

Supply

Consider this for a moment. Someone from a political party goes to a school superintendent, a school principal, a lawyer, a doctor or a chartered accountant and says: "Why don't you consider serving in public life for five, ten or fifteen years?" The person says: "Yes, I would be interested. I know there is a risk in politics. What have you got to offer me?" He is told: "Oh, nothing. Absolutely nothing". Then the person says: "You know, I do have a career. If I leave this place for 5, 10 or 15 years I will have no career to return to. Would you consider that?" "Oh, no. There is nothing there." "I also have a pension plan. I have a family. I am 45 years of age. I have been in the pension plan for 15 or 20 years. If I leave this place and come back 10 or 15 years from now I will have no pension plan. Would you consider that?" "Oh, no."

• (1520)

The person from the political party says: "If you come into public life you take the risk completely. Not only will you have nothing to return to and nothing to soften the landing when you return to public life, but you will have to win at least two or three party nominations and you will have to win general elections".

In other words this possible candidate for public office is being offered nothing by the employer. "I am supposed to take all the risk, give up my career, give up my pension plan, give up my family so that I can serve in public life." The person from the political party says: "Yes, that is pretty well it".

I would think that in most cases the person being pursued as a candidate would say: "Well, public life is great, but it is simply too much for me. I cannot afford it". The fact of the matter is that even with the pensions we have now, most Canadians do not consider public life. Most of them are in mid-life and they simply cannot afford to leave their private careers. The risk is too great even if they are eligible for a pension plan six years after entering public life.

I want to ask the previous speaker if he has considered that.

Mr. Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member has made some very valid points. The important point is, and I think he would agree, that people entering any career should have reasonable knowledge, reasonable expectation of what the compensation should be and it should not be effective retroactively to their detriment.

A final comment. I failed to raise this in my comments, but I do agree very much with the member with regard to his comment on the family. All members of Parliament make a very, very significant sacrifice in being away from their families four or five days a week, nine months of the year. That is the important contribution they make so that they can serve and make sure we live in what the Prime Minister says often in this House, the best country in the world.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I wonder if you could indicate to the Chair if in fact the practice of splitting the time is still ongoing.

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I will be speaking for 10 minutes if the Chair allows.

It gives me great pleasure to speak here today on the MP pension plan. Before I begin I would like to make a remark.

For reasons that elude us on this side, I cannot in my wildest dreams imagine that when we are speaking here how when the simple information and constructive solutions we are putting forth cross the line in this House it gets so distorted so that the responses from the other side come back being unintelligible.

In any event, we in this party are not saying that we do not want pensions. All we are saying is that we would like to bring them into line with the rest of the public. Of all the things the public finds distasteful and unfair about this government, this House and these members, it has to be the gold-plated MP pension plan we have.

In fact, the recent commission that was sent to study MP pension plans, when comparing them to other countries said that our plans were the least stringent in terms of commencement and one of the highest in terms of allowance.

Let us take a look at some other first world countries and make some comparisons between our pension plans and theirs. In France and the United Kingdom the minimum age of service is 55 years, not six years like we have. Australia, 12 years of service or age 60. The United States of America age 62. The maximum allowance in our country is 75 per cent of our terminal salary which is just near the top of all the countries I have discussed. We have about the best that one can possibly imagine.

• (1525)

How lucrative is this plan in real terms? Let us look at the last election. An MP serving eight years who left office at the age of 37 will receive \$28,350 a year initially and \$87,000 a year at age 60 for a total buyout of \$2.7 million.

An MP serving 13 years who retired at age 50 will receive \$39,700 a year initially for a total buyout of \$1.9 million. His initial payments will increase with the indexing. Therefore the last payment will be \$64,692 a year. Not bad. Nowhere will members find that in the private sector. Nowhere in the private sector does such a lucrative plan exist. In fact in the last election 73 eligible defeated MPs will collectively receive over \$100 million in buyouts at the expense of the Canadian taxpayer.

Miss Grey: Who's paying the bill?

Mrs. Brown (Calgary Southeast): Shame.