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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 9, 1995

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 9, 1995

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages and pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), the government's response to 42 petitions.

* * *

PETITIONS

HEALTH

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a number of petitions representing all provinces and territories expressing concern that breast cancer has not been taken on as a national issue and a national priority, given that 5,400 Canadian women will die this year from that disease and about 17,000 Canadian women will be diagnosed.

The petitioners have asked that Parliament establish a toll free information and support line. They urge the government to begin consultations to establish parameters for a national registry of drugs and medical devices and various forms of biotechnology.

VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these petitioners, while applauding the initiatives of government and the CRTC to reduce violence and abuse in all of its forms in the media, continue to emphasize the importance of accentuating the efforts because they believe it is not necessary in order to educate, to inform or to entertain. They also believe that very often these depictions of abuse and violence are contrary to their efforts to raise their children.

Once again they ask government and the CRTC to be extremely vigilant.

[Translation]

The petitioners are responsible people who believe in the need to reduce violence and abuse in the media.

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to introduce a petition to Parliament. The petitioners are calling on Parliament to enact legislation against serious personal injury crimes being committed by high risk offenders in support of my colleague's Bill C-240.

It is a pleasure for me because an incident inspired the petition. There are 27 pages directly related to this. I suggested to the people in that community that one of the most effective ways of getting this on to the table was through a petition. This shows a very responsible attitude on the part of the people from Elkford.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have several petitions to place before the House.

The first asks that Parliament not pass Bill C-41 with section 718.2 as presently written and in any event not include the undefined phrase sexual orientation, as the behaviour people engage in does not warrant special considerations in Canadian law.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, another petition asks that Parliament reduce government spending instead of increasing taxes and implement a taxpayer protection act to limit federal spending.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, another petition asks that Parliament delete section 718.2 of Bill C-41 or at the very least delete the words sexual orientation and permit a free vote in Parliament on Bill C-41.

(1010)

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the last petition asks Parliament to act immediately to extend

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protection to the unborn child by amending the Criminal Code to extend the same protection enjoyed by born human beings to unborn human beings.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present petitions today on behalf of people of Elk Island and surrounding constituencies.

The first petition contains approximately 335 names. The petitioners ask that Parliament not amend the human rights code, the Canadian Human Rights Act or the charter of rights and freedoms in any way which would tend to indicate societal approval of same sex relationship or of homosexuality, including amending the human rights code to include in the prohibited grounds of discrimination the undefined phrase sexual orientation.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition contains 55 names. The petitioners ask that Parliament ensure present provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada prohibiting assisted suicide be enforced vigorously and that Parliament make no changes in the law which would sanction or allow the aiding or abetting of suicide or active or passive euthanasia.

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am today presenting a petition on behalf of my constituents of Prince George—Peace River asking Parliament to recognize the Reform Party of Canada as the official opposition during the remainder of the 35th Parliament. They feel the rights and interests of all Canadian citizens cannot be adequately protected and defended by the Bloc Quebecois.

Mr. White (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present three more petitions if there is time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Following a consultation with the table officers I understand members should table all petitions they might wish to when they are recognized in the first instance and that they will not be recognized in the second instance.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT RETIRING ALLOWANCES ACT

The House resumed from May 8 consideration of the motion that Bill C-85, an act to amend the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act and to provide for the continuation of a certain provision, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Several members having stood, I move:

That the hon. member for Calgary West be now heard.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Call in the members.

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 211)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Althouse
Bridgman	Chatters
de Jong	Epp
Gouk	Grey (Beaver River)
Grubel	Hanrahan
Harper (Calgary West)	Harper (Simcoe Centre)
Hayes	Hermanson
Hill (Macleod)	Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Jennings	Johnston
Kerpan	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Mayfield	McClelland (Edmonton Southwest)
Meredith	Morrison
Penson	Ringma
Silve	Solberg
Solomon	White (Fraser Valley West)
Williams—31	

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NAYS

Members

Alcock
 Arseneault
 Assadourian
 Augustine
 Bakopanos
 Bellemare
 Bernier (Beauce)
 Blondin—Andrew
 Boudria
 Brushett
 Bélair
 Bélisle
 Campbell
 Cauchon
 Collins
 Cowling
 Culbert
 Deshaies
 Discepola
 Duceppe
 Dumas
 Easter
 English
 Fillion
 Flis
 Gauthier (Roberval)
 Godfrey
 Goodale
 Gray (Windsor West)
 Guarnieri
 Harb
 Ianno
 Jackson
 Jordan
 Lalonde
 Lavigne (Beauharnois—Salaberry)
 Loney
 MacLaren
 Maloney
 Marchi
 Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
 McCormick
 McTeague
 Mercier
 Milliken
 Murphy
 Nault
 Ouellet
 Parrish
 Parry
 Peters
 Pickard (Essex—Kent)
 Proud
 Regan
 Ringuette—Maltais
 Robillard
 Rock
 Scott (Fredericton—York—Sunbury)
 Simmons
 St. Denis
 Stewart (Northumberland)
 Terrana
 Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata)
 Ur
 Vanclief
 Volpe
 Whelan
 Zed—135

