

Supply

First, in a democracy an increasing number of people feel that the public should have a say in who occupies the office of chief of state. Second, it is in decline because Canadians prefer the appointee to be above and beyond partisan politics. That reference has not been respected.

• (1225)

Third, it is in decline because the public no longer supports some of the special privileges which pertain to the Governor General's office such as the exemption of the occupant from payment of income taxes and the ability of the occupant to double dip on pensions.

The Prime Minister has disregarded all of these factors in making this appointment which he announced today. Reformers therefore believe the appointment to be unwise, inappropriate, and wish that fact to be registered in this House.

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): Mr. Speaker, this is unprecedented in Canadian history. The Governor General nominated has informed the government that he will accept his pay as a governor and will return his pension to the crown.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT RETIREMENT ALLOWANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): We are now entering a 10-minute question and comment period for the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre, Ref.): Madam Speaker, getting back to the MP pension plan and the need to address it and reform it, I would like to make a couple of comments on the speech of the member for Halifax and also a couple of questions I hope she would take the time to answer.

First of all, the problem with this is that the current Prime Minister said a year ago in opposition that he would reform the pension plan in one day given the opportunity. Now he has been there for a year and has not reformed the pension plan in that one day as he promised. It is in the red book what he would do, the 55 years, the double dipping.

We would support that except we would expect the age to be 60, not 55. We would go further and get into the area which we feel annoys the taxpayers of Canada which is the fact that whatever it is that a member of Parliament contributes, why is it

that the taxpayers have to contribute higher than that. Why is it that the taxpayers are expected to foot the tab for this generous, self-serving, gold plated pension plan? Why is it not just a matching contribution?

Does the member for Halifax not agree that the government's share of the contribution should not exceed a member's share to restore respect in the private sector and to restore the confidence of the Canadian public? That is one of the changes that we would make in addition to what is in the Liberal red book.

Also, does she not agree that 55 is not high enough, that it should be 60? It would help to make it more actuarially sound and it would be more in line with the private sector. If a member wishes to draw it earlier than that age then they would get a reduced amount as in similar plans.

All we are asking in our motion is to rectify a wrong. It is clearly wrong. It clearly annoys the Canadian taxpayer and all we want to do is address that portion of the MP compensation which is too generous, not the MPs' salary which is too low.

If we looked at it why can this government not find a balance between too much and too little? Why can this government not find a balance between good government and self-serving government? Why can this government not find a balance and do the things it said it was going to do when it was in opposition? Now it is on the other side and it is not doing them, or it is doing opposite. This is what frustrates taxpayers. This is what concerns people.

The last question is does she not agree that the government plan is better than that of any in the private sector? Politicians, members of Parliament, belong to an exclusive club of only 295 people, which is probably about 30 too many. There should only be 265. Now they plan to increase it to 301 because they work so hard. Does she not agree that if we have a better plan than that of the private sector is it not somehow embarrassing to her that she has something, or that a member of Parliament has something, better than that which is out there? We come into this job willingly. We know the sacrifices. We know what we are getting into. If we cry about what we are going to lose when we leave—the member did not, I am referring to some other Liberal members who made that point—and cry about what we are going to see out there when we leave, then we should not become MPs in the first place.

• (1230)

Those are my comments. I am trying to be reasonable. I am trying to ask for support for this motion. It only supports what the Liberals promised. We want action before 53 more members qualify under the current rules. We want the current MP pension plan to be changed. Why does the government not act?