with the issue of members' pensions by cutting government spending is entirely beside the point.

According to Jean Dion, an editorial writer in *Le Devoir*, cutting members' benefits would, of course, save money. After the election, it was estimated that pensions payable to defeated members totalled $109 million over a period of twenty years or one–quarter of one per cent of the deficit for the financial year 1992–93 alone.

A review of allowances, benefits or pensions payable to parliamentarians should not, in our opinion, be seen as a way to put government finances on a sound footing, as a way to fight the federal deficit or to achieve that great common ideal of fair distribution of wealth in our democracy. We should be realistic and consider the context.

On the issue of pensions, of course pensions and salaries are linked because they are part of the total compensation plan. It would be irresponsible to separate them. I think we should follow certain guidelines when we look at the treatment of members' pensions. We should consider making them commensurate with the responsibility a member has. I think there is a context we must consider. We should be able to take this debate a little further. To all the people who are watching us, to all those who sent us to Parliament to manage the government's affairs, we should be able to explain the responsibilities of a member as such, because once we are elected, the first thing a member has to do is to take on the responsibilities and activities that go with his position.

So we should take a good look at the issue of level of responsibility, because it is a factor throughout our society in every area of activity. A society functions and develops because people in a variety of sectors and organizations, both private and public, are responsible and take on certain responsibilities. We should look at members in the same way, as people who perform tasks with a high level of responsibility.

● (1630)

Account should also be taken of what attracts people to the job of member of Parliament. There is no doubt that most of the people elected to this House are people who want to have a responsibility in how the government is run, who want to make a contribution to society, to help it evolve, to see progress made.

We are talking about members from many different backgrounds, men and women, with a variety of skills and training, who are able to seek office and come here to pool their talents and knowledge with other members. In this context, there must also exist a certain number of conditions that will attract people of quality to political life.

Another factor to be considered is our individual financial independence, our own resources to draw on in carrying out our work, with the expenses that entails, and our independence from outside contributions. We must therefore remember that those elected to office must be able to operate in a context of financial independence.

The question cannot be examined without looking at the fundamental framework. Earlier, I listened to my colleagues as they raised a number of concerns that I share. I would like, on behalf of the official opposition, to reiterate a number of these points that we feel are essential to the debate on whether to reform the pension plan of members of Parliament.

First of all, I think that we are all well aware of the precariousness of the positions we hold. I often say to my colleagues and co–workers that we must never forget that we are just passing through, and some do so more quickly than others. Our mandate is for a very specific length of time.

We must, during this mandate, keep the promises and commitments made to the voters. We must deliver the goods in the sense of doing what has to be done within the allotted time frame, bearing in mind that our time here must be time spent doing good work, which means working energetically and steadfastly. We are here for three, four or five years, but we must put in quality time here. We feel that this reflection I am sharing with this House on behalf of the Official Opposition is a fundamental one.

Second, retirement age. Obviously, as we consider the various options, we can see that several different plans are in place in our society. In some professions, retirement age has already been set at 50 or 55 years of age. We know for example, that in the police force, civil service or Armed Forces, you become pensionable at 50. It is important to point out that serious thought should be given to the age issue, on the basis of current developments and what is currently offered in our society in terms of quality.

Members of Parliament, as it turns out, often launch their parliamentary career at a time in their lives when they are at their best in terms of energy. Age data show that indeed a great many of our elected representatives are at the peak of their form, at the peak of their capacity, which does not detract from the skill and quality of younger members or those with a longer experience. But we can see that this is an important time of our lives when we devote to Parliament energies that could effectively been put to use in a career in some other field, like the one we left to come here, one we are dedicated to and may return to when we are done here. But at this important time when we devote ourselves to public management, to the development and