Anawak
 Assad
 Asselin
 Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)
 Bellehumeur
 Bergeron
 Bevilacqua
 Bonin
 Brown (Oakville—Milton)
 Bryden
 Bélanger
 Calder
 Catterall
 Clancy
 Copps
 Crawford
 Debién
 Dingwall
 Dromisky
 Duhamel
 Dupuy
 Eggleton
 Fewchuk
 Finestone
 Gagliano
 Gerrard
 Godin
 Graham
 Grose
 Guimond
 Hopkins
 Irwin
 Jacob
 Knutson
 Lastewka
 Lefebvre
 Loubier
 Malhi
 Manley
 Marleau
 Massé
 McLellan (Edmonton Northwest)
 McWhinney
 Mifflin
 Mitchell
 Murray
 Nunez
 Paradis
 Paré
 Peric
 Picard (Drummond)
 Pillitteri
 Reed
 Rideout
 Robichaud
 Rocheleau
 Rompkey
 Serré
 St—Laurent
 Steckle
 Szabo
 Thalheimer
 Tremblay (Rosemont)
 Valeri
 Venne
 Walker
 Young

PAIRED—MEMBERS

Members

Adams
 Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead)
 Caccia
 Chrétien (Frontenac)
 Dalphond—Guiral
 DeVillers
 Finlay
 Gagnon (Québec)
 Harvard
 Kraft Sloan
 Laurin
 Leblanc (Longueuil)
 MacDonald
 Marchand
 McKinnon
 Payne
 Speller

Baker
 Bouchard
 Caron
 Crête
 Daviault
 Dubé
 Gaffney
 Guay
 Hubbard
 Landry
 Lebel
 MacAulay
 Maheu
 McGuire
 O'Brien
 Sauvageau
 de Savoye

(1050)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I declare the motion negatived.

Mr. Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I was unavoidably detained. If I had been here I would have supported my colleague's motion.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate this morning.

What a difference a year makes. A little over a year ago Reform Party MPs said they were to take 15 per cent pay cuts. Then they pretended they wanted a reduction in MPs benefits. Now Reform Party MPs are asking for a pay raise. Would you believe it? Yes.

Some hon. members: Shame.

Mr. Boudria: Duplicity, thy name is Reform. That is what we have this morning. We have some MPs who should be recalled from the opposition side of the House.

Some hon. members: Recall.

Mr. Boudria: Most members of Parliament, if not all, are worth every cent of their pay cheques. In principle members are underpaid. The hon. member for Ottawa Centre put it very eloquently. The Prime Minister has said it before. We all agree it is true but that is not the point at the present time. In particular one political party in the House, is saying two things at once.

An hon. member: Which one?

Mr. Boudria: I have to admit it is the Reform Party.

By coincidence this is the same party that wanted to be frugal. When it came to Ottawa the first thing it asked for was larger office space. This is the same party that came to Ottawa and rejected a limousine and had one delivered by the back entrance.

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Shall I remind the House about the suitable venture of the leader of that party? Let us not talk about free contributions to people's RRSPs and other such ventures to enhance the salary package of those who were claiming that MPs were overpaid.

[*Translation*]

No, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that today's debate has nothing to do with MPs' salaries and benefits. The debate held today in this House is about honesty and openness. That is the real issue being debated in this House.

As we can see, some members of a political formation across the way are now getting it in the neck with regard to openness, honesty and sincerity in this House.

We have been debating this bill for several hours already.

[*English*]

Last week Reform Party MPs proposed meaningless amendments to the bill because they did not want it to go to committee. Why did they not want it to go to committee? Because they did not really want a pay decrease. They wanted a pay increase. Now we know why they did not want the bill to go to committee. They produced dilatory motions to stop the bill from going to committee.

This morning they tried their best again to stop the bill from going to committee. It will not happen again. I move:

That the question be now put.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am almost embarrassed to rise after the speech of the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

(1100)

His comments clearly indicate the kinds of problems we have. Reform Party members, I will remind members, took pay cuts over the last year. Other members of Parliament did not do that. Members of the Reform Party have committed to opt out of the MP pension plan. We anticipate that very few other members of Parliament will do that. There will be a few honourable people on the other side.

Perhaps one of the reasons Reform Party members are willing to do these things is that unlike the previous speaker and many others on the other side, Reform Party members had no trouble before they were here and will have no trouble after they are here finding other employment and making a decent living.

In any case, let me address the bill before us today, Bill C-85, an act to amend the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act, which is of course the MP pension. These amendments have been a long time in coming. For 18 months this government has

been promising changes. Finally we see the marginal changes that we see now.

The Reform Party has long called for changes to the overly generous pensions for MPs. Last November 22, I and many of my colleagues spoke in support of the motion of the hon. member for Beaver River, asking the government to replace the current members of Parliament retirement allowance with a plan reflecting the current norms for private sector pensions. This was rejected by both the Liberals and the separatists. Clearly, the Liberals' new proposal, the freedom 55 plan, does not accomplish this.

Before I speak to some of the specifics of this bill in the few minutes I have, I would like to make it clear that I personally would support a fair pension plan. My wife and I just purchased our first home and we are planning for our future, but I could not go home and look my wife or my constituents in the eye if I opted into a plan like the one offered in Bill C-85. Instead, I will put my own money into an RRSP, just like millions of other Canadians, and hopefully the government will not see fit to cut those again, as it has in the past.

Let us take a look at how this plan evolved from the plan introduced by Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent in 1952 to the monstrosity that is proposed today. According to Mr. St. Laurent, the original plan was "to be actuarially sound and a matter that would operate without any further charge on the public funds than the matching of contribution to be made by all members of Parliament".

Mr. St. Laurent indicated that the plan was never really intended at the time to be a pension per se. According to Mr. St. Laurent, it was to provide for members in their later years and to reward them for their public service.

At that time members contributed 6 per cent of what was an annual \$4,000 salary in return for an allowance equal to only 4.5 per cent of their indemnity if they retired after serving more than two Parliaments.

