

Supply

Ms. Clancy: Madam Speaker, there is a long time theory about women and their inability with mathematics. I can assure the hon. member that mathematically I am challenged.

I neither heard the speech of the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell—

Miss Grey: I am too, but I can figure out 6:1.

Ms. Clancy: I am sure the hon. member for Beaver River probably can do that. As a teacher she is trained to do it. As the hon. member so kindly put it I am trained in rhetorical eloquence. I will keep to my job.

I did not hear the speech of the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. I did hear the comments of the hon. member for Kootenay West—Revelstoke. As I made very clear, I was making a statement about the contribution as a member of Parliament of the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell of his years both provincially and federally and the fact that he deserved to be heard without his motives being questioned, pure and simple.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I wish to inform the House that pursuant to Standing Order 33(2) because of the ministerial statement, Government Orders will be extended by seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse, BQ): Madam Speaker, the motion before the House today reads as follows:

That this House urge the government to replace the current Members of Parliament Retirement Allowance plan with a pension plan that reflects the current norms for private sector pensions, with a maximum contribution in accordance with the Income Tax Act.

Its wording is extremely vague, when it refers to current norms for private sector pensions. Which private sector pensions? Are we talking about the pension plan for executives at General Motors or Chrysler Canada, or about the pension plans of employees of small businesses in East Montreal? The standards are not at all the same. The wording of the motion is definitely unsatisfactory, and if the wording is unsatisfactory, we can assume that the substance is as well and that the motion leaves much to be desired, as it will in the course of this debate, especially in terms of what is said by the motion's sponsors.

• (1240)

We in the Official Opposition feel that the pension plan for members of Parliament cannot be dissociated from the issue of members' salaries or the entire budget envelope that is allocated to members.

If members were paid \$200,000 annually, as they are in the United States, it would be obvious that a pension plan if any, should be very modest in scale. However, when a member's salary is quite low, as may be the case today, it makes sense to have a more substantial pension plan. The two go together. We

cannot separate these issues like the compartments they have in submarines to keep them from sinking.

I think it is just petty politics to take an issue that is already controversial and say: "Look at those people in the House of Commons. They are overpaid, they have too many benefits and privileges, they have a shoe shine service, they have people to cut their hair—" and other people to split hairs. I think we have to take a far more comprehensive view, and that is the approach we support.

We can afford to be very detached about this issue, Madam Speaker, especially considering the role of the Official Opposition in this House and its life expectancy, in the light of its political views. So we have a certain perspective that others may not have, in the circumstances. Of course, members should be treated in a way that is commensurate with their responsibilities. To claim, which is petty politics in my book, that members of Parliament are overpaid and make such a pronouncement out of the blue, based on nothing, further erodes the role of MPs in our society.

There was no shortage of occasions in the past for demeaning the role of parliamentarians, a role which is often not obvious. Very few care about the number of hours MPs dedicate to their work, seven days a week. You know, Madam Speaker, 75, 80 and 90-hour weeks are not uncommon for MPs, but who is counting? So, the entire system, both the pay plan and retirement plan, should be reviewed.

We must also be able to attract quality candidates for the position of member of Parliament. My colleague from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell referred to the 1830, 1832 legislation which was in fact designed to allow any citizen, from the richest to the ones from the humblest origins, to have a chance of becoming a parliamentarian. It is not with this kind of abrupt rollback of benefits that we are going to be able to set the course and stay on course, one which is increasingly difficult to maintain.

One has to realize that, normally, MPs are elected to the House of Commons at the peak, so to speak, of their working life, when they are the most productive, building a career, whatever their line of work is. So, at the end of their mandate or mandates in the House, MPs very often find themselves in a vulnerable situation, especially since, as we know, the turnover rate among members of the House of Commons of Canada is one of the highest in Western Parliaments.

Unlike in the United States, where members of Congress serve some 20 years on average, Canadian members of Parliament serve between five and seven years on average, which is an extremely short time. We know what happens to members after they retire or fail to get re-elected, how difficult it is for them to find new jobs, for all kinds of reasons I will not get into at this time. But this is a reality members from all political parties must face. That is why we must make it a little easier for members