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Chair

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 Wednesday, June 10, 2009, today we start our consideration of Bill C-280, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act, qualification for and entitlement to benefits.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here, and the sponsor of the bill as well. We're going to give each of you a chance to speak on it.

Just before we do that, we have some housekeeping. You have before you a couple of budgets for witnesses, which I would like you to pass quickly. One is for a witness today and another is for a witness on Thursday. Could I just have a motion to accept these?

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much for taking care of the housekeeping. I don't want to keep us waiting any longer. We're going to get right to the sponsor of the bill, Ms. Hughes.

Ms. Hughes, thank you for being here. We're going to start with you. It's usually for seven to ten minutes. Do the best you can. It is your bill, so if you want to speak a little longer than seven minutes, by all means do so. Then we'll go to the Canadian Labour Congress, and then we'll come back to Mr. Hamilton.

Ms. Hughes, welcome. The floor is yours.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Feel free to let me know when my seven minutes are up.

The Chair: I'll give you a one-minute signal. How does that sound?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am glad to be here today and to see this part of the legislative process come about for Bill C-280.

This is my first time appearing before a committee as a witness, so I hope you will be patient with me.

As you are aware, Bill C-280 would change EI in a few ways that I believe would be of great assistance to a number of Canadians who are eligible to collect benefits or find themselves a little shy of the threshold for entry into the program as a claimant. Bill C-280 would

remove regional distinctions for the number of hours required to become a claimant and set the minimum number of hours at 360. It would also see a sampling of the claimant's best paid 12 weeks over the previous year used to set the amount a claimant will receive.

Bill C-280 is the product of converging factors: the economic slowdown that became a recession and the high unemployment that accompanies this type of economic event.

In my constituency of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, we had a higher than average unemployment rate before the current crisis. This trend continues.

When considering EI, it is important to remember that this bill is not a cure-all, but set to rectify some of the inequities we are seeing more clearly now that more people require this assistance. I understand that this bill may require clarification in some areas, and hopefully we can move towards some of that today.

I recall last winter driving in my constituency from one town to another. Basically, I was on Manitoulin Island—if anybody has ever been there. It was a Saturday morning and I was listening to *The House* on CBC Radio. The guest that morning was Ian Lee, director of the MBA program at the Sprott School of Business at Carleton University.

He was being interviewed about a submission he made to our finance minister on the subject of stimulus spending. In his submission, Mr. Lee had provided a breakdown of typical stimulus solutions and gave the multiplier effect for each one. A multiplier is the value of a dollar spent by the government in terms of the fiscal return on stimulus, or, more simply put, bang for the buck. What surprised me the most was his conclusion that EI offered the government the very best multiplier, far outperforming tax cuts, even payroll tax cuts, which were the most efficient in the tax-cutting category. EI also outperformed infrastructure spending and transfers to the provinces, which in turn outperformed every type of tax cut in the bang-for-the-buck assessment.

The next week my office was in touch with Mr. Lee. He sent us both his submission and the testimony of the Moody's chief economist to the U.S. House, which he based his document upon. Mr. Lee was clear that he had his differences with plans being proposed by New Democrats at the time and that he would like to see EI be a tool controlled by the Minister of Finance. He was equally clear that no other traditional stimulus tool offered as much return to the Canadian economy as employment insurance.

With this in mind, I saw it as imperative that we do something that would help get EI to more Canadians. Difficult economic times seem to me a good time to remove regional distinctions. We had just embarked on spending billions of dollars to stimulate the economy, yet we were not using one of the best tools we had to its fullest. The regional distinctions that reflect a way to manage EI in better economic times now seemed like a hindrance, given the urgency of the economic crisis and the speed at which it was stripping our economy of jobs.

With more people able to collect benefits, we would be able to keep the core of our communities alive. We could help the mortgage payments continue and help the grocery stores stay open. There would be some continuity so that we could have the workforce available when the work returned.

An example of that is readily available in my constituency. Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking has a large forestry sector. If those laid-off workers migrate to the bigger centres where there could be some work, they may never return. The communities lose. In circumstances like that, communities atrophy. When the jobs come back, the experienced workers aren't there.

Another reason to have uniform and lower entry levels is the way it is difficult to get real-time snapshots of regional unemployment rates in a major economic event such as the one we are experiencing. By the time we recognize that a region is getting hit and go through the steps needed to change the entry level, the exodus in that community may already be well under way.

Finally, I would like to address the fear I have had relayed to me that making it easier to collect benefits will stop people from wanting to work. To me, this is absurd. People aren't that different from one another. Would any one of you want to collect a fraction of what you make now and sit at home? They can't be that different. People go to work for more reasons than just a paycheque. There is a sense of accomplishment and contribution, as well as many other motivating factors.

●(1535)

I believe the abuse of the system is a grossly overstated concern. We have to look at the big picture and not focus on worst-case scenarios; worst-case examples make poor guidelines. We don't think about those in our areas. Our fishery quotas are not based on what a poacher can do. Why are EI eligibility levels any different?

I understand there are some items to be worked out with respect to Bill C-280. I am mostly concerned with getting help to those who are in need, and perhaps staving off the worst effects of this recession.

Before I conclude, I just want to add that I was disappointed to see there is basically only one hour for witnesses and one hour for clause-by-clause. I would hope you would reconsider this and have more witnesses, because the ones we have are just a very small fraction of the witnesses who should be heard on this matter.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Hughes.

We're going to move over to the Canadian Labour Congress. We have Ms. Byers and Mr. Jackson. Welcome back to committee. The floor is all yours for seven minutes.

Ms. Barbara Byers (Executive Vice-President, Canadian Labour Congress): Thanks very much. *Merci beaucoup.*

The Canadian Labour Congress welcomes and urges all parties to support this important bill. The bill would modestly increase EI benefits to 55% of earnings—as now—but calculated on the basis of the best 12 weeks over the previous year. We welcome the proposed move to the best 12 weeks, but we continue to urge a benefit rate of at least 60%. Members should recognize that the average benefit today is a very low \$348 per week, barely enough to support even a single person above the poverty line. The maximum benefit today is \$150 less, per week, than it was in the last recession. The bill would expand access to regular and special benefits to 360 hours. As members are aware, the CLC has long called for such a uniform entrance requirement of 360 across the country.

The current serious recession has amounted to a stress test for the current EI system, the first test of fast-rising unemployment since the new hours-based system was introduced in the mid-1990s. At one level the EI system has responded to the crisis. The number of regular EI claimants rose by almost 500,000 between July 2008 and July 2009, as unemployment soared. The proportion of unemployed workers collecting benefits has risen modestly over that period from 41% to 45%. That is because the system does become a bit easier to access, with a lag as the unemployment rate rises in a region. The duration of benefits also increases in line with rising unemployment. Yet the fact is that many workers, especially women and young workers, have fallen through the cracks. Between July 2008 and 2009 the number of unemployed workers who were unemployed but not collecting regular EI benefits rose by 220,000 or by 32%. The proportion of unemployed workers collecting benefits has jumped for men but has barely increased for women. The proportion of unemployed workers collecting benefits remains very low in many parts of the country, and in July of this year it was below 50% in the three western provinces, and also in Ontario, where it stood at just 40%. Again, as has already been pointed out, part of the reason is that it is difficult to gain access when jobs suddenly disappear in what used to be a low unemployment region.

Entrance requirements in terms of hours worked continue to exclude many unemployed workers from benefits. HRSDC research shows that about 10% of all unemployed workers in recent years worked before becoming unemployed but didn't have enough hours to qualify for benefits. That amounts to about 160,000 unemployed workers in any given month today and a much higher number over the course of a year. HRSDC and Parliamentary Budget Office costing of proposals to temporarily drop the entrance requirement to 360 hours from the current range of 420 hours to 700 hours shows that this change would bring in almost 200,000 more workers into the system over a year, at a cost of about \$1.1 billion. This is surely an affordable change on a permanent basis since the cost would fall as unemployment falls. The change would provide limited but still important benefits for a limited time period to many vulnerable workers, again, especially women and young workers. If implemented today, it would be an effective form of stimulus and support for hard-hit communities. The CLC believes that the 360-hour threshold should also replace the 910-hour requirement, or about six months of full-time work, imposed on new labour force entrants and re-entrants. This serves to exclude many recent immigrants and may account for why so many unemployed workers in Toronto and Vancouver are ineligible for benefits.

We welcome the fact that the 360-hour requirement in this bill would apply to maternity and parental benefits. We have long supported a more generous and inclusive program that recognizes new realities in the job market and in society as a whole. Maternity and parental benefits allow parents, especially women, to better balance the demands of work and family care, helping to promote equality in the job market while also contributing in a central way to the well-being of very young children.

• (1540)

Changing the entrance requirement from the current 600 hours to 360 hours would bring more workers, especially mothers, into the system. In recent years, about 20% of mothers with paid jobs in the year before the birth of a child have not received maternity or parental benefits. We note that the current 600 hours is higher than the regular EI entrance requirement in those regions with over 8% unemployment, and it certainly excludes many women who paid into the system and deserve to benefit.

In conclusion, we urge your support for an important and progressive piece of legislation that will benefit many unemployed workers from coast to coast to coast.

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Byers.

We're now going to move over to Mr. Hamilton, who is the mayor of Elliot Lake.