In 1963 the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act was amended to require members to contribute 6 per cent of their \$12,000 indemnity per annum. Rather than the flat percentage allowance, benefits were increased to 2.5 per cent of the member's annual indemnity up to a maximum of 75 per cent.

In 1965 additional provisions were made for a retirement allowance plan to allow senators to participate at a 3 per cent benefit accrual rate. Members will recall that at that time the term for senators was changed from life to age 75, so for the first time there was provision for retirement in the Senate.

It was really in 1981 that the changes to the benefit rate for MPs began to make this plan the obscene one we have today.

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This was when the benefit accrual rate was increased to 5 per cent and the generous inflation protection, the full inflation protection we now have, was implemented.

We can see from the report on the administration of the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act for 1983 that while it varied from year to year, the plan kept up the appearance of a one-to-one member-to-government contribution ratio from 1952 all the way to 1992. However, as we know, this was an illusion due to accounting practices, and it vanished in 1991-92 with the \$158 million top-up that was needed to the plan. This actuarial adjustment credit was needed to comply with legislative changes in Bill C-55 at the time requiring that adequate contributions be credited to meet the costs of pension obligations as they accrue.

(1105)

With this top up, the cost of the plan to taxpayers in the form of interest on the plan was also increased. Many people do not know that the government does in fact pay a generous rate of interest on this account, which is of course a cost to the taxpayers but which is not included in the total cost the government admits is involved in this plan.

With the top up in 1992, the unrecognized cost was \$3.4 million. It has gradually escalated to \$20.4 million in 1992-93 and then to \$23 million in 1993-94. It is also interesting to note that the rate at which the government pays interest into the MP pension plan, about 10 per cent, while not an unreasonable rate, is considerably higher than the 4 per cent it will pay when it returns contributions to members who choose to opt out or who do not meet the six-year vesting period.

Bill C-55 also caused the division of the members' pension plan into two parts to achieve compliance with changes to the Income Tax Act regarding the rules for registered pension plans. Now we have one portion that conforms with rules for registration and the other a "retirement compensation arrangement" that does not. This portion has much higher associated costs for the plan because of the refundable tax paid on it. Bill C-85 does not correct this.

Clearly the 1952 idea of providing politicians with a financial buffer to compensate them for periods of employment uncertainty is contrary to the reality our constituents now face. In the 1990s the concept of job security has all but disappeared, not just for Canadians in the broad workforce but even for Canadians in the most traditionally secure areas of the public sector.

Similarly unacceptable is the argument that MPs are underpaid and thus must get bigger retirement benefits. If the government feels MPs are underpaid, then the government should address that issue in a transparent manner, not through the backward route of an overly generous pension plan. The Reform

Party's position on this is clear: there should be no increase in MP salaries or office budgets until this country's budget is balanced.

As many private sector employers and some of the provincial legislatures have obviously realized, this type of plan, a defined benefit plan, is very costly to employers and the costs are difficult to accurately predict. There is no real relationship between how much a member contributes to the plan and the benefits a member receives.

Several provincial governments have recently taken drastic measures to scale back or to eliminate traditional pension benefits for politicians. Prince Edward Island rolled back pension benefits and then wound up the plan completely. Similarly, the Alberta government lowered the benefits for some of the recipients already collecting their pensions and then ended the plan for future MLAs.

It is interesting to note that the benefit accrual rate for Alberta MLAs prior to this roll back was 4 per cent, the rate now being proposed by the government. A study had found that the net value of one year's worth of pension accrual for an MLA was \$28,733 under that plan, compared to an equivalent \$9,034 in the private sector. For the federal plan we are presently under and under which many members of the House will still collect benefits, this number was \$42,741 a year.

The Manitoba legislature will implement reforms far in excess of those proposed by this government following the next election. Their pension plan arrangement will be replaced by an RRSP savings plan arrangement where taxpayers only have to match each member's contribution.

Even here in Ontario the provincial Liberals in their "son of red book" promised that if they are elected they will scrap the Ontario legislative pension plan and replace it with a group RRSP, exactly what the Reform Party proposes. We saw it in 1993 and we are seeing now in Ontario how different Liberals are when they are running for election as compared to when they are actually sitting in a Parliament.

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House to address Bill C-85, amendments to the MPs' pension plan. At the same time, I share a bit of shame in the House, having heard the atrocious remarks of the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

(1110)

I address the citizens of Canada. I hope, ladies and gentlemen of the public, you read *Hansard* of today to listen to what the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell had to say. In that you will hear a perversion of the facts, where that member deliberately went after the Reform Party to twist things around and indicate that what we were talking about here was

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augmentation of MPs' salaries rather than the pension plan, which is the thing we are directly addressing.

(1115)

One should not get emotional. This should be a place where one addresses logic and reason and brings facts out into the open. I find that really the remarks of that member typify what is wrong with the political process in Canada.

We are talking about a pension plan. We believe sincerely that the pension plan given to MPs is simply far too generous. We are speaking on behalf of the Canadian public in that regard. They say it is too generous, it is gold plated, we should cut it back. What the government is doing to respond to the public is simply not good enough, and that is our point.

In any event, the government has finally found the courage to tackle the problem, if insufficiently. I am saddened that the Liberal fat pack has refused to abandon its place at the public trough, which has resulted in what is really a very poor excuse for MP pension reform. There is insufficient reform in that bill.

