

*Private Members' Business*

The way the polls look right now, I will have to win another election to contemplate a pension plan in Parliament and I would not want to bet on that for a number of reasons. I do not make that statement in any sense of distress or pessimism; I just state it as a fact of life. It obviates the contingency of the pension plan. The pension plan of this House is generous if we live long enough to get it.

I have been a proponent for a long time in our own self-interest in generating respect for this House and those who serve here of the view that a comprehensive, independent professional view of all aspects of the compensation program is now due. It should start with an examination of the qualifications that Canadians want, expect and need from their parliamentarians; a comparison with the professions that are represented here; an analysis of the careers forestalled, of the opportunities passed, of the businesses that did not prosper in absentee ownership.

Again I do not say that in any sense of complaining, but I think it is a fair and objective foundation on which to start any analysis of compensation. It should then be followed by a study of salary provisions based, as I say, on the qualifications that Canadians feel should be in this Chamber and on the legitimate career costs involved herein.

It should involve an examination of expense provisions, an examination of the fact that in terms of charitable donations the member of Parliament is the first target in almost every campaign. I speak for everyone in this House that a large part of the so-called tax-free allowance goes in direct donations to charitable causes in our ridings.

In the area of legitimate expenses, I am not sure that Canadians appreciate fully and in detail what I consider to be the inadequacy of expense provisions for the contingencies of two homes: one in the constituency and one in Ottawa. Fortunately for me and my wife our children are all gone. There are just the two of us so we travel here every week. We travel home every weekend. We keep two homes. It is expensive. Again, I am not complaining. If I get to stay here long enough to get a good full pension, perhaps it would be compensatory and

the arithmetic would all work out. I would say on the surface of it that the expenses for members of Parliament and what is expected of them is inadequate to the requirements of the job.

On balance I would say today I would be very surprised if a professional assessment of all aspects of our compensation program would not reveal that on balance salaries, expenses, and pensions, it is perhaps not an unreasonable situation. I say that again the likelihood of me getting a pension at that stage is a big gamble.

I hope it would be possible to conduct such a comprehensive study before the next election. That is probably unlikely in the circumstances, but it is certainly something I know that the minister has been examining.

The President of the Treasury Board has conveyed to me on previous occasions that one of the big problems here is to find the terms of reference and the methodology to conduct such a study because it does involve intensely personal feelings of all members of Parliament and longstanding inherent vested interests by members who came here knowing what they were getting into and deserving what they receive. You cannot change the pension plans in the middle of the game, in the middle of the career, anymore than you can change the rules of any other compensation gain.

If it could be started at the beginning of a term, if we could run an election knowing in advance what the new pension provisions, new salary provisions and expense provisions would be, then everybody from that point forward would be in a position to make the choice whether to run or not to run and there would be no cause for complaint. The vested interests in existing pension plans I would submit should be preserved.

This is a subject that has already been seized by the President of the Treasury Board, the cabinet, the government, again without revealing any caucus confidentiality. I can tell you that it has been widely discussed. It is a subject whose time has come for all of the reasons I have stated. I would hope that the plans of the President of the Treasury Board will reveal themselves in the fullness of time. I think they will take us in the direction that we all feel we should go in this respect.