Welcome, sir. The floor is yours. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Rick Hamilton (Mayor, City of Elliot Lake): Thank you very much.

I'm here today to provide my personal opinion as a municipal leader, the mayor of the city of Elliot Lake. I'm also a member of a local District Services Administration Board and will be dealing with

Bill C-280. It's my first time as well, Mr. Chair, to present before a committee. I thank you for the opportunity of doing it. It's a new experience for me.

At the outset, we'd like to state that EI benefits should flow to those who require this assistance while unemployed, and these benefits need to provide a reasonable standard of living at a time when those most affected really do need it. Any increase in the qualification for benefits or in the duration and amount of those benefits has a direct impact on municipalities, as we are the gatekeepers of the social assistance system, particularly here in Ontario, either directly or through the District Services Administration Board, which is the case in my municipality.

The recent downturn in the economy has sent the financial woes of municipalities, especially those in northern Ontario that rely on base resource industries, into a tail-spin. Many of the communities have seen significant plant closures, layoffs, and cutbacks similar to those that were experienced in Elliot Lake in the early 1990s. At that time we lost 4,500 direct mining jobs. It was quite a devastation.

We survived this devastation through a number of means. First, we were provided at that time, twice, with what we called EI requalification programs, to permit many of our laid-off workers to extend benefits, thus preventing a large-scale migration of workers from EI to social assistance benefits at that time. This allowed us to mitigate the devastating impacts and provided a much-needed stimulus to allow us to reinvent and revitalize our local economy from a mining-based theme to a retirement- and tourism-based economy that presently is thriving. This revitalization has been successful for a number of reasons, including EI programs enshrined at the time.

The cost of Ontario Works, or OW, benefits to municipalities, and by extension to the property tax payers, was significant even with this program in place. I would not want to imagine the impacts without enhanced EI benefits at that particular time.

There is a move afoot here in Ontario to upload Ontario Works benefits from municipal tax rolls to the province, but at the same time there will be an offset to some degree from the Ontario municipal partnership fund transfers from the province. This is in early stages, so the impacts on municipalities remain to be seen. Notwithstanding this, the best we can expect would be a zero base from the uploading, so any increase in the Ontario Works caseload would have a negative financial impact on municipalities. We believe that EI benefits are certainly better than having the OW benefits. Again, suffice it to say that EI benefits for laid-off workers would better stimulate an already damaged local economy than would benefits paid under the Ontario Works program.

As I understand, the recent downturn in the economy has affected every municipality to varying degrees. The north remains economically challenged because of this recent economic downturn, as well as the traditional nature of business that resides here in northern Ontario. Northern Ontario is resilient, but not immune to any of these impacts.

So Bill C-280 has a net effect of addressing many of the concerns I have as a municipal leader. First, lowering the threshold to 360 hours and seeking to award benefits based on the best 12 weeks of earnings in a year will go a long way towards ensuring that those benefits flow to my constituents and therefore permit them to survive in a more advantageous financial situation. Failing this, they may not either qualify or receive benefits and may have to rely on the Ontario Works system, which of course is much inferior.

I know that other mayors have raised a red flag on this issue as well. As I understand Mayor Miller from Toronto said, we are quite concerned; the fact that the most vulnerable haven't been protected with appropriate changes to the EI program is very problematic for cities. I personally share this view with Mayor Miller.

In closing, I'm here to speak to the merits of EI changes as outlined in Bill C-280. I thank you very much for the opportunity of addressing the committee today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hamilton, for travelling to be here today.

We're going to start with the Liberals.

Mr. Savage, you have the floor for seven minutes.

• (1550)

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Hughes, for bringing this bill as far as you have. Congratulations on that.

I have been to Manitoulin Island, and I can tell you that outside of Nova Scotia it is as beautiful a place as exists in Canada. I've also been to Elliot Lake. I used to work in Sudbury, so I've seen that rather remarkable community as well.

My question is for anybody who wants to comment, but specifically Ms. Hughes, and Ms. Byers, who referenced in her brief the costing of a 360-hour national standard of eligibility. She mentioned that the cost is about \$1.1 billion. The government, when they produced their cost on this, you may recall, costed it at about \$4.4 billion—which, I think it's understood now, is ridiculous. One of the reasons they costed it at \$4.4 billion was that in putting their costing together they suggested there would be a ballpark cost of around \$2 billion per year based on what they called the labour market impact, which would create a 2% increase in unemployment. In other words, to go to a 360-hour national standard, they suggested, would increase unemployment by 2% because people would be fleeing their jobs to jump onto, as the minister referred to it, this lucrative system.

I want to ask you about that. Many people don't seem to understand that you cannot collect EI if you voluntarily leave your job. You have to be fired or laid off. Do you believe there are many Canadians out there who are looking for the opportunity to jump out

of their jobs, find a way to get fired, so that they can collect 55% of their previous income for somewhere between 19 and 45 weeks?

Anybody...?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I want to talk about the costing. Basically, in my opinion, we can't look at the cost of this out of context from all of the stimulus spending we are doing right now.

First, I should thank you, because I know that in the past few months the Liberals were always supporting 360 hours. Mind you, a temporary fix was what you were looking at. But given how effective this type of stimulus is, I believe it would be justified to spend that much. If we have had tens of millions of dollars to spare for advertising for our economic recovery plan, we should have the money available to add to the actual meat of the plan. When you are looking at the dollars it would cost and looking at the economic stimulus it offers, it is well worth the money, and that depends upon how many people would actually need to access it, doesn't it?

The Chair: Is there anybody else?

Mr. Andrew Jackson (Chief Economist, Canadian Labour Congress): The idea that changes in EI rules would significantly increase the number of claimants is a bit of a folk myth among economists. If you go back to the early 1990s, there was a whole raft of studies commissioned by HRSDC on how the EI system functioned. A few of those studies found that in a few parts of the country there were very small impacts on the numbers of unemployed when access to benefits was made more generous, but there is nothing in those studies that would sustain that kind of conclusion about how it would open up. A number of those studies, in fact, showed that there was almost no impact on the number of recipients arising from EI generosity.

In terms of your proposal, it is really important to underscore that in a time of recession, such as now, there would probably be zero impact, since basically any available job is going to find somebody willing to fill it. At the most, you might say that some people might become unemployed and other people who were unemployed would take the jobs. So I don't think there would be any impact at all, except in an extremely tight job market.

I'll send you a summary that I prepared on this some time ago, but certainly the studies that were done by Lars Osberg, former president of the Canadian Economics Association, and Shelley Phipps, a very well-known economist at Dalhousie, strongly disputed the notion that there would be a significant impact on unemployment from reducing the entrance requirement.

Mr. Michael Savage: The Parliamentary Budget Officer came to the same conclusion as well, particularly if it were of a temporary nature.

Ms. Byers.

Ms. Barbara Byers: I just wanted to add that we said that the average benefit today is very low: \$348 a week. First, I can't see people rushing to get \$348 a week, when you look at it—and remember, that's the average. A lot of the people we would be bringing into the system would be people who are not working full time, so their benefit would be considerably lower.

On a personal note, in my previous life I was a social worker. It was always easy to hit the unemployed or people who had to get welfare. There was a thing that somehow people were doing well on this, when they're not. If you have contact on a regular basis with people in the system, you know that it's not the life that any of them want to lead.

• (1555)

Mr. Michael Savage: I agree with that.

Ms. Hughes, you referred to Ian Lee, when he spoke on CBC on Saturday morning, on *The House*, I think it was. You were in Manitoulin Island. I remember listening to that, and I was probably driving to or from a rink in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. I remember being struck by his work, which originated in the Senate of the United States, in terms of evaluating different kinds of stimulus.

Clearly, stimulus that's put into what you might call the social infrastructure, particularly EI, is the most effective stimulus because of the fact that the people who get that money have to spend it. It goes into the economy, and I think the number he referenced was a 1.61 turnover rate in the economy, which put it ahead of infrastructure, and, as you've said, far ahead of tax breaks, particularly the kinds of tax breaks that have assisted the more well-off among us.

So if that's the inspiration for your bill, I commend you for it and I congratulate you on having brought it this far.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Savage.

We're going to move to Mr. Lessard from the Bloc. You have seven minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome Ms. Byers, Mrs. Hugues, Mr. Jackson and Mr. Hamilton. First of all, I would like to commend Mrs. Hugues for introducing this bill, which we intend to support. Later, I will be moving an amendment along the lines of what Ms. Byers was proposing earlier, namely that the benefit level be set at 60%, rather than at 55% of insured earnings. As we continue our discussion, we'll see if the committee might be amenable to this amendment.

I really do appreciate your initiative, Mrs. Hugues, given that it keeps this debate on employment insurance in the forefront. To my way of thinking, it is a crucial debate. When the management of the TD Bank suggests to us that amendments are needed to EI, it means that there are significant problems with the system. As a rule, recommendations to improve the EI system do not come from banking institutions. The TD Bank has recommended that the 360-hour threshold for qualifying be adopted, which clearly shows that support for this proposal is growing.

Your initiative is even more timely today, given the presence of the mayor of Elliot Lake, Mr. Hamilton. I'm very familiar with this working-class, mining region, even though there are not many mines still in operation, because one of my brothers worked in the mines.

His health suffered some as a result of his working down in the mines.