In their 1991 book, *The Great Reckoning*, authors James Dale Davidson and Lord William Rees-Mogg wrote: "In the past, those societies that have treated persons differently, based upon what they are, rather than what they do, have faltered economically, and opportunity has been foreclosed for almost everyone". This quotation is appropriate to our debate here today, for with the MP pension plan we have a group of 295 men and women who are being treated differently simply because they are members of Parliament. How are they treated differently? Under this revised pension sham, MPs can collect a pension at the age of 55. In the private sector, most people have to wait until they are 65.

Even with lowering the annual accrual rate to 4 per cent, it means that this plan proposed by the government is twice as rich as that of the plan of the average Canadian worker. The MP plan is fully indexed against inflation, which is something that is virtually unheard of in the private sector.

Why does the Liberal government and its gang of present and future trough feeders feel that they have a right to be treated so much better than the average Canadian? While it may be true that this bill will fulfil the red book promise to reform the plan, it is a hollow and purely symbolic reform.

For example, the red book speaks of eliminating double dipping, the practice of collecting an MP pension while earning a government paycheque, usually for a patronage appointment. The government says that their proposal will eliminate double dipping. But if we look closely at the bill we see it simply defers the practice. Pension benefits continue to grow but are deferred for as long as the patronage position lasts.

Once again we see that these amendments are nothing but smoke and mirrors. The Canadian public is incensed at the current obscenely generous gold plated pension plan for MPs. It is equally outraged by these amendments which merely downgrade the gold plated plan to a silver plated one.

The fact that politicians have a bad reputation in Canada is largely due to this type of largesse. The government had the opportunity to address the massive public concern but refused to do so. It blew it. Like most other things the Liberal government has done, it reacted in a half hearted foot dragging way. It has proven once again that if the public wants real reform they had better send in some real Reformers.

As a real Reformer, I oppose this plan. However, I am not here to simply criticize. As a Reformer, I also have an alternative. Last year I asked my constituents about MP pension reform. I asked how long an MP should have to serve before getting a pension and at what age. We asked this question widely in my constituency.

Based on the responses I received I presented my constituents with a proposal to revamp the plan. Support for this proposal was ten to one in favour. Since that time I have been working on the plan on behalf of the people of Nanaimo—Cowichan and I am proud to say that the process is now complete. Yesterday the collective voice of my constituents was heard on this issue in the House when I introduced my private member's bill.

In comparing the government's farcical attempt at pension reform with that proposed by my constituents in Nanaimo—Cowichan we see many glaring discrepancies. For instance, under the Liberal plan taxpayers contribute \$3.50 for every dollar put in by the MP. Under the Nanaimo—Cowichan plan, taxpayers contribute nothing since they are already paying the MP's salary. Under the Liberal plan the pension fund is managed by the government, which has a worse fiscal record in management than Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. Under my constituents' proposal the pension fund will be administered by the private sector.

Under the Liberal plan, taxpayers are on the hook to eligible MPs for life. Under our plan MPs would receive a one time lump sum payment consisting of the money which they contributed plus the interest accumulated, which could be considerable.

Under the Liberal proposal the Liberal fat pack maintains its front row reservation at the public trough while newer MPs will be moved back to the second row, thus creating a two tiered pension plan. Under the Nanaimo—Cowichan plan all MPs are treated equally, as no one is entitled to belly up to the trough.

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In comparison with the so-called reform package put forward by the Liberal government there is only a one-time opportunity to opt out of the plan. That means that all future MPs will be forced to swill from the public trough, like it or not. Our proposal allows MPs to opt out of the plan at their discretion.

Liberals, like the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and her fat pack colleagues, say they have worked hard for their gold plated pensions and deserve what they have coming. I trust that the voters are wise enough to see through the smoke and mirrors to discover the hypocrisy and deceit behind the bill so that the Liberal fat packers get what is coming to them.

A true democracy must be based on quality citizens who come forward to serve their country out of a genuine desire to make our society a better place in which to live, not out of a desire to better one's own standard of living.

(1120)

I do not believe that politics should be a lifelong profession. It should be a momentary detour in one's career path. Unfortunately, the bill to which we are addressing ourselves today promotes the former and does nothing to restore Canadians' faith in their politicians. The citizens of Canada will judge the government of today on this bill.

I urge all members of the House to abandon this frivolous bill, although I know I am not going to get much reaction from across the way. I urge members to take a long, hard look at the proposal put forward on behalf of the constituents of Nanaimo—Cowichan in the bill I introduced yesterday.

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this bill today.

When I listened to the words the government whip had about the Reform Party and this pension plan, it makes me ashamed to be sitting in the House listening to that kind of poor rhetoric from the Liberal government. People in my riding of Fraser Valley West living in Langley, Aldergrove and Abbotsford must be shaking their heads today wondering what is happening in that place where they are supposed to be running this country.

What is happening in this place is a major disappointment. When I was elected I thought I could come to the House and try to change this government and get it off things like this fat pension plan. I thought just maybe we could try the concept of a triple-E Senate where senators would be elected, effective and would have equal representation. I thought we could deal with things like balancing the budget. I thought we could look at trying to reduce the number of frivolous grants that are given out year after year after year. I thought I could effect a change in patronage and ethics and get the government to change.

However, everything I have just mentioned is still happening is still supported by this government, even though it knows it is wrong. The Liberals sat on this side of the House in the last session of Parliament and belittled the Conservatives for it and here the Liberals are still at it.

The Liberals made a promise in a document called the Liberal red book. The Liberal red book actually came out during the election. It was not a long term plan they had. It was an election tool. The promise was to make some changes in this pension plan.

