

Supply

I am hopeful that the hon. member for Beaver River and her colleagues will support the government in its endeavours to do that. I know Canadians want to see reform of MP pensions and we are committed to doing that.

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.): Madam Speaker, we are certainly prepared to look at any legislation that the government does bring forward and if it is worthwhile and supportable we certainly will support it.

The Prime Minister has talked about opting out and this minister just mentioned it a few moments ago. He would give the opportunity for some people to opt out if they wish.

I beg the minister to explain to me how that could be ultimately fair in terms of making substantive changes to a pension program. In other words, some may opt out but the rest will continue to pork out. Is that what I understand? Those people who are still in an overbloated pension system because they have qualified now would just continue to pork out while some people would opt out. I hardly think that is a major reform of the MP system.

The minister also said that these MPs who qualified yesterday will not retire tomorrow. Of course not. We are not assuming that these people are going to retire tomorrow. That is not part of this argument. It is superfluous to it.

He said there was nothing magical about yesterday. There was something magical about yesterday and it is that if this government had acted on what the Prime Minister talked about last August when in opposition, if these changes had been brought about before yesterday, the six-year magic marker of qualification or vesting date, then for example my friend from Halifax who is in her 40s would not qualify for an MP pension until her 50s, which is what the red book says.

It talks about deferring the age. It talks about bringing it more in line, ending double dipping, putting it off to a later retirement age.

• (1310)

Someone in their 40s would now qualify. That is magic to me, that is lotto for life, just as simple as pie yesterday that these people qualify. If the government is even thinking of moving this further to a retirement age I do not understand how he can say that there was absolutely nothing magical about yesterday. They are eligible now for pension. We are not saying they are going to go out and collect it right away either. That will be after the next election date, whether they choose to resign or whether the taxpayers in their ridings choose for them to resign. It will be one way or the other.

It is also really important to note that when that day the minister talked about earlier does arrive they will be eligible to

collect a pension also. When a government contributes \$6 to \$1, as my friend from Halifax said earlier, it does not take a mathematical whiz to figure out that this is the most generous kick in for employer-employee benefits. It is almost \$6 to every \$1 that we contribute. There is no way that is actuarially sound. We can have that proven time and time again.

The minister says they only became eligible for pension yesterday, there was nothing magical about it whatsoever. If they brought it in before those 52 MPs qualified for it yesterday afternoon they simply would not be eligible today. If the government is going to make substantive changes to this MP plan it should make sure that it would affect the people who qualified yesterday.

What part of eligible does this minister not understand?

Mr. Eggleton: Madam Speaker, I am afraid that the hon. member for Beaver River just does not understand vesting because she talks about if the government had brought in legislation before yesterday then somehow yesterday would have meant nothing. That is not true at all.

The vesting period is not to be confused with benefit payout. We could bring in a minimum age with respect to benefit payout and it does not hinge on what the vesting period is. That is all yesterday was related to.

The member is in a rhetorical fantasy about what yesterday was. It really does not relate to the question of benefit payouts and the age they are paid at.

This government knows full well that Canadians are concerned about people collecting a pension when they are in their 40s, that they are collecting a pension far earlier than any other Canadian and we are going to deal with that issue. What happened yesterday is of absolutely no consequence in dealing with that issue.

We intend to continue to allow these people to qualify. Why would we do anything else? The hon. member has her qualifying day coming up sometime before long.

Miss Grey: March 13.

Mr. Eggleton: She knows it is March 13. She is obviously very interested in the date.

Let me also deal with her favourite possibility and that is to be able to opt out so she cannot reach her day. I wonder if she is really going to decide not to allow March 13 to happen. She can opt out. The Prime Minister has said that we will provide a provision that you can opt out or maybe it will be opting in. It will be one or the other. It will work out the same way. You might actually have to opt in. You may actually have to sign a piece of paper saying that you want to be into the plan. However, you have that opportunity. If you feel that you want to save the Canadian taxpayer that money then it is up to you to do that.