I have two questions, the first of which is directed to you, Mrs. Hughes. Given the thought that went into your bill and the discussions that you have had to date, would you be open to an amendment that we would like to move to increase the benefit level from 55% to 60% of earned income?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Thank you for your question.

Certainly we are prepared to consider amendments. The aim behind the bill really was to generate some discussion. As many of you know, it was initially introduced by my colleague Yvon Godin. Since my bill was drawn earlier in the session, we had a productive discussion. It is a step in the right direction, particularly in light of the economic crisis.

When a member tables a bill, there is every expectation of changes being proposed and we are open to amendments, provided they benefit those who are most in need. Unfortunately, many people do not have access right now to benefits, even though they contributed to the program. EI is a form of insurance and they should have access to it.

• (1600)

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you.

I am interested in hearing your comments, sir, on the economy of your city. Having myself served on municipal council, I am mindful of the extent to which responsibilities have been offloaded to municipal governments. Sometimes, because of this shift, municipalities must come to the aid of people who have lost their jobs, by setting up community groups, and so forth.

You talked about the dynamics of EI benefits from the standpoint of the economy of a city like yours. Can you give us some examples of how EI has impacted a community like yours?

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Hamilton: First of all, the dynamics arose out of devastation. We lost about 4,500 direct mining jobs, and at that time our population was about 16,000 people. If you extrapolate that to any normal-sized city, that's economic devastation, to say the least.

Now, the EI benefits that we received at that time were very helpful. They weren't the only piece of the puzzle. There were other stimuli provided, and one of them was to operate one of the mines for another five years to give us a little bit more help moving along, setting up economic development corporations and such. But for those who had a difficult time finding a job immediately after the mines closed, it allowed them to requalify for benefits to maintain a decent standard of living, so they could find that job or be retrained for something else.

It really made a big difference, particularly for those who I consider to be marginalized workers. Those were the folks in the 45- to 50-year-old range, where they weren't at the end of their work life, but from a competitive standpoint in the open market at that time, it was very difficult for them to compete against the 25-year-old and 30-year-old miners who could transition to another job quite easily.

So, yes, at that time, it was quite the godsend for us. It was very helpful, along with a very large package, yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I see. Thank you very much.

I have several questions that I intend to divide among the witnesses.

My first question is for you, Ms. Byers, or for you, Mr. Jackson. With respect to the contribution rate, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the government plans to divert \$19 billion of the accumulated surplus in the EI fund by the year 2015 to offset the deficit.

At the same time, there is no denying that the needs are great. Currently, the contribution rate is being voluntarily maintained at a very low level, namely at \$1.76, whereas the government is projecting that this rate will rise to \$2.14 in 2011. I'd like to hear your views on this matter. There is something diabolical going on here. Why not increase the rate immediately to \$2.14 or to about \$2 to beef up EI right away and achieve the dynamic economic spinoffs discussed? I'd like to know how you feel about the government using the EI fund in this manner.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're out of time, but I do want an answer. So if you guys could just respond, it would be great.

Mr. Andrew Jackson: As you know, the government did freeze the premium rate for 2009 and 2010 as part of the economic stimulus package, and we think appropriately so. They are paying for the cost of the extra five weeks of the benefits out of general revenues. But the EI fund is projected to run a deficit of about \$10 billion over this fiscal year and the next fiscal year, and you're right, premiums will have to go up in 2011 to begin to address that accumulated deficit. One could imagine there will probably be several years when premiums will go up by 15% a year, if in fact it's not set at a higher rate.

I find it a bit curious that we ignore the fact that we had an accumulated surplus of \$57 billion going into the deficit, which doesn't count, but the \$10 billion incurred in the recession does count and has to be repaid. We'd hoped that the government, or the next government, or any government would reconsider that formula.

It may be that we're in a very weak recovery, with 2011 still with very high unemployment, so we've got a year and a bit to think about it, at least, before that happens.

•(1605)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Godin, the floor is yours for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to welcome the witnesses and to commend Mrs. Hughes for tabling this bill respecting the 360-hour threshold.

I would like to continue along the same lines as Mr. Lessard. The government has talked about possibly increasing contributions

in 2011. I think you already know how I feel about that, given my statements in the House each time the matter is raised. I have talked about the \$57 billion that has been stolen from the EI fund. There is no justification for automatically increasing contributions to offset a shortfall in the EI account. The government has made no secret of the fact that it has taken money from the EI account and does not plan to return the funds.

Unless I'm mistaken, according to the Employment Insurance Act, the government should be paying interest on the money it took. We're not just talking about \$57 billion, but about the interest on this amount.

Do you agree with me?

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Jackson: My understanding is that the EI account still exists. It's integrated within the public accounts of Canada and there is interest credited to it. So it's true in that sense.

We know that most of the \$57 billion in surplus was accumulated in the period from 1995 to 2002. To my mind, the best way would be to restate the public debt of Canada to show that it wasn't really reduced as shown in the overall government balance over that period, to free up the funds that way.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes. The previous government claimed to have reduced the debt by \$92 billion, but it failed to mention that it took \$57 billion out of the EI fund. That explains why there was a surplus of only \$30 billion. That's precisely what happened.

With respect to the bill that would bring in a 360-hour threshold, several business representatives have argued that if the number of hours needed to qualify was lowered, people would be more inclined to opt for collecting EI, rather than to work. Even the government that preceded the Liberals held that view. It's not the first time that we've heard this. I'd like to hear from the mayor of Elliot Lake and I'd like to know whether in his opinion, his residents would prefer to collect EI instead of getting up and going to work every morning.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Hamilton: Thank you for the question.

Quite frankly, I would be insulted with that comment if it were made to me. I was on EI and I went back to work after the mines closed.

EI is the kind of thing that's there for those who need it. I worked for 15 years without any apparent problems. I always had a job. But they closed the mine on me. Unfortunately, I was in difficult straits to find another job, and it took me some time, but I did. So that's what it's there for.

I find it quite appalling that somebody would suggest that someone like me, who is a good, hard-working person, is just looking for a handout so as not to work. I find that very difficult, because there are hard-working people, as I am, and I prefer to work; I don't prefer to be sitting on EI benefits or any other benefits.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I would like to say something.

I lived in Elliot Lake for 27 years. My husband was laid off. Collecting EI was not our choice, but at least it was an available option until he could find another job. I find it rather surprising that people who need benefits are being told that there was money in the fund, but that there is no longer enough money because some of the funds were diverted for other purposes. These funds are a form of insurance. We need to think about that long and hard. A worker who loses his job needs to be able to access EI. That worker shouldn't have to accumulate 600 or 700 hours of employment in order to qualify.

I know of many people in my riding who worked in the forestry industry and who lost their job as a result of the economic crisis.

[English]

I guess you could call it the ripple effect.

[Translation]

In communities like Manitouwadge, Wawa and Smooth Rock Falls, people are at a loss as to what to do. They do not know where to turn. They need EI to continue building and reshaping their community.

•(1610)

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'd like to come back to the 360-hour threshold, because it's important, to my way of thinking.

Ms. Byers, how does the CLC feel about the Liberals' position that the 360-hour threshold should apply only for the duration of the economic crisis? It's not a matter of politics, because this issue is being debated publicly. I for one believe that when workers lose their job, they are left to deal with a year-round economic crisis. Does the CLC side with the Liberals on this issue?

[English]

Ms. Barbara Byers: No, I think we've been very clear that uniform access should be a permanent measure and it should be for all points across the country.

When the change was made in the 1990s to, first of all, require employers whose employees worked more than 15 hours a week to pay into EI, because you'll recall that before that they didn't, we actually supported the change from weeks to hours because we thought this would actually open the door for a lot of people, for the people I talked about, women and young workers, who had periods of unemployment. Maybe the unemployment benefit wouldn't be huge, but at least they would get some small benefit.

What we didn't count on was that the hours threshold was going to be so high that people wouldn't get access. If you say we have a \$57 billion surplus, that was created in part by people who have paid into a system for a long time now but have no hope of ever collecting the way the system is. Essentially the rules have to change to benefit the people who are actually paying into the system.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Godin and Ms. Byers.

I'll move to Mr. Komarnicki for seven minutes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I certainly hear Mr. Hamilton. A mayor of any community that loses any jobs finds it devastating, not to say the huge amount that

you experienced of 4,500. You mentioned that re-qualifying for EI was one of the aspects, but there were other stimuli injected. I'm not sure whether EI is the right mechanism. There may be programs to deal with mass layoffs like you experienced in your community.

This particular bill, as I understand it, shortens the upfront qualifying period, but it doesn't do anything in terms of extending the back end of the benefit. This bill may not have worked for your situation, in any event.

I notice there was a discussion about the \$50 billion, plus or minus, that was in the EI account. As I recollect, my understanding is that back in the early 1990s, when unemployment was running at about 8.7%, the then Liberal government stripped a lot of benefits and increased the premiums, which resulted in that accumulation of dollars. It went into general revenues and was used for other projects.

Coming back to that variable entrance requirement that varied depending on hours worked—

Mr. Michael Savage: A point of order.

I think I heard Mr. Komarnicki say that the premiums were increased. The premiums were decreased for 12 years in a row.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I may stand to be corrected on that point, but the point of the matter was that benefits were reduced substantively, and that's why the accumulation was built. The benefits were not relevant to what was paid in, but that's not the main point.