I will go through these changes. Essentially that was a facade. The government has told the Canadian people it is changing things but it is not doing it. They are weak changes. They are not real reforms to the pension plan. It is just a facade to make the folks out there think that something is really happening here. What is really happening out there is that people are overtaxed, frustrated and fed up. It is no wonder from listening to this kind of rhetoric on pension plans.

I could call these Liberals hypocritical for saying one thing and doing another, but I will not. I could call them trough slurping pension planners for making an absolutely abysmal excuse in trying to change a pension plan, but I will not. I could call them overindulging politicians for taking more than what they are worth, but I will not. What I will call these Liberals and this government are plain bad managers.

(1125)

Organizations in Canada that work in developing pension plans for their employees work within the Income Tax Act, as I have done in developing a pension plan for my employees. I give what is fair and reasonable, usually a dollar for a dollar. That is not what is happening here. Here government members are telling Canadians that they are going to reduce some benefits and save Canadians money while at the same time they milk the system for all it is worth. I think that is disgusting.

Let us think about what the Liberals are developing. They want to establish a future minimum age of 55. I checked the records and the majority of parliamentarians in the House are already 55 years old. What kind of smoke are they putting out here? They want to eliminate double dipping. That is nice. They are saying that when they give the patronage jobs to their friends, they will not give them the \$130,000 or \$180,000 plus a pension. They will hold the pension back.

What the government does not really say about this is that the pension members earn while they are MPs is still accumulating compound interest. When they get out of the patronage job, the double dipping job they are talking about, they get the MPs pension updated and indexed. They also get all the returns from the patronage position. Talk about being at the trough.

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The Liberals have talked about lowering the rate at which the benefits accrue. They currently accrue at 5 per cent. It is 5 per cent of \$64,000 for every year of service. They said: "We are going to do something here. We will bring it down to 4 per cent". What Liberal members are not saying is that 4 per cent is still double the rate of private sector pension plans, registered plans under the Income Tax Act. They also do not say that there are special provisions in the Income Tax Act to make way for that.

If we want to reform a pension plan or anything else in the House, we had better start a real reform, not the half baked idea of telling people one thing and doing another. Hypocrites.

They have lowered the rate at which individual members contribute to the plan from 11 per cent to 9 per cent. Very good. Members here will get a 2 per cent return, more cash in their hands. Congratulations. At the same time that is being done, what really happens is the contributions they are giving are really going to cost more to the taxpayer.

Reform Party members will opt out. Now what are they to do? In this pension plan they need all the contributions to make it viable. If we opt out of it they will be short of cash. They have taken 2 per cent of the cash coming in from members so who are they to hit? That is right folks, the Canadian taxpayer. That is who is to pay for it.

They have given us an opportunity to opt out. I am opting out of this plan. I have a family to look after as well and I do not have a job to go to at the end of my parliamentary career. That is just fine with me. That is just fine with my wife and family. We will go back to our riding and we will hold our heads a little higher.

For those people who forced at least some change, the Liberal government is saying: "We will make it very difficult for you when you opt out. You can never get back in". That is fine. I can live with that. "We will give you a 4 per cent return". Well, that is good too.

(1130)

They are not saying that there is absolutely no hope for anybody opting out of the plan to make a move to get back in. People are entitled to change their minds, but the government has to be very careful about what it is doing. This is not an act to punish. If people want to opt out, let them opt out. The government has a bad management style that will not be forgotten.

Finally let me say that the RRSP limits this year were supposed to be \$14,500 for the average Canadian citizen but the government kept it at \$13,500. Folks out there get a little less and folks across here get a little more. Is that a great example you set?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order. Before the hon. member for Fraser Valley West concludes his remarks in the

brief period of time left, I recognize there are strongly held views on the issue. It is vigorous debate, but I urge you and remind you that all interventions must be done through the Chair or the Speaker and not directly across the floor.

Mr. White (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, this is an emotional debate and deservedly so. Many people believe that the this pension plan is gold plated and is too large. I am convinced that some Liberal members probably feel the same way but cannot make change because their party says: "This is the way it is to be".

That is unfortunate but I sincerely hope the next time we go to the polls people remember what happened in the House this year on this issue and in this debate.

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in the last 24 hours I have learned much about why many politicians can talk so much and say so little. I have learned much about why many politicians say so little in failing in their attempt to be all things to all people.

I have also learned why many politicians prefer to say nothing at all, for if a politician says nothing there are no words that can be used against him or her to deflect from the substance of debate.

Yesterday in the House, instead of answering a reasonable question from my Reform colleague from Kootenay East, the President of the Treasury Board decided that the only response required was to refer to comments I made in the House on May 4.

Suddenly the debate is no longer about pensions but about the comments of a member of the House who raised the compensation issue. The issue was raised in my capacity as an individual and not as a matter of Reform Party policy and was so qualified. The issue was raised by other members of the House from other parties during the course of the debate. It was an issue that all speakers recognize was separate from the main issue of debate, that being the pension of parliamentarians.

This is all quite regrettable. It is important to at least reference the issue of our basic compensation since the studies dealing with our pensions do not address them in isolation but rather in the context of the other moneys and benefits we receive.

The issue of our compensation was raised by the President of the Treasury Board when he introduced legislation and stated that they could not wait for the day when we could deal with salary increases as suggested in the Sobeco, Ernst and Young study. They could not afford them then. While the total compensation approach outlined in the study is worthy of further discussion it is not functionally possible at this time, as reported in *Hansard* of May 4.

The position of the President of the Treasury Board is entirely consistent with Reform Party policy. The Liberals campaigned

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in 1993 on a general promise of changes to the MP pension plan without specifics being provided.

