

Supply

• (1130)

We are not here to necessarily defend all of those entitlements as they presently stand but the point is people in Canada are being told by the Liberals that there are going to be cutbacks.

The members will know that daily the members of this House receive the publication called *Quorum*. I was just flipping through it and I noticed a headline saying "New Brunswick welfare changes foretell the human resources minister's thinking on social program reform".

I wonder if they cannot understand or why they cannot understand that when the finance minister is one of the 52 who was named yesterday, when members of these committees sitting on the Liberal side going around the country saying that there are going to be cutbacks in entitlements, there are going to be increases in university tuitions, but not me. That is the ultimate NIMBY and I do not think the people of Canada are prepared to accept the ultimate NIMBY. I wonder if the member has experienced the same kind of frustration that I have in my constituency of people saying this not in my back yard philosophy is not good enough when members of Parliament are not prepared to stand up and be counted.

Mr. Gouk: Madam Speaker, I have had a great deal of dialogue with people on a variety of subjects in my riding, as many of us have done. It is very frustrating that we are placed in this position in which we have to go out to the public and say we are cutting back on these services and we want you to identify to us what you are prepared to give up.

We are looking at cutbacks in some types of pensions, various types of services that we are going to not only be willing to but are able to offer to the Canadian public. It is very hard to stand there with a straight face and tell the public this when we are faced with the kind of gold plated benefits that are currently available to people in this House.

These are the types of things that we have to address. I am one of those people who take a 10 per cent reduction in my pay. I do it through donations to charities within my riding. I do not do this because I think MPs are overpaid, far from it. Those MPs who do their job, truth be known, are probably underpaid in general terms. Most of us do not come here for money, we come here to serve. We can serve the Canadian public best by leading by example and that is what our motion is all about.

Mr. Hugh Hanrahan (Edmonton—Strathcona, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to address this House on the issue of MP pensions. This is an issue that is of great concern to me.

Mr. Harper (Calgary West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, I wonder if you could verify your rotation list. We just

had two speakers split their time on this side and I did see the parliamentary secretary who wanted to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): There has been an agreement with the Reform Party and the Bloc to allow four Reformers or two slots to go to the Reform Party. This had apparently been worked out prior.

Mr. Hanrahan: As I was saying, this is an issue that is of great concern to me, to the Reform Party and to all Canadians.

This pension plan is indefensible even in good times when Ottawa vaults were overflowing and the public was feeling wonderfully generous toward its politicians. In bad times such as we experiencing now when many Canadians are suffering and the government is hard pressed to fund basic programs the MP pension plan amounts to little more than highway robbery.

When I say I know that Canadians truly do want the MP pension plan reformed, I am speaking from results of my constituency survey which I conducted in my riding of Edmonton—Strathcona in the spring of '94. The responses were overwhelmingly in favour of pension reform. When the constituents were asked the question at what age should an outgoing MP be able to collect a pension, 97 per cent of all respondents said that an outgoing or retiring MP should not be able to collect their pension until age 55.

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Even more convincing is the fact that 75 per cent of my constituents think that an outgoing MP should not be able to collect his or her pension until after his or her 60th birthday.

A second question that was asked regarding MP pensions was after how many years should an MP serve before being eligible for a pension. The results again were staggering in favour of pension reform. A hundred per cent of respondents said that a minimum number of years should be no less than eight. Eighty-one per cent felt that the minimum number of years of service should be no less than 16. The answers to these questions are a far cry from the present situation which is in place today.

It is important to illustrate a few facts about MP pension plans, as it will clearly illustrate why pension reform is needed. First, pensions are payable immediately upon retirement after only six years of service no matter at what age an MP retires or is not re-elected.

Second, payments continue even if the ex-MP holds another government job which we refer to as double dipping. Third, pensions begin at \$23,390 per year and increase 5 per cent per year of service to a maximum of 75 per cent of average salary. Fourth, inflation indexing kicks in after age 60 and finally, MPs pay 11 per cent of their base salary into the pension fund, the government matches this amount and covers shortfalls, an unfunded liability which cost the Canadian taxpayer nearly \$160 million in 1992.