

premature. They are wasting their time debating this today when the matter is coming before Parliament shortly anyway.

They are suggesting in the motion in their vague way that there should be some other changes to the plan. There was as study commissioned by the previous government by the consulting firm of Sobeco, Ernst & Young with respect to remuneration for members of Parliament. That in turn, when it was completed this spring, was turned over to a commission of this Parliament, the Lapointe commission as it is known. It deliberated on it as well.

Through the hon. Speaker the matter was tabled here in the House in July. That report talked about some other changes in the pension plan, suggesting there be some modifications to the accrual benefit package and a number of other aspects of it. It said quite clearly that members of Parliament were undervalued by many in terms of the work they do and in terms of the remuneration they should appropriately receive.

It did say that while there should be some reduction in the total benefit package for the pension, there should be an increase in the remuneration for members of Parliament and that overall it should wash. It should come out as an even package, up on the salary and somewhat down on some of the other provisions, including the pension benefits.

This Parliament has determined there will be no salary increases, not only for members of Parliament, but for the public service, because we are in a time of restraint. We are in a time when getting our fiscal House in order is of the highest priority, a time when we must get the deficit and the debt down. Therefore we cannot afford to give salary increases to anybody in the government system including, having to set an example, the members of this House and the members of the other place.

If there is no increase in the salary then it can well be argued how do we take a decrease in the other parts of the compensation program. We would violate the principle of the Lapointe commission and the Sobeco, Ernst & Young study, which was to maintain the level of compensation but make adjustments internally. Obviously we are not in a position where we can do that. When that day does arrive we can again look at that package of suggestions as to adjustments that might be appropriate.

The final point I want to make is in relation to the vesting period, because much has been made by the third party on the vesting period. Yesterday six years arrived for 52 members of this House with respect to qualifying for their pensions. I want to point out very clearly that vesting does mean that as of now they are being paid out. Vesting means qualification to be paid out, but they are not going to be paid out. They are members of this Parliament. Nobody is planning on resigning or retiring.

Supply

They will be here for another four years before the hon. member for Beaver River would have to really worry about their collecting that pension.

Yesterday was the qualifying period for them. It is a six-year qualifying period. That is not an unreasonable length of time as a qualifying period for a pension plan. For average Canadians it is frequently less than that. It can sometimes be two years or three years to actually qualify for the pension. When it is paid out is another matter. To qualify in this particular case takes some six years to do. There is nothing magical about yesterday. It was not an occasion that should require this kind of debate today.

• (1305)

There is a qualifying period that has now been met by another 52 members of this House. With respect to the matters of how the pension is paid out and when it is paid out, those are all matters that are still under consideration and are not in any way prejudiced by what happened yesterday. Not one iota has anything changed by what happened yesterday.

That is something you do not seem to understand and you are certainly misunderstanding this. It does not help Canadians when you make this point about the vesting period.

I think it has to be understood quite clearly that six years to qualify for the plan is far different from when you pay it out and the ages you pay it out at. Those are all matters that are going to be dealt with by the government in living up to and completing its obligations under the red book commitments that we have agreed we would do, and do it in a timely fashion, do it long before anybody is going to retire from this House, long before you need to worry about any payouts.

There are more substantive concerns at this point in terms of payouts that relate to getting the deficit and the debt under control, getting the deficit down to 3 per cent of GDP. There is a program review that is going on. There is the social security review. We have gone through a defence review. We have gone through a foreign affairs review. We are reviewing everything. We are reviewing the size and shape of government, the roles and responsibilities that government performs. It is a very major undertaking, so this government does have a lot on its platter.

Notwithstanding that, the government is quite cognizant of the concern of the hon. member for Beaver River that we deal with this at an early stage, and we are dealing with it at an early stage.

This year the sitting of this House has almost a month to go and it is certainly my hope that in that period of time I will be able to rise in the House and advise as to the implementation for the red book commitments, specifically dealing with those items of double dipping and minimum age which we are committed to reforming.