(1135)

We campaigned in 1993 with specifics provided on how we would change MP pension. As well we provided specifics on why the compensation of MPs must continue to be frozen. We said explicitly that until a balanced budget was achieved the salaries and expenses of government MPs and their offices would be frozen. Our position has not changed.

I was not the only member raising compensation issues in the House during the course of debate on pensions. The Liberal member for Wellington—Grey—Dufferin—Simcoe was quite explicit. In *Hansard* of May 4 he stated:

We cannot give ourselves a raise when we are telling everyone else to hold the line.

Referring to the Ernst Young report he stated:

However the report recommended an increase in pay for members of Parliament. I would be more than happy, if that happened, to see the pensions done away with and work within an RRSP program.

This was a Liberal member speaking and another Reform suggestion. Another Liberal copies Reform award might be due to the hon. member. He expressed sentiments not unlike those expressed by Reform members for many years. I agree with him as I agree with the President of the Treasury Board that the issue of MPs salaries is a matter to be addressed at some later time. In this respect we have all perhaps clouded the issue of the merits or demerits of the current pension plan proposals by raising salary issues at the same time.

To the extent that I have clouded issues by raising such issues I must express regret. However, I believe it regrettable the President of the Treasury Board would use my comments to avoid addressing issues of substance in the pension debate, one of the most important debates in the current Parliament.

To paraphrase a recent hit by the reunited "Eagles", a band with which the hon. Liberal House leader is certainly familiar if not the President of the Treasury Board, I respectfully ask the President of the Treasury Board to get over it, to quit playing his petty partisan politics, to get on with the debate of MP pensions, and to let us get on to the substance of the issues with respect to our pension plan.

The Liberals think they have us. They think we will not talk about it any more because of what I suggested in debate in the House over a week ago. We will not run away from the issue. We will address it.

For the Liberals who are present and listening to the debate, the Canadian public is totally fed up with self-serving MPs giving themselves a fat cat, gold plated, three tier trough regular

for the old folks, the old veterans; trough light for the class of 1988 and onward and the ones from 1993; and trough stout for cabinet ministers who can contribute anything they want down the road. A pension plan like that for life is ridiculous.

Why will the President of the Treasury Board not introduce some ideas about a matching contribution plan, a one for one? For every dollar wonderful deserving MPs put into a pension plan the government matches by a dollar. Why does the government not do that? It cannot do that because it has to be better. The Liberals think they are a better class of citizen now they are elected, that they deserve three and a half times, and that they deserved a six to one plan before that.

There is no question the President of the Treasury Board is touting a proposal on the basis of sophistry just like the Minister of Finance, using clever but misleading arguments to lead to a false and wrong conclusion. The Canadian public is fed up with the lack of courage the Liberal government is showing and the lack of integrity when it promised integrity in the red book. How does it show integrity for the Liberals to talk about a proposal of another member and call it a salary increase when all we are talking about is looking at the pension plan which is too generous.

The number one objective of my Reform colleagues in the House and I is to kill the Cadillac pension plan. The government is not interested in it. The Liberals think they deserve more. They think they desperately have to save Sheila, the Deputy Prime Minister, so that she could get if she were to leave next month \$2.7 million. They have to protect Mr. Boudria, the man who worked—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order. I am quite prepared to understand that in the enthusiasm of debate one member's name might slip but when another is used it becomes a little suspicious. I caution members to refer to one another by riding or by ministerial portfolio.

Mr. Silye: Mr. Speaker, as I said our objective is to kill the MP pension plan because it is too generous, too extravagant.

Mr. Hermanson: It is illegal.

Mr. Silye: It is illegal in the private sector as well. The Liberals want to protect \$2.7 million for the Deputy Prime Minister and \$2.2 million for the chief government whip. These are the millionaires, including the Minister for Human Resources Development. The minister of public works will get \$3 million; the minister of immigration, \$3 million; and the member for Broadview—Greenwood, \$1 million. He has a good proposal for tax reform but the government is more interested in its self-serving MP pension plan than it is in tax reform. It will not even give him the time of day.

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(1140)

We are against the pension plan for a simple reason. It raises a double standard. Why do we as MPs now deserve more and better than what is out there in the private sector? Would the President of the Treasury Board tell me that? If the Canadian public wants MPs to have a pension plan, why not one that is the same as the private sector dollar for dollar? Why can MPs contribute 9 per cent while in the private sector it is 5 per cent? Why not 5 per cent and 5 per cent? Why a full pension at age 55 when in the private sector 65 years of age qualifies and if the pension is taken before that age the person receives less?

It is just common sense and it will not apply to the House. The Liberals will not accept it. All I can say is that I do not understand the mentality of the 100-plus Liberal rookies who are here. Veteran politicians are laughing all the way to the bank because they received their six to one. It was backdated to 1988 to make sure the member for Beaver River had the option to opt out. We have the option to opt out. In 1997, if there is an election, the new Reformers who come here will not have the option to opt out. That is hypocritical. That is something the Canadian public will not forget. I am frustrated to no end. When these people were in opposition they indicated that the Conservative government lacked integrity and lacked morals.

I am really starting to wonder if the government is interested in the best interests of the Canadian public. It has an opportunity like the Reform Party to opt out of the Cadillac pension plan. The rookies have an opportunity to stuff it in the faces of the veterans and say: "No, you are not going to catch us". If they do not opt out, I am very confident the Canadian public will vote them out. I think that is what will happen.

