

Private Members' Business

would begin the rebuilding of trust in this institution, which is the central issue for Canadians today.

Mr. J. W. Bud Bird (Fredericton—York—Sunbury): Mr. Speaker, I also support the general thrust of this initiative. I would appreciate if the member who made this motion would listen closely because I think that in some respects the whole purpose he is addressing is a disservice by dealing in one narrow aspect of members' expenses, members' compensation or members' pension plans.

It is very much like the leader of the New Democratic Party said last week. I was not in the House when she made a speech about pensions. In isolation, she can demonstrate that pensions, which many of us will never hope to receive, are too generous or are based on the wrong criteria, and so on. Frankly, the hon. member has done the same thing by taking the narrow issue of expense allowances and the fact that they are tax free, and addressed that. The hon. member for Broadview—Greenwood has applauded that.

The fact that I know both of these gentlemen well would cause me to be certain they are not sanctimonious. But there is a danger of that by just addressing the one aspect of this problem. I agree that we should not have a tax preference. But I can demonstrate that the expense allowance by itself is inadequate to the needs of most of us. To put this motion and not say that is on the edge, frankly, of not really being fair to yourself or to all the other members.

In the narrowness of your presentation, my hon. friend, and in the response of the hon. member for Broadview—Greenwood, you do a disservice to all members by helping to paint this picture of distrust in dealing with one item in isolation and not in the context of all items.

I have only been in this House for three years. I came here for the first time from a business background, as a matter of fact, a private business background, but an extensive public business experience as well. I was shocked to find the *ad hoc*, ill-designed, topsy-turvy compensation plan that over decades has been conceived, almost it seems on the basis of, well, what kind of patchwork can we put to the system today to solve this problem?

Last year we instituted a \$6,000 a year expense provision for those of us who have to maintain hotel

accommodation, apartment accommodation, or whatever, because we do not live in this area. That came after decades of this House sitting here. That allowance does not provide a means of recompense for me because I happen to own the condominium in which I live. I have to depend on a \$40 a day allowance because for some reason it is not deemed appropriate that I file a claim based on my out-of-pocket expenses for a second home, which we all know and every Canadian expects is a requirement of this job.

We go on and on. I have been frustrated at the label that I have received, leaving a business career to come as a member of Parliament, and to find the disrespect in which we are held, the distrust in which we are held, the public perception that we are overpaid and underworked, that we abuse the tax system, we abuse the pension system and that our salaries are too grand.

I am not complaining. I would do this job for free if I could afford it, and as long as I could afford it, because I believe it is one of the most distinguished opportunities any Canadian can have. But the facts are that the total compensation that I receive is inadequate to the expenditures I make and inadequate to the salary I have made all my life. If you count the cost of lost businesses and lost business opportunities, if you take the opportunity cost for this job, it is not remotely adequately reimbursed.

I take issue, frankly, with two individuals who I hold in the utmost respect for addressing this so vigorously in such a narrow, isolated context.

I would challenge you and other members of this House, as I have frankly challenged my own leadership and my own caucus, to launch a study, a commission, some public inquiry into the total compensation of the members of Parliament: the adequacy of salaries in relation to the qualifications and the commitments required; the adequacy of all expenses, the expenses for a second home and for air travel; to make sure that we do not have broken homes because our wives and husbands and children are living apart most of the time; to ensure that the air travel expense we get is not a gift but is there for the purposes we have to serve. Why would you not mention air travel in this motion? The free air travel, the 64 points, particularly if you do not use them for official business, is even more offensive than the tax free aspects of the expense allowance.