The main point is that at this time they established the variable entrance requirement based on the unemployment rates in the various regions. As I understand Bill C-280, it would eliminate the existing regionally differentiated minimum qualification requirement, and you're talking about the 360. But it would retain the act's current benefit entitlement structure, which provides claimants residing in high unemployment regions with more weeks of benefits for a given number of hours of insurable employment.

What I'm saying is that you want to take away the regional differences on unemployment up front. Once you've qualified for the benefits, you would still retain the fact that those with the high unemployment rate would receive more benefits, or benefits for longer.

Am I correct in that or not? Perhaps Ms. Hughes can answer that.

•(1615)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: There are some technicalities. I'll try to explain some of it from my end, and I'm sure the Canadian Labour Congress will actually—

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Is it correct that the length of benefits would vary according to the unemployment rate in the different regions? Is that correct or not in this bill?

Mr. Andrew Jackson: I guess under this bill people would come in, but they would come into the grid. Yes, you're right, on the basis of this bill, duration would still vary with the local unemployment rate.

If I could just correct you on one point, in terms of the variable entrance requirement, that existed before we moved from weeks to hours. It was changed from weeks to hours, but we've long had a system in Canada of a regional unemployment rate determined in both entrance and duration.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Let's bring it to this bill. What this bill wants to do is eliminate that variability in the entry side, but it's not eliminating it on the length of benefit side. If I am correct—and you seem to say I am—why is that? Can you explain that to me?

Mr. Andrew Jackson: I guess we made progress on different fronts.

Ms. Barbara Byers: Our position is that people, no matter where they live, should have access to up to 50 weeks of benefits. Quite clearly that has been our position.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: But in this bill you're still maintaining the length of benefits based on the unemployment rate as it is per region. Is that correct?

Ms. Barbara Byers: It would appear that the bill does.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I wonder what the explanation for that is.

Ms. Barbara Byers: I just want to make one comment. We can sit in this room talking about what took place today, yesterday, 13 years ago, 15 years ago, or whatever, or what will take place tomorrow. There are 200,000 we've had in here in a year who we can say would be brought into the system, but quite frankly, right now they're being kept out of the system. It's a system that they and their employers are paying EI dollars into and they don't have any access.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Let's not get into the past. I'd still like an answer to the present question.

How is it that you've changed half the formula but not the other half? Why do you still want to rely in this bill on the different unemployment rates in the different regions with respect to length of benefits?

Ms. Barbara Byers: We wouldn't if we were drafting the bill, but nobody asked us to draft it.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'm asking Ms. Hughes, why is there that distinction? It's a simple question.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, on a point of order.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Just to satisfy the Conservative member, we'll make an amendment to assure that it will be equal on both sides.

Is that what you're looking for?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'm not asking Mr. Godin the question. It's his resurrected bill.

I just want know if there's a reason. If there isn't, that's fine. If you're not able to say, that's fine. Are you, or are you not, able to explain why?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: As I said, the bill was my colleague Mr. Godin's first, so he'd probably be in a better position to really answer that. However, it's my understanding that we have the regional differences there that we are asking to get rid of, but with regard to the qualifying amount, that's where this part of what you're talking about would actually be based.

The fact of the matter is that when someone loses their job, no matter where they live, they've lost their job and they need access.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: We're not arguing that.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I've had tons of people in my riding call and say, "You know, I call one week and my requirement is 480 hours, and then I call another week and it's 490 hours." So they have to call on a weekly basis to decide whether they can actually access their benefits that week. If it happens to be within that window of opportunity, they may be able to access it for a year, whereas someone else who had that same amount of hours won't be able to.

The Chair: That's all the time we have. We're going to have to maybe catch you in the second round.

We're going to move now to our second round.

Ms. Minna, you have five minutes.

• (1620)

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

Thank you for coming here today.

Obviously the entry accessibility is an important part of the bill, as is the 12 weeks, but what I wanted to ask about is to focus in a little bit on women.

When all the changes took place in the 1990s, my understanding at the time was that there was supposed to have been an evaluation afterwards, in four years or two years—I forget the timeline—specifically to look at the impact the legislation would have had in regard to unintended consequences. One fact that I was very interested in at the time was about women and how it affected women.

There was a study done, as you may be aware, by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in June of 2009 with respect to women accessing EI. There's a piece in there where one of the witnesses is stating this very clearly and pointing out the fact that the government says there's 80% or 81% accessibility to EI by all people. It states:

However, this ignores the fact that job loss particularly affects those with unstable patterns of work, such as workers on reduced hours before a layoff as well as part-time, temporary, and contract workers. It also ignores the fact that many unemployed workers qualify for EI for a shorter period of time but quickly exhaust their benefits.

Then it goes on, of course, to talk further about this.

One of those groups of people that I have seen in the Standing Committee on the Status of Women also did a study on what's called women's economic security. Again, this issue came up even in that study with respect to the number of women who lose jobs or are in temporary, part-time, or short-term jobs because they're in and out of the labour force due to their caregiving roles and so on. They're not able to take on full-time jobs, but they are never able to access parental leave and other things.

Have you done a bit of an analysis on that perspective, the gender perspective, to see to what extent these changes actually make a difference for that component of the population? I'm just curious to see if the CLC has done some evaluation on that.

Ms. Barbara Byers: Over the years, we've done about three sort of in-depth studies, I think, using Statistics Canada's work around the loss of finances to communities because of the UI changes. Certainly in our last one that we did, which is a few years ago now, there was an analysis of what the gender breakdown was as well. It is quite appalling. At one point, there are several cities where the access by women is coming in at 9% and 16%.

We know quite clearly that people are paying into the system, and women in particular, and they can't.... For example, we visually can see if a plant closes down or if a mine closes down. You see the gates close behind people. It's shut down. You know that's a group of people. What you don't see is women who work in hotels, for example, or in restaurants, or in any other kinds of part-time work where they have their hours cut or where they go through periods where they don't get any hours at all in some weeks. They're the ones who are really being hammered with this as well, because they can't accumulate the number of hours to be able to access even any EI.

Mr. Andrew Jackson: If I could add one point that was alluded to in the presentation, I just crunched a few numbers the other day, and if we just look at this period of recession, we see that the proportion of unemployed workers collecting benefits has increased as unemployment has risen, as one would expect it to, but it's been far, far higher among men than among women.

So the proportion of women unemployed workers collecting EI benefits has changed, but it's just a very, very little increase, which I think does suggest that the 360 hours, the hours base for getting in, is.... I don't think we have numbers, but I think it would be overwhelmingly women and young workers who would benefit from changing that.

Hon. Maria Minna: What you've just said is interesting because you can look at that number in two ways.

Earlier I was told—I forget which meeting we were at—that the reason there's a smaller number of women collecting EI as a result of the recession is that they're doing better in the recession. It could actually be the fact that most of them are not eligible to access EI, that is, they are doing jobs that don't actually give them the opportunity because of the entry and the level.

As you were saying, Ms. Byers, they have lost jobs but cannot necessarily access in that situation.

There's also the situation that I've seen recently in families where the husband may have lost a job. He may have worked in one of those industries. The wife has gone back to work to try to make up for that because EI has been exhausted by the husband. So she's gone back to work part time. This again goes to family stresses and so on.

So is 360 hours, in your view, the optimum or the ideal spot? I'm just wondering about trying to make sure that the women I'm talking about in this report would be able to access it.

• (1625)

The Chair: That's all the time you have, but I do want an answer from Ms. Byers.

Ms. Barbara Byers: Just briefly, the 360 hours is not some sort of number we drew out of a hat. It's based on 12 weeks at an average of 30 hours a week. Again, as I say, we didn't make this number up. It's based on some statistics about the average work week, and so on.

But you're right. There are people who are holding down two, three, or four part-time jobs to try to keep their family afloat.

The Chair: I know Mr. Hamilton has to step away to catch a flight.

Do you have any closing comment before you leave?

Mr. Rick Hamilton: Thank you very much for having me. It has been a wonderful experience. I've never experienced this before. I'm usually the person asking the questions, not answering them.

And thank you very much, Ms. Hughes, for inviting me down to Ottawa.

The Chair: Thank you. Have a safe trip home.

We will now move back to the Conservative side.

Mr. Lobb, you have five minutes.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's too bad the mayor is leaving, because I was just going to say what a nice part of the country it is. I've been there, around the Thessalon area and all the way up through to Chapleau a few times. The Laurentian Lodge is a place that my family has been to a couple of times.

The first question I have is for the Labour Congress. It goes directly to the document they provided.

On page 3 of that document, something that stood out for me is where it talks about the cost of the program. It talks about HRSDC and the Parliamentary Budget Office, that they calculated this at \$1.1 billion.

That's contrary to what I understand. Our department has generated a number. It's somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$4 billion. So I wonder whether that's a typo or some other report.

Mr. Andrew Jackson: I haven't had the opportunity to see the HRSDC study, but the Parliamentary Budget Office was given that study. My understanding is that HRSDC did one costing based on no impacts on behaviour of individuals. The Parliamentary Budget Office thought that HRSDC estimate was an accurate depiction of the costs, so there was no dispute between HRSDC and the Parliamentary Budget Office about a plain vanilla version of costing the proposal.

