

Government Orders

be mentioned that 75 per cent of the officers who deal with beneficiaries and make decisions on applications are women. If a beneficiary does not agree with the officer's decision that he or she quit voluntarily or lost his or her job for misconduct, that person can appeal to an independent board of referees.

Mr. Samson: They can wait two years.

Mr. Robitaille: Madam Speaker, the member for Timmins—Chapleau says they can wait two years. I think he is somewhat mistaken about the process. The member for Timmins—Chapleau does not seem to know the process. Usually, and it is recognized, the average wait for someone appealing to the unemployment insurance tribunal is two to three months. I suggest that the hon. member for Timmins—Chapleau check his figures before saying anything and spreading misinformation.

If the beneficiary does not agree with the decision of the board of referees, an appeal can be made with the umpire. If that is not satisfactory, the beneficiary can go to court, even to the Supreme Court. Think about it. In November 1990, sexual harassment was first introduced in the act. It was not introduced when our Liberal friends were in power. This Conservative government put it in the act. There has not been a single complaint on how employment and immigration handled such applications since then. No appeal has been made to the board of referees.

Unemployment insurance provides temporary help to workers who lost their jobs and are looking for other ones. Unemployment insurance is not an income support system for those who choose to be unemployed. Canadians have long been an adaptable people who keep up with the times. These changes are meant to harmonize the needs of Canadians who work hard for their living and those who want to work.

To slow the skyrocketing increase of the UI account deficit which threatens the system's very viability, we are imposing a freeze for the next two years, not a reduction as the opposition claims. We will be able to show that after April 4. We are freezing the amount of benefits just as we froze our own salaries and public servants' salaries, exactly as many Canadian companies have frozen their

employees' salaries. We are all in the same boat. Benefits will not be reduced for those now receiving unemployment insurance. Despite the freeze, Canadians will still have a more generous and fair unemployment insurance plan than what Italy, Great Britain, the United States and many other countries offer their workers.

• (1650)

Finally, we are tackling the unemployment insurance account deficit and, as part of this process, we want to put an end to abuse of this system. In that way we are different from the Liberals who let things go. We are also different from the New Democrats who want to spend money to protect those who abuse the system, while trying to make us believe they want to limit expenditures.

This distinguishes us from the Bloc Québécois as well. It is taking a stand motivated only by political opportunism. Its members are no longer free to make up their minds independently because they are in the pockets of the likes of Gérald Larose, Fernand Daoust and Lorraine Pagé. It is fine to object, but what alternatives do these people have to offer? None.

We are enabling a greater number of Canadians to retrain and we are sparing no effort to allow them to re-enter the labour force. We are making more funds available to ensure that Canadians who want to work find employment as quickly as possible.

Training and upgrading are one aspect, but the other is job creation. Small businesses are major contributors to both job creation and economic growth. This government recognized that fact in its recent economic statement. New employment incentives were added in the form of a refundable tax credit for small businesses where UI employer premium payments are above the 1992 level.

More than 900,000 Canadian businesses are eligible for this incentive program. These measures will allow small business to create real jobs, increase the number of hours worked by part-time workers or raise their employees' wages. How many workers will benefit from these measures?