

Supply

These are my thoughts on what has been a fascinating debate. It has been a discussion of useful ideas which the government will certainly be taking into account in its announced reforms of the pension plan.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I am familiar with the member's riding of Vancouver Quadra. It is a riding not dissimilar to that of my seatmate and is in a fairly high income bracket with very professional people. I am sure the hon. member has probably been apprised of the fact on the part of his constituents that the whole issue of compensation for the member of Parliament probably is not an issue.

• (1355)

We could look at other ridings, for example the far eastern portion of Kootenay East where the coal miners have been put out of work. In the many situations where thousands of people are just barely getting by there is probably going to be a difference of opinion on the part of the constituents.

Notwithstanding that, the chair of the committee on social reform is one of the people who will be qualifying, as is the Minister of Finance. The University of British Columbia is in the hon. member's constituency. The human resources development department is saying in all likelihood that tuition fees are going to double.

In view of that, would the member not agree it would have been a very wise and prudent move on the part of the Prime Minister and the government to have made this move before these people were telling the students that their fees were going to rise from \$2,000 to \$4,000 and that by the way, there was an advertisement saying that the committee chair was going to qualify for a pension that in his lifetime has the potential of paying \$1.4 million? Would the member not agree it would have been very prudent, expeditious and wise of his front bench to have made this move in a far more hasty manner?

Mr. McWhinney: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the thoughtful question from the hon. member. It is true that I have a very great university within my constituency. I met with the student leaders there. I met with the administration two weeks ago. I have also met with universities outside my constituency. For a number of reasons they have come to me to discuss their concerns.

I do not regard it as a consequence of the social security green book that university fees will go up. In fact, I have given my personal undertaking that I will do my best to see that whatever emerges under the social security green book proposals that consequence would not arise. It is not a necessary and inevitable consequence of the green book at all. Frankly, the remedies are

more within the provincial domain and have very little to do with federal policy. That is a separate issue from the larger issue the hon. member raised.

It is true that in my riding the sentiment seems to be to favour larger salaries for members. This has been put to me by people who say they would never run for Parliament because the salaries are too low. Accepting the notion of a pension plan more in line for example with university pension plans in terms of balance of contributions would be acceptable. I see that argument and in fact, I accept it.

An hon. member: Should it have been done sooner?

Mr. McWhinney: I think frankly since the review is going on and since there is no urgency before the elections, it can be done in its proper time. I do assure the hon. member I accept that viewpoint too. I would rather see more balance in the pension and a different approach to the salaries, but there is no correlation between this and university fees. I do not accept as a consequence of the green book that fees will go up.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise on the opposition motion concerning the members of Parliament pensions. The member for Vancouver Quadra has raised some very interesting points as usual.

I particularly want to note for all members that the government in its election platform and its statements in the House has said it will end double dipping and the age. Today the Prime Minister did show his commitment to make those changes when he announced the appointment of Canada's next Governor General, the Hon. Romeo LeBlanc. He further went on to say that the Governor General will draw a salary as a Governor General but will return his MP pension to the government as a sign of that leadership. That is outstanding.

The Speaker: Order. I understand the hon. member may have a little bit of time remaining when we return to the debate.

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REPORT OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Auditor General of Canada for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1994.

I remind hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(d), this document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

It being 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 30(5), the House will now proceed to Statements by Members pursuant to Standing Order 31.