HRSDC then added onto the cost some assumed impact, saying there would be more unemployed workers if the entrance requirement were lowered. That's how you got the much bigger number.

I hope I'm not misleading people. I think HRSDC came up with two numbers: there was the \$1.1 billion, and then there was a higher cost based on an assumed second-round impact.

Mr. Ben Lobb: You could certainly argue the reverse theory that you just mentioned.

Ms. Hughes, have you or has anyone in your party independently costed your proposal around the 360 hours?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: It was costed when it was first introduced. I can't give you the costing number now, but as my colleagues from the Canadian Labour Congress have mentioned throughout their speeches, and so have I, when you are looking at costing, the government of the day happens to know that when they projected their deficit, they projected a much lower one than was actually being projected by the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Seriously, though, I'm not trying to be partisan or tricky here. Where did you quantify the proposal?

• (1630)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Where did I quantify it? It was basically on the fact that people need access to employment insurance. So when you're looking at the numbers, you have to look at whether the benefit outweighs the expenses. The benefit would be that the economic stimulus is certainly much higher.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I think you're misunderstanding what I'm saying. I was just trying to see if there was a number that you put to your proposal, but fair enough.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Just to add to that as well, when this was being drafted, it was actually based on a lot of statistics, and we've done a lot of work with the Canadian Labour Congress. They've given you their costing budgets and we've worked in conjunction with them on a number of occasions. I guess it's safe to say that their total—

Mr. Ben Lobb: If you are relying on their numbers, that's fair enough.

Mr. Andrew Jackson: I would just add that the TD Bank did a study that looked at 360 hours and 420 hours, and I think their costing was in roughly the same ballpark.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I'm just asking the question. We were talking about the bill. That's fine.

Mr. Andrew Jackson: What we might debate is the second-round impasse, but I think the straight 360 hours costing a little over \$1 billion, everybody has sort of agreed on.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Whatever your numbers are telling me, that's what your numbers are.

Ms. Hughes, is there any costing on the part about the best 12 weeks? In regard to the 55%, are there any dollars put behind that or any expectations on that?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I'm just trying to go through my document here, because we have been talking about quite a few things.

The whole intent in putting this forward is to make sure that people actually have access to employment insurance. There will be some costing, of course, and we will have some differences in how much it's going to cost from one end to the other and the intricacy of what the impact will be when people actually have access.

Basically, with our concern that people who work flat out for long stretches, surrounded by less lucrative preparation and wind-down periods, are not getting the benefits they deserve, we need to look at whether the cost actually outweighs the benefits.

The Chair: I'm sorry to cut you off, Mr. Lobb, but that's all the time we have. We're going to have to kick it back over to the other side of the table.

Madame Beaudin, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

First, I would like to let Mr. Lessard clear up something.

Mr. Yves Lessard: I'd simply like to respond to two questions that were put to you, Mrs. Hughes. But first, let me put my answers in context.

The unemployment rate in December 2005 was similar to today's rate and the assistant deputy minister of the Department of Human Resources and Social Development was asked at the time to supply us with some figures. These provide an answer to Mr. Lobb's questions.

Regarding the 360-hour threshold, the ADM estimated that this measure would cost \$390 million and would affect 90,000 unemployed workers, given that not all unemployed workers would automatically qualify.

As far as the 12 best weeks are concerned—and this answers Mr. Lobb's questions at the same time—that measure would cost \$320 million and affect 470,000 unemployed workers. So then, \$320 million would affect 470,000 unemployed workers.

There are the answers to your two questions.

Now I'll give the floor back to my colleague so that she can ask her questions.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Good day.

Thank you very much for joining us.

As you know, we will be doing a clause-by-clause study of the bill later. Basically, I have a straightforward, general question for you.

If you had to list the main strengths of this bill, what would they be?

Also, if you feel that there are some shortcomings to the bill, or certain provisions that need to be amended, what changes would you propose?

I'd like to heard about the strengths of the bill, and the areas that you think need to be improved before we proceed with our clause-by-clause study.

[*English*]

Ms. Barbara Byers: I think we've been clear in our documents and also in the discussion that obviously the 360 hours are vitally important. You can design the best EI system in the world, but if people can't access it because the threshold is too high, then you have a really nice document, but it doesn't really do anything for anybody. From our perspective, the 360 hours are what needs to be done.

The two improvements have already been talked about in this room. One of them is in our document, that we want a benefit rate of 60%, and people have already raised the question of benefit duration. We certainly would agree with 50 weeks. We understand what it means to people. So those would be the strengths.

You have to deal with access, you have to deal with benefit level, and you have to deal with benefit duration.

Again, you can deal with a whole bunch of other things, but if people can't get into the system, they can't access the other things either. They can't get a better benefit and they can't get a longer duration if necessary.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Do you feel this proposal would encourage people to work?

Many people are arguing that bringing in a 360-hour EI qualification threshold will have the opposite effect on some workers.

If I understand you correctly, you're saying that it would be an incentive for people to go out and work. Correct?

[*English*]

Ms. Barbara Byers: I think the reality is that nobody wants to be at home not contributing. I think Carol Hughes already said this earlier. We all want to contribute in whatever way we can.

I don't want to do an age scan in this room, but maybe some people are still living with the old 1960s kind of statement about.... I come from the west, from Saskatchewan, and people used to talk about "the UI ski team", which was a myth then, but it still lives across the country. People want to work. They want to be able to contribute.

I would like to remind the parliamentarians here, too, that in about 2003—I think it was December 17, and parliamentarians can tell me whether it was 2003 or 2004—there was a parliamentary committee that studied EI very extensively. It came in with 28 recommendations, 20 of which I believe were agreed to by the Bloc, the NDP, and the Liberals, and there were a few others that the Conservatives.... In fact, that might even be a high number.

I would just remind you to go back and look at it. It really talk did about this, and guess what's in there? It's 360 hours.

Mr. Andrew Jackson: Let me add one point, just to remind members that part of the package of changes to the EI in the mid-1990s was to make workers ineligible for EI if they quit their jobs. In the system prior to that, workers who quit could qualify, but there was a penalty imposed.

Basically it means that any worker who is unemployed today and claims EI cannot have quit their job. You can debate all these studies from the late 1980s or early 1990s, which as I said before show very small impacts at worst, but it's not open to workers to game the system in that way at all. To claim a benefit, you have to have a record of employment from an employer showing that you were laid off from the job.

The Chair: We're going to come back for two quick questions, and then we're going to wrap it up before clause-by-clause.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have one question, and then I'll pass it on to my colleague, Mr. Vellacott.

This question is directed to Barbara Byers. It flows from Mr. Lobb's questioning; he talked about the costing.

With respect to using the best 12 weeks and increasing the benefit from 55% to 60%, have you done a costing of what the amount might be? What would the corresponding effect be on premiums, if that were the route you were going to take? If you can answer that straightforwardly, I'd appreciate it.

Mr. Andrew Jackson: I don't have the number at my fingertips, but it's pretty simple to cost going from 55% to 60%: it would raise the cost of every claim by five divided by fifty-five, or one-eleventh.

To underline the significance of taking the best 12 weeks, the reason I think that's important is that often in a period before a layoff a worker works on a reduced hours basis. It's through no fault of their own that their normal earnings are interrupted.

If you average over 26 weeks, a lot of workers who get laid off, whether it was that the employer was in trouble....

But I don't know what that would cost.

• (1640)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I appreciate this, but that wasn't the question. If you can't answer it, that's fine.

Ms. Barbara Byers: In terms of costing, there's \$57 billion that was taken from workers and their employers.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: That wasn't the question.

Ms. Barbara Byers: I realize that, but that's the answer.

The Chair: We're going to move on to Mr. Vellacott for one question, and then we're going to move to clause-by-clause.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): I guess I'd respond to my colleague, Carol, here. I live in the province of Saskatchewan, where Barb comes from, or originally was.

I'm surprised that you're not a little more on top of some of what's happening. At least in my office, I get calls on a regular, repeated basis from employers—I am not an employment agency—I lamenting the fact that they don't have enough labour. There's a labour shortage in our province. They're talking in terms of the nominee program, getting immigrants in, doing what they can. They just can't get the workers.

How do you respond to those people, the employers in my riding, who are short-circuited, if you will, by this kind of bill and the labour shortage in the booming buzz of the province of Saskatchewan? How do you respond to them in the face of this kind of bill, Carol, when there are not enough workers, not enough employees out there?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I don't know. I've never been to Saskatchewan, so I don't know what kind of work is out there.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): What? You've never been to Saskatchewan?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Not yet; I'm hoping to go one day. Anyway, I don't know what kind of labour market is out there. Is it a problem getting the workers to go out there? Why is it? That's what you actually need to define: why is it that they're having trouble attracting? Are they horrible employers? Are they not paying enough? I don't know. That's what you need to look at.

I can tell you that there are a lot of workers out here who are looking for jobs, and I can tell you that from my riding, people are actually having to travel by plane to go to different work sites. Whether it is in Yellowknife or anywhere like it, they get flown in, in order to get jobs. So it's not because these people are not looking for jobs.

I need to go back to the employment insurance aspect. We have to be clear. There was \$57 billion in the fund, and it should still be there. And that insurance money was actual insurance; it wasn't money that should have been used for anything else. That's like you having a mortgage and the bank all of a sudden saying, "I want you to pay your mortgage, so I'm going into your bank account and am taking the savings you've put aside and putting them into the mortgage."