In summary, these people were elected to restore integrity as promised in the red book. By trying to rush debate on the issue through the House without allowing time for proper debate and without allowing the hon. member for Calgary West to speak first today, they are trying to deny an opportunity to allow us to detail fully what they are trying to foist and hoist upon the Canadian taxpayer.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to address this bizarre piece of legislation, Bill C-85. I want to paint a bit of a picture for people.

If someone told an ordinary Canadian citizen that he had a great business proposition, that for every dollar put into an investment he would get back \$3.50, he would say that it was amazing and great. He would want to do it. Not only that. It would be guaranteed by the Government of Canada. We are not talking about 10 per cent, 8 per cent or 5 per cent on a Canada savings bond. We are talking about a 350 per cent return on investment.

The only problem is that it is not available to the average Canadian citizen. It is only available to members of Parliament. It is disgusting. It is the height of hypocrisy. My hon. friend from Macleod said: "They were not hypocrites but hypo-grits when they proposed this".

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Solberg: I thought it was a very good line. I give accolades to the member for Macleod.

Apart from the puns, Bill C-85 has a very serious side. That is what concerns me. Bill C-85 is way out of step on several counts. I want to talk about those for a moment and the faulty premise on which this bill is built.

(1145)

Two years ago when I was knocking on doors in my constituency, in Brooks, Taber and Medicine Hat—and Medicine Hat in particular because it is a retirement town—one of the topics which people talked about was that they were sick and tired of the MP pension plan.

They did not say: "We are sick of the aspect which says that taxpayers kick in \$6 and MPs kick in one". They said: "We are sick of the double standard". They did not say that they wanted 3.5 times instead of 6 times what MPs kick in. They said: "We expect a pension plan like anybody else's, where if the employee puts in a dollar maybe the employer will contribute a dollar, but nothing richer than that".

I took that to heart. Members of the Reform Party took it to heart. However, the government has completely ignored it. It has come up with another form of padding its members' pockets at the expense of taxpayers. It is crazy. This bill is completely out to lunch when it comes to respecting the wishes of the taxpayers. We are here to serve the taxpayers, not to serve ourselves.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands is sitting over there scrambling to defend his trip to the trough. He is completely out of step with what Canadians are saying.

Another thing that Canadians mentioned to us is the huge debt. The debt at that time was \$480 billion. It has now rocketed up to \$550 billion. Surely members have some sympathy for the long-suffering taxpayer when they are considering the remuneration which they give themselves. However, no empathy was shown when the government proposed Bill C-85. It is another trip to the trough. It is a minor improvement over what the previous government gave to its members, but it is so far out of step that it defies logic. It defies description.

Medicine Hat to a large extent is a retirement town. In many cases its people exist on pensions. They find this debate absolutely unbelievable. The government will be talking this fall when the finance ministers convene about how to change the CPP to make it actuarially sound. The OECD says that the

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retirement age will have to be pushed to age 79 to make it actuarially sound.

However, the government is proposing that we have pensions which are fully payable at age 55 with contributions from the taxpayer which are three and a half times what MPs have to put in. People find that absolutely unbelievable. I defy members across the way to come to my communities of Medicine Hat, Brooks, Taber, Bow Island, Tilley and all the other communities and justify this outrageous pension plan.

One subject which I wish to address is the whole idea of MPs' remuneration. It is well past the time when MPs should be allowed to set their own remuneration package. This bill does not deal with that. It completely ignores that. MPs and elected officials in other jurisdictions are about the only people in the country who are allowed to set their own wages and remuneration packages.

The president of General Motors or a teacher or a business person who owns a business cannot set his or her own wage. Business people are accountable to customers. They have to pay their suppliers. They can draw a wage based on all of that, but at the end of the day they have to depend on their customers and their employees before they can decide what kind of remuneration package they can have.

According to the government, MPs are above that. Bill C-85 makes no mention of it. It suggests that MPs should have a remuneration package which is based simply on the whims and caprices of the government. It has nothing to do with reality. It is an argument entirely in the abstract. The government has no perspective at all when it talks about the remuneration package or at least the member of Parliament pension plan. It is crazy.

(1150)

One of the things that MPs are supposed to do is to talk to their constituents on a regular basis so they can find out where their constituents stand on these types of issues. It is a fundamental responsibility of a member of Parliament. However, none of that has been done when it comes to Bill C-85.

Instead, the government has decided to eschew the opinions of the public. It has said it does not want to hear from the public on this. It does not want to find out what the public thinks. What it wants to do is set up its own pension plan that is far richer than anything that is available in the private sector. If Canadians do not like it, that is tough luck because that is what the government will do.

When we knock on doors people are so cynical about politicians they will not listen to the first word we say about serious issues. All they believe we are doing is padding our own nest. I cannot argue against that. How can we argue against what the public is saying when it is absolutely true?

It is a well established tradition in this place and the government has done nothing to improve on it despite all of its promises in the red book. It has failed to restore integrity which is important and critical so people will respect and ultimately have faith in their government. This is a necessary step so that people will willing bring forward ideas for the important debates that need to occur so that the government enjoys the faith of the people. It is a very important aspect that the government has, I guess, intentionally ignored. It has pushed ahead with Bill C-85 and is actually now trying to invoke its own form of closure by not allowing a free and full debate.

The Reform Party has all kinds of concerns with this legislation. I want to touch on a fairly technical but still important part of it. The government has really tried, in my judgment, to deceive people by saying it is going to cut the contribution level down from 11 per cent to 9 per cent.

However, as my hon. friend from Fraser Valley West pointed out, there will not be enough money coming in. Reform MPs are opting out. I want to make it very clear that Reform MPs are opting out of this heinous plan. However, because of that the government is going to end up having to draw on more taxpayer dollars to make this thing fly. That is crazy.

