

Supply

As has been stated time and time again in today's debate nobody is retiring between now and the end of this Parliament. Indeed, there are a lot of things on the government plate that relate to reforms in many areas that relate to the whole budget process. Those matters have a great deal more urgency than this matter.

Notwithstanding that, I understand how Canadians feel about the pensions and the need for reform. We have said that within just a little over one year of having taken office we will bring in a reform of MP pensions that is based on the red book commitments.

The red book commitments are to end double dipping. Those members of Parliament who cease to be members of Parliament would not be able to collect both their pension and another full time salary in government service. Whether they were employed in the government service or receive a governor in council appointment, they would not be able to be in full time occupation receiving a full time salary with the crown at the same time as collecting the pension.

● (1255)

That was amply demonstrated today. The bill is not yet before the House and of course it is not yet in effect. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister announced today that the designate for Governor General is a former member of this House and a member of the other house. He will be forgoing his pension while receiving the salary for being the Governor General of Canada. It is a voluntary compliance and the Governor General designate should be commended very much.

Once the law is brought into effect it will prevent those who do retire from this House or the other place from being able to pick up a salary as well as their pension scheme. That is certainly one of the very clear red book commitments. I again say that the government is committed to bringing in legislation and bringing it in early to end double dipping.

With respect to minimum age, again the red book talked about the concern that some members retire from this House at a very early age and collect a full pension. Some members collect it in their 40s, far earlier than the normal retirement age of Canadians. They collect it as an amount of money that would be supplementary to other remuneration they might receive in their new pursuits. It becomes part of a larger income that they then enjoy.

Canadians generally do not enjoy that kind of pension arrangement. A great many people have expressed their opposition and concern about it to me. This government again is clearly committed to dealing with a minimum age with respect to the pension payout for former members of this House. It is a red book commitment and something we will be dealing with very

shortly. I reiterate there will be a statement before this House before the end of the year.

There is another thing which was not in the red book but has been added to this consideration. It responds to something the third party members raised earlier in the term. It is with respect to wanting to opt out of or not be included in the pension arrangements, whatever they may be. They want to have the opportunity not to participate.

Although that has not been an option up until now, the Prime Minister clearly stated before this House that members of Parliament would be given that option. Members of Parliament will have the opportunity to opt in to the pension plan in a timely fashion. If as the hon. member for Beaver River and her colleagues have been saying for some time that they do not want to do so, then they are free to not opt in to the plan. Members of Parliament can make their own decisions individually as to whether or not they want to participate in the plan.

A lot of members of Parliament give up some of their best earning years to serve the public. The pension plan for them is some further protection. It is one I know that will be given serious consideration by each and every member of Parliament.

I am sure even members of the third party will give it individual consideration. After all, they seem to be weakening in their resolve with respect to reducing their own salary. They are beginning to understand that they need that kind of money because of the hours they put in serving their constituents. They have to maintain residences both here and in their constituencies and they understand the cost of living and having to do that. They are weakening in their resolve with respect to this matter.

I suspect we might see some change of heart when it comes right down to having to make that momentous decision of whether you opt in to the plan and participate or whether you are completely out and completely unprotected.

● (1300)

I would not say completely unprotected because there are some colleagues of the hon. member for Beaver River who are in that double dipping category who have had previous experience in other houses and legislatures who collect money in addition to the money they gain from this House.

They know what double dipping is over there. I think they understand how difficult it is to give up remuneration. They will also find that they will have to give very serious consideration for their own protection, the protection of their families in the future with respect to the matter of pensions. Opting in becomes another feature.

There have been some suggestions and there are suggestions in this motion today, although I agree with my colleague, the hon. member for Bellechasse, that it is kind of vague. It is ambiguous and awkward in terms of its wording and it is