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Let me just interject at this point. We were on the record very clearly that this was the wrong way to handle the EI account. But the money's gone now. That's the other issue.

The Chair: Mr. Vellacott, I'm going to let Ms. Byers finish up. That's all the time we have.

Ms. Barbara Byers: It's just because I'm from Saskatchewan.

One of the things is that the unemployment rate in Saskatchewan has gone up. I still get the notices from the *Leader-Post* and so on, so I still keep up with the news at home. But the other part of it is, if we're talking about real labour shortages, one of the ways to deal with them—and our people in the construction industry constantly tell us this—is to bring in mobility assistance for them through the UI system. That's typical. Employers can get assistance to bring people in from Germany or Chile or all sorts of places, but the worker can't get assistance to move to a job that might be there.

The Chair: During our employability study, that was one of the recommendations; it would probably be a good idea.

I'm going to say to the witnesses that you're allowed to be released from the table, if you wish.

Carol, do whatever you like.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I actually have a CPAC meeting.

The Chair: Okay, we'll let you go. Thank you for being here and for taking the time to be part of our committee.

Now we're going to go to clause-by-clause.

Mr. Michael Savage: Just for clarification before clause-by-clause, Chair, can you or the clerk confirm that this bill will require a royal recommendation? Has the Speaker ruled on that?

The Chair: That is correct. It requires a royal recommendation.

We're going to pass out the one amendment that we have, and then we're going to go clause by clause.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't know what point you call this, but Mr. Lessard referred to a number for 12 weeks at 55%. I wonder if he would repeat that number. I didn't catch it when —

The Chair: Was he talking about the amendment?

• (1645)

Mr. Ben Lobb: No, he was talking right in the actual—

The Chair: We'll wait until he gets back to the table.

We'll get started again with the clause-by-clause.

Mr. Lobb had a point of clarification for Mr. Lessard.

Why don't you ask for that point of clarification?

Mr. Ben Lobb: It's just a friendly little point of clarification. Mr. Lessard referred to some costings from a previous report, I believe it was. I didn't quite catch it when he mentioned it. It was on the costs of the 55% and the 12 weeks. If he hasn't put it away, could he repeat the figure again?

The Chair: Is it the name of the report that you want?

Mr. Ben Lobb: No, it's the cost.

The Chair: Do you have those figures, Mr. Lessard?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I have these figures which were supplied by the department and again, I will put them in context. Some of my colleagues were present at the time, including Mr. Godin and Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours for the Liberals. A number of members were on hand and all parties were represented on the committee tasked with examining EI reform. The report contained 28 recommendations, eight of which had been formulated and unanimously endorsed by the Standing Committee on Human Resources.

One of the 28 recommendations called for the creation of an independent account and for the repayment of the money diverted from the EI fund. I will spare you the details of each individual recommendation. Suffice to say that we asked the department to do some evaluations for us.

There was more cooperation on the part of officials at the time, because they had the minister's authorization. Since you were asking, they came up with the following figures. The cost of increasing the benefit level from 55% to 60% of insurable earnings would be \$1.2 billion and the measure would apply universally. The cost of setting a 360-hour threshold for EI benefit qualification was \$390 million, with that measure affecting 90,000 unemployed workers. Introducing a measure based on the 12 best weeks would cost \$320 million, with 470,000 unemployed workers targeted.

I could give you additional figures, because we have all of that information. It was provided to us by Mr. Michael Bron, Assistant Deputy Minister at Human Resources and Social Development on December 7, 2005.

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Lobb: Well, that's good. I appreciate the information. I didn't need the dissertation on his previous work, but I appreciate it. Thank you again for the answer to the question on the 12 weeks and the 55%.

The Chair: I think the context is important, so you got the context.

We're now going to go to clause-by-clause consideration. I'm going to ask the committee if we can group these clauses together again. We're going to consider clauses 1 to 4. The amendment is on clause 5. Does the committee agree to do it that way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clauses 1 to 4 inclusive agreed to)

(On clause 5)

The Chair: We now have the amendment that you see before you.

I'll put this in context. Because this is money, it would normally require royal recommendation and it would be out of order. The bill needs royal recommendation. The clause would need royal recommendation as well, but we're going to vote on it anyway because it has come before us and we'll do that.

The amendment is that Bill C-280 in clause 5 be amended by replacing line 27 on page 2 with the following: "to a claimant is 60% of the average of their". That is the amendment.

Is there any discussion on the amendment?

Go ahead, Mr. Lessard.

•(1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I'd like to speak to that, Mr. Chair. I believe we have done that in other forums, specifically in the House of Commons. I think the comment made earlier by Ms. Byers from the CLC summed up the intent of the proposed amendment quite well.

The aim is by no means to only improve accessibility, but also to improve people's income. A weekly benefit of 55% or 60% of insurable earnings is not that great an amount. Some maintain that the bill will require royal recommendation. As it now stands, I think you will all find that the bill will require royal recommendation.

As parliamentarians, we need to ask ourselves if we are really improving the EI system with this bill. This amendment is a step in that direction.

[*English*]

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

Is there further discussion on the amendment?

Go ahead, Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you.

This amendment is consistent with other bills that we've looked at on EI. I think Mr. Godin's bill was Bill C-265. I think Madame Deschamps had Bill C-269, and moving from 55% to 60% is part of that.

I can't speak for what governments have done prior to my coming to Parliament, nor can I speak for what future governments will do, Liberal or otherwise, but I will support the amendment because I think it's important that we send a message to the government that changes need to happen to EI for lots of people. We'll support the amendment for that reason.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I was interested in what my colleague Mr. Komarnicki said. Did I say it right?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: You were pretty close.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's pretty good for an Acadian.

Maybe he will agree that we could go to another subamendment into which we could put all those numbers of weeks when they have

different times they could claim. Maybe he would be interested in working on a subamendment.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I can say this. Mr. Godin doesn't care about the cost part of it, as long as it's bigger and wider.

The Chair: We're losing control here—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'm not finished. Maybe you think I don't care about the cost, but I can tell you that it's not the government that is paying into it. It's the workers and the businesses who are paying into it, and the government is taking that money to balance the budget and have the deficit go to zero.

That's where I'm coming from. I'm just trying to add my piece on that.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Go ahead, Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Last year, we debated the costs extensively. In terms of amending the regime, we all agreed, Liberals, NDP and the Bloc, on a minimum threshold. This measure was part of that consensus. We have already debated whether or not the fund could afford this measure. For that reason, we are comfortable with putting forward this proposal at this time. I understand that our Liberal colleagues are on board with this. That is consistent with what they told us last year.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. I will call the question.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Clause 5 as amended agreed to)

(Clauses 6 and 7 agreed to)

The Chair: We have the last couple of questions.

Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the bill as amended carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the committee order a reprint of the bill as amended for use in the House at report stage?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That takes care of Bill C-290.

The Chair: We have a motion from Mr. Martin, but before I do that, there's been some suggestion from Ms. Davies that one day is not a sufficient amount of time for us to hear her bill. As well, a number of witnesses, including Ms. Davies, have confirmed for Thursday. There are seven.

Quite frankly, given the number of witnesses, I don't know how we will have a chance to go clause by clause on her bill on Thursday. My suggestion is that we break it down into two groups. Ms. Davies and a couple of witnesses can talk in the first hour, and then we would have the other four witnesses. We'd have three witnesses in the first hour and then four in the second. Then we could go to clause-by-clause consideration on the Tuesday after we return from the break.

I'm going to ask the committee what their thoughts are. We can discuss it and then we can go from there.

Go ahead, Mr. Savage.

• (1655)

Mr. Michael Savage: I don't have a problem with that. Did we have anything scheduled for the Tuesday after the break week?

The Chair: We were going to start on poverty again.

Mr. Michael Savage: Do we have any witnesses planned, or anything like that? If not, that's fine by me.

The Chair: All right. We'll go to clause-by-clause study on the Tuesday when we return.

Let's go to Mr. Martin's motion.

Mr. Martin, could you read your motion into the record? The floor is yours.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): This is—

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Martin. I've just been told by the clerk that you need to withdraw the old one and let us know what the new one is.

Mr. Tony Martin: I withdraw the old motion and I will read the second motion into the record. It's not that dissimilar from the first one, but there are some changes—

The Chair: Sorry, Tony. If you're withdrawing the old motion, then we need to get unanimous consent that that is the case.

Why don't we just make sure that everyone has a copy of the new motion? Okay.

Do I have unanimous consent to withdraw the old motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion withdrawn)

The Chair: Go ahead, Tony.

Mr. Tony Martin: The new motion would read:

With November 24th, 2009, marking the 20th anniversary of the 1989 unanimous resolution of this House to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000, and there not being noteworthy progress towards that goal, while the significant progress in eliminating poverty among seniors shows that government programs can be effective in addressing poverty, be it resolved that the Government of Canada develop a plan now to eliminate poverty in Canada for all, with interim targets and measures, at three-year intervals, to eliminate poverty in Canada.

And that the Committee report its decision to the House.

The Chair: Do you want to speak to the motion?

Mr. Tony Martin: This comes to us from a group that is connected with many other groups across the country that are focused on the issue of poverty. Campaign 2000 was started back in

1989 to focus on child poverty. They've done a lot of work, and they're appreciative of the work we're doing here in this committee and in Parliament.

