still on an annual basis, who meet the definition of “long-tenured worker”.

We concluded that not everyone would benefit from this measure, even though everyone was entitled to it. Those who will truly benefit are those who will have reached the end of their benefit period. Of the 570,000 claimants, we estimated, still based on 2006 data, that 21% would reach the end of their benefit period and fully exhaust their benefits. We came up with the figure of 120,000 by multiplying 570,000 by 21%. So then, 120,000 claimants meet the definition of “long-tenured worker” and will also be exhausting their benefits, still on an annual basis.

The measure will be in place for 20 months, and provision has been made for a transition period. Therefore, aside from these 120,000 individuals, an additional 70,000 will potentially benefit from this measure over the full period. We added 120,000 and 70,000 and came up with the figure of 190,000 potential EI claimants would stand to benefit from the measure in 2009 and 2010.

•(1630)

Mr. Yves Lessard: I get the impression that you are telling me exactly what I told you at the outset, but you think otherwise.

Let me rephrase the question. Currently, there are approximately 1,600,000 people out of work. Of this number, 765,000 receive EI benefits and between 28% and 30% of these 765,000 claimants—according to your own figures— will reach the end of their benefit

period. In the case of this group of claimants, 21% are eligible for the measures set out in Bill C-50.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: No. What I was referring to was the average number of unemployed workers on an annual basis. I have not calculated the exact number of unemployed workers for 2009 and 2010.

Mr. Yves Lessard: It is simply for the purposes of this exercise.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: For the purpose of this exercise, it is important to know that on an annual basis, if we say that there are 500,000 people out of work, most of them will not receive EI benefits for 52 weeks. We agree on that.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: So then, this means that for each unemployed worker, I will have different claimants more than once. Basically, I have 2.5 clients for each unemployed worker. If, on an annual basis, I had 500,000 unemployed workers, taking into account the number of claimants, I would multiply 500,000 by 2.5, which would give me, if I'm not mistaken, about 1.3 million claimants for the year. The information that we have on file represents the number of different clients over the course of one year. That explains why the base is much larger than the actual number of unemployed workers. As I said, the number of claimants for 2009 is 1.9 million. We estimate that all of these claimants will have received at least one week of EI benefits during 2009.

Mr. Yves Lessard: That's what I said at the outset. This is another way of putting it. At times, communication problems make it difficult to understand one another. I understand quite well, it is what I was saying at the very beginning, that this is in addition to all of the other unemployed workers, if you will. I understand now.

Let's consider the parameters that you used. Do you still agree that of those who reach the end of their benefit period, that is 30% of claimants from one generation to another, 21% will be eligible for the measures set out in Bill C-50? Therefore, not every claimant is eligible.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: Quite the contrary. In all, 20% of claimants reach the end of their benefit period. According to our information, 20% of claimants exhaust their EI benefits. You have turned the situation around by starting with those who have reached the end of their benefit period and then asking, of those who have exhausted their benefits, which ones meet the definition of long-tenured worker. Here is how we proceeded. First, we identified those claimants that meet the definition of long-tenured worker and determined how many of them reach the end of their benefit period.

Mr. Yves Lessard: I'm referring to the minister's document which is based on data for 2006. We agree that the same methodology is being used for the year 2009. According to this document, 21% of long-tenured workers exhaust their regular EI benefits.

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: That is correct.

Mr. Yves Lessard: You maintain that of this 21%—and I'm merely reversing the figures—30% of this 21%...

Mr. Louis Beauséjour: No, what I'm saying is that 21% of claimants will exhaust their benefits. Of the 120,000 claimants in total, 21%, not 30% will reach the end of their benefit period.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Fine then. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

We'll now go to clause-by-clause consideration.

Shall clause 1 carry?

Sorry, Mr. Lessard.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, but we would like a recorded division.

[English]

The Chair: Would you like that on every vote, Mr. Lessard?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Is there something he needs consent on or not? It just seems like a long process that maybe isn't necessary.

The Chair: Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: We will dissent on the bill as a whole, but I can tell you now that we will be casting a dissenting voice. However, I still would like a vote by show of hands.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You cannot dissent if you request a vote by show of hands. You either vote for or against.

Mr. Yves Lessard: No, to dissent, you must vote against the clause.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. As a compromise, Mr. Lessard, I'm just wondering if we could do a recorded vote on the first one and then apply that.... Would that be acceptable to you?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: It would.

[English]

The Chair: All right. Let's do a recorded vote on clause 1.

(Clause 1 agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: My question is, then, can we apply that vote to clause 2 all the way through to clause 8?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clauses 2 to 8 inclusive agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the bill carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the chair report the bill to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

To our witnesses, thank you very much for being here today. You are dismissed, as we are going to get into some committee business now.

We're just going to suspend for one minute as the witnesses leave.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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