

Private Members' Business

There has to be a new way of doing things. The electorate is tired of closed door, behind the scenes, backroom dealing, making sure that our wallets are thick and our bellies are full while the rest of the country is asking for the justice that we are supposed to be providing. We as members of Parliament are supposed to be providing the justice.

I know we contribute generously to this pension plan. We make an 11 per cent contribution from our salary. Not many people know that. What is the contentious issue here? I ask my colleagues: Why are you opposed to an independent, non-partisan commission to review MPs' pensions and salaries? Why?

I know my daughter's principal earns much more than I do. Not many people know that. Would an independent commission not be able to demonstrate that? I feel embarrassed in saying I am hard done by; he is making more than I do. An independent commission would probably say it with a little more credibility than my saying it myself. What is the problem?

I urge support of this motion because it is not just a matter of money. It is a matter of confidence in the political system and, boy, do we need something to re-energize confidence in the political system.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): I am afraid I was a little too quick off the mark. I was anxious to give all sides a chance to express their views, and normally, I should have looked toward the government side. If the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle is willing to co-operate with the Chair, I will recognize the spokespersons on the government side, the Liberal side and then get back to him afterwards.

[English]

Mr. J. W. Bud Bird (Fredericton—York—Sunbury): Mr. Speaker, I will endeavour to be brief.

I would like to point out that this subject is not new. I do not believe this subject was first brought to the House for debate by the Leader of the NDP. I can recall participating in discussions previously.

One that comes to mind is the debate on March 12 of this year with respect to Bill C-263 when I spoke and recommended a comprehensive, in-depth, professional,

independent analysis of all aspects of compensation programs for members of Parliament. It is a recommendation that I have, long previous to that, conveyed to my colleague, the President of the Treasury Board.

Without breaking any caucus confidences, it is safe for me to say as well that it is a recommendation to which he has replied on several occasions with interest and with an expression of intent in this House to have such an examination of not only pension plans but hopefully an examination of all aspects of members' compensation provisions.

• (1810)

As other speakers have said, there is inherent and growing scepticism and cynicism of the political process in Canada, of politicians, of Parliament and of parliamentarians. There is no question that the perception of a pension plan that has grown too generous over the years fuels and feeds that cynicism.

As we reinforce the respect and confidence of Canadians in this Parliament and in the parliamentarians who serve here, it is important that we be prepared to re-examine and review not just the pension plan but, as I say, all aspects of compensation to try to correct what I perceive to be a patchwork of compensation provisions over the years: changes to salary conditions on the one hand at one time; then when it is timely, changes to the expense provisions at another time; and then when it seems that it is timely again, changes to the pension plan. There is no cohesive, comprehensive overview or design as far as I can tell to the compensation program that does exist here.

As other speakers have said—I think it is true of almost every member who sits in this House—the last thing we thought about when we considered coming to Ottawa to serve in this Parliament was what the salary would be, whether the expenses would be adequate or what the pension plan would be.

I am not complaining. I am proud to be here and privileged to serve. I have been proud to sit in the provincial legislature of New Brunswick, in the city council chambers of Fredericton and in the mayor's office for a total of about 15 years. I do not have a pension from any one of those experiences. Nor do I complain about it. Nor did I expect one.