They want to mark this particular anniversary so that none of us forgets the commitment that was made. When this motion is reported to the House and we get a chance to speak to it briefly, I think it would be an excellent opportunity for us to share with the House the work this committee has been doing on poverty for over the past two years now, and to indicate to them that there is in fact a report coming that all will have a chance to look at and perhaps commit to, to achieve the goals that are outlined in this motion. I would encourage everybody at the table to support this.

The Chair: Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: I certainly support the intent of this. I've had some discussion with my colleague on this, and also with Campaign 2000. I think it's important that this anniversary be marked in some way. I also think it's important that we recognize that there are ways that have been shown to reduce poverty. This motion references that we have had some success in limiting poverty among seniors, but I think we also need to recognize that child poverty would be a lot worse in this country had we not brought in things such as the child tax benefit and the national child supplement.

I would like to see that put into this motion so that it actually not only indicates that we want to do something but also gives some indication of what measures have worked so far in a positive way in reducing poverty. I would be proposing that we put an amendment in, and I can go through that later if you'd like or I can do it right now.

• (1700)

The Chair: Why don't you do it right now?

Mr. Michael Savage: Okay. The first two lines are fine.

For “not being noteworthy progress towards that goal,” after the comma I would add “in spite of certain improvements such as the child tax benefit and the national child benefit supplement”. A number of organizations such as the Caledon Institute have indicated that this improvement, which I think came in 1997, has reduced what would have been an increase in child poverty to the extent of close to 30%, or around 30%. It's the kind of thing we can all build on.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I hear what Mr. Savage is saying, and I was certainly drawn to the particular clause that says “and there not being noteworthy progress towards that goal”, because there has been progress. If that entire portion were removed, this would be something we could support. I recall hearing testimony not only on the improvements Mr. Savage talks about, which relate to the programs he's talking about, the national child benefit supplement and so on, but on the working income tax benefit, for instance, which I recall being a positive step that would take people past the welfare wall. I think even the member from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour commented favourably about that.

We had at our committee Deb Matthews, I think it was, the Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services, who spoke about WITB. She also talked about the CCTB as being an aspect. Of course, there were enhancements to some of those programs, and there's a child tax credit—there are a number of pieces and programs that are worthwhile and may need to be enhanced—but I think it speaks to the point that there has been work done.

So although I could see myself supporting Mr. Savage's motion, because it's better than what is there now, I would propose an amendment that would take out the words, "there not being noteworthy progress towards that goal". If that were taken out, it's something I could support.

The other portion that I find we couldn't support is "at three-year intervals". I'd want that eliminated as well.

If the decision is to vote on Mr. Savage's amendment, fine; then I would propose an amendment after that. Perhaps Mr. Martin would be prepared to take those words out. That would be something that would likely bring some consensus at the committee.

The Chair: I want to recap what we have here.

We have a motion on the floor by Mr. Martin. We have an amendment by Mr. Savage. We have a subamendment by Mr. Komarnicki now, who is suggesting that you want to leave in Mr. Savage's amendment, but after "2000," strike out "and there not being noteworthy progress towards that goal". You also want to strike "at three-year intervals". This is just to ensure that I'm correct.

Now we're talking about the subamendment, which includes those other things, so if there's any discussion, we're going to be talking about what Mr. Komarnicki has right now.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'm not sure that it reads right, if we take these words out, because the next portion starts "while". We may have to take that out and say, "there being significant progress".

The Chair: Okay, sure. It would be, "there being".

All right. We're going to have to talk about the subamendment the way it has been presented. We're taking names.

I have Mr. Lessard, and Ms. Minna after that.

Mr. Lessard.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, I would suggest to our colleague that he simply withdraw the motion. I think we're taking something away from the substance of the proposal. We agree on the principle, but we have a problem with the approach.

We do not feel that any significant progress has been made, at least none that is noteworthy. A commitment was made to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. However, the situation hasn't changed. Poverty among seniors may have declined significantly, but there has been no progress on other fronts.

As for marking this anniversary, the motion would have to reflect a genuine commitment on the part of the government to implement some of the supporting measures that we have come up with and that we plan to recommend. Work in this regard is under way. Otherwise,

the motion would amount to nothing more than a symbolic gesture. It would reflect a lesser commitment than was meant to be fulfilled by November 24, 1989. Back then, some parameters were agreed to. The government had taken a stand, set a timeframe and even decided on implementation stages.

That's our position, Mr. Chair, and we will not support the amendments as they now stand. Otherwise, we will move a sub-amendment calling for these amendments to be withdrawn, emphasizing the need to acknowledge that no noteworthy progress has been made and to recommend to the House to implement the key recommendations of our report. To do otherwise would be pointless, Mr. Chair, and we would merely be deluding ourselves once again.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

So far I have Ms. Minna and Mr. Martin on the list.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: I understand Mr. Lessard's comments with respect to recommending that the House implement our report, although that report is not yet done, nor is it written, so it's kind of premature to actually make that recommendation. It might be more appropriate to do so at the time, because right now we're recommending something that the House has not yet seen, nor will the House see it for a little while yet—but definitely before Christmas.

To go back to the motion, to my mind, I think there are two things that we're trying to capture here in regard to what both Mr. Martin and Mr. Savage have said. We want to acknowledge that it's been 20 years, and the progress, while we've made some, has not been good enough to eliminate child poverty. We haven't eliminated it, and I think maybe we need to just say it in those exact words, but also, to encourage the government, we need to note that government programs do work.

We say that with respect to the seniors, but it doesn't hurt to say that with respect to the comments made by Mr. Savage with respect to the child benefit. For the programs that do work, we want to make sure they're not weakened or undermined. We want to make sure they're strengthened in some way, in fact, to do the job they need to do. Then there are other programs like housing and what have you. If they have prevented a 30% increase in child poverty, that is not what we're looking to eliminate. It's at least a move forward.

So I would support the amendments or the suggestions by Mr. Savage, only because for me it's important to ensure when we're talking about government programs that we keep reinforcing the fact that government programs do work. In this case, they weren't perfect because they needed a lot of other stuff for them. They needed child care and housing. They needed a proper plan for an integrated strategy to eliminate poverty in the country as a whole, which of course would also affect children. That didn't happen.

The recommendation does mention an integrated plan. I don't have a problem with the timelines given. I just think it's important to note that government programs do work, and that while one of them, the child benefit, in and of itself didn't do all of the job, it needs to be increased as well. Many people know that at least they'll have \$5,000. It was a good beginning. I would encourage us to leave that in, because it encourages governments to accept the fact that their programs can work if they're willing enough to put them on the table and make them work.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Minna.

We're going to go to Mr. Martin, Mr. Savage, and Mr. Lobb. That is who I have on the list.

Mr. Tony Martin: In the interests of trying to build some consensus here, I'd certainly be willing to support adding, "in spite of certain improvements such as the national child tax benefit, the child benefit supplement, and the working income tax benefit", because that is certainly something that, even though very minimal, was welcomed. As Mr. Lessard said, I think you would gut the bill completely if you took out the section about there not being "noteworthy progress" towards that goal. I would want to leave that in.

Also, I have no difficulty taking out the last piece about the three-year intervals because we'll come to some of that kind of detail in our report.

So I would actually recommend, since we are amending, that we knock off "with interim targets and measures, at three year intervals, to eliminate poverty in Canada", because actually "to eliminate poverty in Canada" is redundant. It has already been said once.

Perhaps I might just read what I am suggesting here:

With November 24th, 2009, marking the 20th anniversary of the 1989 unanimous resolution of this House to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000, and there not being noteworthy progress towards that goal, in spite of certain improvements such as the child tax benefit, the child benefit supplement, and the working income tax benefit, while the significant progress in eliminating poverty among seniors shows that government programs can be effective in addressing poverty, be it resolved that the Government of Canada develop a plan now to eliminate poverty in Canada for all.

And that the committee report this decision to the House.

The Chair: I want a general consensus.

I have other people on the list.

We need to go back and vote on his subamendment, but I'm also trying to see if we have some consensus at the same time.

An hon. member: There could be a friendly amendment.

The Chair: They're all friendly, but my question is this. Is there a consensus from the Conservatives, the Liberals, and the Bloc that this would be okay with what Mr. Martin just said? If it is, we can talk about that. If not, we'll go back to voting on Mr. Komarnicki's point, and then we can add another subamendment.

My question is, do we have a consensus? If we don't and you're thinking about it, I'll just continue along with the speakers I have here.

Mr. Savage, and then we can come back to see if we have some consensus.

Mr. Michael Savage: It's tricky for me, Mr. Chair. I do think we're getting there, but Mr. Lessard makes a very astute point that you can't, on the one hand, say that we haven't had progress, and on the other hand add a whole bunch of different things. The national child tax benefit and the national child supplement are particularly good, and the WITB has the potential to be good. I don't think it helps enough people yet. It's not coordinated with all the provinces yet, but it's a mechanism that could work.

I remind committee members of the response of the Government of Canada earlier this year in reaction to the recommendation at the United Nations Human Rights Council's universal periodic review. Canada specifically indicated that they do not accept recommendation number 17, which is that we should have a national anti-poverty plan. The Canadian response indicated provinces and territories have jurisdiction in the area of social policy. They have developed their own programs to address poverty. This committee was doing this study on developing a plan to reduce poverty in Canada, to come up with an anti-poverty plan, while the government was specifically taking it out of recommendations from the universal periodic review of the UN.

