

Oral Questions

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the test of the courage of these remarks is not whether they make sense in this House but whether they will make sense in the constituencies.

The Canada pension plan, according to the government's own report, will be wiped out in 20 years unless there are significant increases in contributions. While Canadians' pensions are being put at risk the financial security of senior ministers and MPs is assured by this pension plan—business as usual at the MP pension trough.

How can the minister stand here today knowing that many ordinary Canadians are in danger of getting no Canada pension at all and still defend pension provisions for senior ministers like the Deputy Prime Minister who will be collecting millions in retirement?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I think was pointed out in the consultant's report that was tabled last year at the Lapointe commission, when it comes to compensation levels overall, and it must be looked at in this context, members of Parliament are lower than the equivalent in the private sector.

• (1425)

This particular reduction in MP pensions will make them even further down the scale in terms of that comparison. On top of that, members of Parliament contribute twice as much to the pension plan in many cases as private sector plans.

The hon. member still has his RRSPs and his clothing allowance, all of which he can—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, to date at least 48 of the 52 Reform MPs in this House have confirmed they will opt out of the MP pension plan.

If the minister cannot tell the House which ministers will be opting out can he at least give us an idea of the number of members of the Liberal caucus who will be opting out of this pension plan?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a personal choice and one that members will have an opportunity to make over a 60-day period once the bill has passed through Parliament.

I want to reiterate that there is a reduction in this plan. There is no retroactivity to the plan but I noticed that the head of the National Citizen's Coalition does not think that is a good idea. It is fair that members should continue to earn what they have earned up to the point where the pension bill is passed.

Overall, every member of this House, cabinet or non-cabinet, faces a reduction in the pension benefit, an overall reduction in the compensation package. I think that is showing the leadership that we need going into this budget today.

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[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jean-Marc Jacob (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence.

According to a study done for the Department of National Defence, francophones are grossly underrepresented among senior officers in the armed forces. The study shows that French-speaking officers are concentrated in nursing and chaplain services.

How can the minister explain that, in the top military ranks, francophones account for only one out of nine lieutenant-generals and three out of 31 major-generals, when his government has closed the only French-language military college in Canada?

Hon. David M. Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I must point out that the Canadian Forces better reflect the Canadian reality of two official languages.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, the armed forces is probably the one institution in this country that reflects the duality of Canada's linguistic constitutional reality more than anything else. Thirty per cent of the armed forces personnel are francophones, about 25 per cent at the officer level. There is room for improvement and that is why when the postings and promotions for general officer level are made public shortly we will see francophones in very significant positions within the hierarchy of the armed forces.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Marc Jacob (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I think that the minister has just confirmed that francophones are overrepresented in the junior ranks and underrepresented in the senior ranks.

How can the minister of defence justify such underrepresentation of francophones in the Canadian Forces, where there are almost no French-speaking officers in personnel selection, security and intelligence?

[*English*]

Hon. David M. Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member really should take a stroll over to national defence headquarters one day. I think he will be amazed at the degree of bilingual discussion and personnel there. Twenty-five per cent of all the senior officers in the armed forces are francophone.