

Government Orders

There is no member in the House who has not already felt the burdens of this office. It has been three brief months since our election and less than a month since the opening of the 35th Parliament. I ask the members present to consider the amount of time spent in Ottawa, the time spent in transit and the time spent in our ridings. Many members of the House have young children and spouses they dearly miss. Some members have left behind successful businesses to devote their energies to public service.

These are great sacrifices but sacrifices we chose to make of our own free will. Despite the enormous burdens of this office there must be a limit to the compensation for this job.

To return to my earlier point, we are here to represent the values of our constituents. There is a rage in the land about the current pension system. It violates the sense of equity of people as there is nothing to compare it with in the private sector. People are angry that after voicing their protests they have not been heard. It is unfair, they say, that politicians can write their own cheques and pay them with taxpayers' money.

During the election the Liberal Party presented its platform in a document some of us may be familiar with entitled "Creating Opportunity" or the red book. More recently in the speech from the throne the government reaffirmed its support for the independent review currently under way.

• (1315)

It is important that we remove the public irritants that have undermined politicians in the public eye. This Parliament must signal the end to double dipping. We cannot have people receiving both pay and pensions from the federal government. The taxpayer is willing to pay but the taxpayer is not willing to pay twice.

The age at which pensions are received must be reviewed. No one in the private sector receives full pensions immediately after vacating a position. The question put to us during the election and now before the members of the House is why should we.

What is the appropriate age? I do not have all the answers but if we are to represent and reflect the realities of our constituents, should we not be governed by the same rules of economy as them? Should we receive full pensions after retirement without an age restriction? I think October 25 told us no.

The size of pension is another component. Our pensions must be based on value qualified by reasoned assessment, not greed. The review under way must look at our duties and skills and other factors also should be assessed objectively. From this we should arrive at a figure more in tune with the feeling of Canadians.

The government House leader has now placed before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs a number of items to be reviewed. I believe this to be a great step forward.

Among some of the items to be discussed are procedures regarding members' statements, special debates, the taking of division by electronic means, the conduct of private members' business especially with regard to private bills and Senate public bills, any anomalies or technical inconsistencies in the standing orders, the reform of Question Period, measures to achieve more direct participation by citizens including citizen initiatives, the right of constituents to recall their MP, binding referenda, free votes in the House of Commons, debates on petitions and fixed election dates.

I applaud the government House leader on this initiative. I look forward to participating in the debate and review of these proposals.

We have seen recently that private members can make valuable contributions to the presentation of different ideas before the House, for example the great acceptance from members from all sides and the success of the debates on Canada's peacekeeping role and cruise missile testing.

These debates raised the level of decorum and intellectual exchange of ideas. This type of reasoned debate is what makes this House such a great institution. It is unfortunate that these exchanges do not receive the level of public interest as the often rowdy and point scoring mentality we have seen in some question periods.

In the remainder of my allotted time I wish to address one final issue. The lobbying industry has expanded rapidly over the past years. The integrity of government is questioned when there is a perception that the public agenda is set by lobbyists who have excessive resources to exercise their influence away from public view.

I believe there is only one collective body we must listen to and that is the Canadian people. In order to ensure that the voices of the silent majority are heard over the voices of the few we must strongly address the issues of conflict of interest, influence peddling and selling access. There must be openness and consultation with all Canadians, not just with the lobbyists arriving at decisions. It is this point I applaud the actions of the Minister of Finance in his pre-budget consultations. These consultations allowed the minister to hear advice from bankers, economists and social agency advocates. What is more important is that we were able to hear what was said in the open, in full public view, not just whispers behind closed doors.

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In conclusion, I feel the points raised here today are a starting point and not in any way a cure all for the changes required in the operation of the House. I want to go back for a moment and restate that we must represent not only the people of our ridings