It seems to me this motion has to correspond to the work this committee is doing. We undertook this study a year and a half ago or longer. This has been floating around for a couple of weeks, and I understand we're getting frustrated with some of the language, but it does seem to me that this has to relate to the work of this committee. We don't want to call upon the government to come out tomorrow with an anti-poverty plan, because it won't mean anything. The work we are doing in this committee should be connected to this motion in some way. I wonder if that is felt by other members.

• (1715)

The Chair: I'm going to keep going. We have a list. Maybe we can see if we have some consensus or if we need to go back and start voting on the subamendment and then the amendment.

Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I'm pleased that Mr. Martin took out the last bit about targets and measures at three-year intervals as a means of eliminating poverty in Canada. Part of it was duplication of the sentence it's attached to. The part about targets and measures could be questioned, since there is still no universal measurement system for poverty in Canada.

In regard to Mr. Savage's comments, I would suggest that we take all that out. You end up having a competition over what else you want to put in. I'd like to see the universal child care benefit put in, and I'm sure everybody has one they'd like to include. You could probably figure out for what reasons and why. So it might be an opportunity to just take it out. My suggestion would be to leave the first sentence in to the point where it says "by the year 2000" and stroke the rest of it out, right to the point where it says, "Be it resolved that the Government of Canada develop a plan now to eliminate poverty in Canada."

So you're ending the first sentence at "2000", and you're beginning the last and second sentence at "Be it resolved" and ending it at the part where it says "eliminate poverty in Canada".

The idea behind a motion is to make a suggestion to the government. Some may feel that we'd be taking a lot out, but it's saying that this is a 20th anniversary, and we as the committee, or we as Mr. Martin, want to see a plan developed to eliminate poverty. So I think that takes out a lot of the other parts that just don't work.

The Chair: I'm not sure we have consensus on that one, but we are still going to go back. I'm going to finish who I have on the list. I appreciate Mr. Martin's thoughts on a consensus. We don't seem to have consensus on that, though. We're going to have to go back. You have the floor now, so go ahead.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Maybe we're building a consensus. Our issue is that Mr. Martin says there is not noteworthy progress towards the goal. In my estimation, there is noteworthy progress but not sufficient progress. So taking everything out of the motion after "2000" eliminates the quibbling. The point is resolving the Government of Canada to develop a plan, and that's what needs to happen. The word "now" doesn't address the fact that we're studying this very issue and have some recommendations. If we change the word "now" for the words "taking into consideration the committee's report", then I think we'll have it covered. We're not getting into the specifics of whether we have made progress or how much progress we've made. We're saying we want to have the government's report, but only after it has taken into account what we're going to recommend.

So I would suggest we could reach a consensus by eliminating, as Mr. Lobb said, all that portion after "2000", taking the word "now" out after "be it resolved that the Government of Canada develop a plan", and by adding "after taking into consideration the committee's report, a plan to eliminate poverty in Canada".

So maybe there is room for a compromise, and it would be a good compromise to make a statement in time for Mr. Martin.

Mr. Michael Savage: Can you read that again?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: It would now read:

This November 24th, 2009, marking the 20th anniversary of the 1989 unanimous resolution of this House to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000, be it resolved that the Government of Canada develop, after taking into consideration the committee's report, a plan to eliminate poverty in Canada for all.

• (1720)

The Chair: Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: This is a laborious process. We need to make an effort to reach a consensus, Mr. Chair! I think we need a consensus in the case of a motion like this one. We are prepared to consider the approach advocated by Mr. Lobb and Mr. Komarnicki—I don't know how the Liberals will feel about it—but we would add a stipulation to the motion, so that it would read as follows: [...]

be it resolved that the government of Canada develop a plan now to eliminate poverty in Canada for all, while respecting provincial jurisdiction, with interim targets [...]

I think it's appropriate to add this stipulation, Mr. Chair, since many of the measures must be taken by the provinces. When we make our recommendations to the committee...I think it's wise to defer to the committee's recommendations, as Mr. Komarnicki's pointed out. Another thing we need to consider is that recommendations can fall within two jurisdictions. I think we need to realize that. Then, we could consider supporting such a motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: It sounds to me that we're getting closer.

Tony, it was your motion originally. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Tony Martin: Let me reflect what I think I've heard. I'm happy with what I'm hearing.

There was a suggestion that we go with the following:

Whereas November 24th, 2009, marks the 20th anniversary of the 1989 unanimous resolution of the House of Commons to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000, be it resolved that the Government of Canada, respecting provincial jurisdiction, develop, after taking into consideration the committee report, a plan to eliminate poverty in Canada.

And that the committee report its decision to the House.

That will give us all a chance to put a few words on the record.

The Chair: I'm seeing some consensus.

Go ahead, Mike.

Mr. Michael Savage: Even though I get a little defensive about this, I do think there has to be some statement here that we didn't reach that goal. We didn't. Whether you say it's not noteworthy progress or significant progress, I think we have to do something that indicates that there was a failure here. I blame the parliamentarians from 1989.

I don't want us to just say, okay, it's the 20th anniversary, so let's punt the ball for the next generation. Something has to happen now. And that's suitable, because our committee is doing this work. I think that's important. It has to recognize this committee.

I'm wondering, since Tony is getting close to this, and it was his original motion.... We don't have to vote on this today. We have two committee hearings on Bill C-304. We should be able to squeeze 10 or 15 minutes out of one of those. Perhaps Tony could go away, communicate with us, and then come back with a motion. If he could try to get it to us by tomorrow, we could consider it in advance of the committee meeting on Thursday.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Chair, further to what Mr. Savage stated, he may want to say something like:

With November 24th, 2009, marking the 20th anniversary of the 1989 resolution of this House of Commons to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadians by the year 2000, a goal that has not been achieved....

And then carry it on. I think if you put that in there, we know we're not there.

The Chair: Go ahead, Madame Folco.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): I would like Mr. Komarnicki to read what he added about the committee's report, immediately after what was just read.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: It was:

Be it resolved that the Government of Canada, after taking into consideration the committee's report, develop a plan to eliminate poverty in Canada for all.

• (1725)

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I know it's a picky point, but seeing that the report has not been tabled, that it's really in our heads right now, I would suggest using "proposed report" or "future report", because such a report does not exist.

The Chair: The report of the current study...human resources... This is the language that I think somebody has to take away and fix up.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: No, that's fine. I understand that.

The Chair: Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I want to be sure that we understand each other. Ms. Folco has invited you to read your motion.

Am I also to understand, further to the summary given by Mr. Martin, that we could also include the stipulation I suggested, "[...] while respecting provincial jurisdiction [...]"]?

[*English*]

The Chair: Most definitely. I believe we had a consensus on that, Mr. Lessard.

Let's see if we can clean it up right now while we have it here. We have added a couple of things that are good and that I think we could move forward on.

It starts:

With November 24th, 2009, marking the 20th anniversary of the 1989 unanimous resolution of this House to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000, which goal has not yet been achieved....

Then we jump down to:

...be it resolved that the government of Canada develop a plan taking into consideration the current study being undertaken by the HUMA committee to eliminate poverty in Canada, while respecting provincial and territorial jurisdictions.

And that the committee report its decision to the House.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: You missed the words "for all". Is there a reason?

The Chair: No, I missed that.

I'll repeat it again:

With November 24th, 2009, marking the 20th anniversary of the 1989 unanimous resolution of this House to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000, which goal has not yet been achieved, be it resolved that the government of Canada develop a plan taking into consideration

this current study, work being undertaken by the HUMA committee to eliminate poverty in Canada for all, while respecting provincial and territorial jurisdictions. And that the committee report its decision to the House.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: The thought is there, but the grammar is a little tricky.

Mr. Michael Savage: Dean, after "eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000", you say "which goal". Could you take out "goal" to say "which was not achieved".

The Chair: Sure. It will be "which was not achieved".

Mr. Michael Savage: And at the end...I want to make sure we're asking the government to undertake the study. It's not just to look at the study to reduce poverty, but that the government uses the study to reduce poverty.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chair, seeing that we don't have a French translation anyway—

The Chair: Yes, so here's what we'll do. We'll have the clerk clean this up and we will submit it again on Thursday. We'll have time to talk about it then because we'll be going clause by clause.

Is that okay?

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I have a suggestion, Mr. Chair.

When the clerk proceeds to draw up the motion as submitted, I would insert the two amendments that we proposed after "Canada". The motion in French would therefore read: "[...] élabore dès maintenant un plan d'élimination de la pauvreté au Canada devant tenir compte [...] instead of "compte tenu". According to Mr. Komarnicki's wording, it was important to take into consideration the report that we would be producing. However, in French "compte tenu" means something quite different.

So then, immediately after "Canada", it would make more sense to insert "devant tenir compte des recommandations du comité et aussi des juridictions des provinces".

• (1730)

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

We'll have a clean copy to look at on Thursday.

Mr. Michael Savage: Can we get it in advance? Is that possible?

The Chair: Yes, it will be circulated as soon as it is translated.

Thank you very much. The meeting is adjourned.

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