The government has failed to consult with the people. It is padding its own pockets, padding its own nest, looking after itself and refusing to go to the people on an issue that is very important to them. It is an issue of integrity.

Mr. Hermanson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is a rather important debate and I do not believe we have a quorum. I only see four Liberals in the House for this important debate. It is rather disappointing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Cariboo—Chilcotin.

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the roots of this Chamber stem back to its namesake in London, Britain's own House of Commons. Those words "House of Commons" refer to the purpose of this institution; to represent the commons or the commoners within government.

We carry on that tradition today by representing grassroots Canadians from all walks of life. Or do we? It is a question each of us should ask before engaging in this debate over MPs' pensions. Are we representing the same Canadians who elected us to this Chamber?

Two years ago Canadians clearly demanded change. After the 1993 election the once Progressive Conservatives were pushed to the backbenches of Canadian history and these Chambers greeted two new parties. The party that I am proud to be a member of, the Reform Party of Canada, promised to think, work and act differently. We started by putting our policies on paper. First in the blue book and then economizing by putting

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this on the blue sheet long before the Liberals came out with their own red ink book.

(1155)

We promised to truly fulfil our role as representatives of the people, going against our own party's official positions if necessary to represent our local electorate. In contrast, Canadians have seen how the Liberals handle MPs who strive to represent their own constituents. They are tossed from committees and bombarded with veiled threats from their leader. May I add, the Canadians I have spoken to have been appalled by these actions. They do not want to be ruled by Parliament. They want to be heard by Parliament.

Reform has also promised to fight for real change in such areas as government waste, deficits and debt and the MPs pensions. Over the past year I have stood in the House on three separate occasions demanding change in the MP pension plan. Or as I have come to call it, the MP pension scam. When one compares the private sector pension plans with the MPs pension scam as I have, it is obvious change is needed.

Under current tax laws, contributions to a pension plan cannot exceed 20 per cent of a salary, that is for the average Canadian. According to the accounting company KPMG Chartered Accountants, most private sector corporations spend the equivalent of between 13 per cent and 18 per cent of their payroll on pension plans. Some are far below these levels.

For example, one of Canada's largest telecommunications companies is at a mere 10 per cent of their payroll. Yet government after government has allowed MPs and Senators to skate around these rules, exempting themselves to a level equal to 63 per cent of the payroll equivalent. This means that if the plan was fully subsidized by MP pay cheques, over two-thirds of our income would go into supporting the MP pension plan. Even under the new proposals, pensions would be at 57 per cent of payroll, well over half. This kind of extravagance only leads to contempt among grassroots Canadians.

Many of my constituents have spoken out against this sort of waste. The language has not been positive. It has been downright unparliamentary. Let me take a moment to quote from a few letters and comments I have received.

One constituent writes: "The government has been asking we taxpayers to tighten our belt as we struggle to live on less as they take in more taxes. It is time for them to set the example in restraint. Don't just talk about it, do it". Is spending seven million tax dollars a year on the new pension scam restraint? Is it responsible spending in the eyes of average Canadians? Think about it.

Another quote: "I think I can speak for most Canadians. We are sick of government waste, especially government pensions and benefits. It is a total extravagance on the government's part. I am 29 years old, my husband is 33, we have three small children. My husband works 12 hours a day, six days a week. We are sick and tired of the amount of income tax he pays".

An hon. member recently spoke at length on how MPs work: "Twenty-four hours a day, sometimes seven days a week". Therefore, MPs deserve this kind of pension. How can we justify taking tax dollars for this sort of luxury pension when many of our fellow Canadians are barely getting by with no security for their future.

There are many more letters I could quote from. In one of my 1994 householders, over one in four respondents spontaneously singled out on their own the MP pension plan when asked where cuts could be made to put our country's financial house in order. That was one in four without prompting.

This plan has become a lightning rod for all that is wrong with government and drastic change is needed. Sadly, the change demanded is one thing the Liberals have left out of the bill.

(1200)

What surprises me most about this new plan is how little has changed between it and the old plan. I received a question and answer pamphlet from the President of the Treasury Board, as did every member of this House, and I was shocked at some of the responses to the questions asked. Let me quote some. "Will members still need six years of service to qualify for a pension?" The answer: "Yes. No changes are being made in this regard". "Will the maximum pension still be 75 per cent of a member's best years' sessional indemnity?" The answer: "Yes, but now it will take members of the House of Commons longer to earn their maximum pension". "Will the new pensionable age affect retired members?" Answer: "No." In all, it was lots of talk but not much walk.

There is one change, however, the one time opting out clause. By putting this clause in, members now have a choice: either accept an outrageous unacceptable pension or none at all. In my view, this is a blatantly political move designed to make the government look like it is acting when in reality not much has changed. In fact, after the next election every new MP will have to take the new and improved so-called MP pension scam whether they like it or not.

The Reform caucus, myself included, view these proposals as completely unacceptable, and if they remain as they are it is the intention of the Reform Party of Canada to opt out.

It is sad to see so few members on the government and Bloc sides honouring these same principles. This is not an issue of the pocketbook; this is an issue of the heart. This pension issue

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points to how we perceive Canada. Is this a country where we express our ideals of hope and prosperity, how our country will be now and for our children and grandchildren, or do we just grab as much for ourselves as we can while the opportunity is here?

None of us in the House of Commons came to Ottawa for the benefits or for the pay. We came to serve our fellow constituents and bring about the kinds of changes needed.

As long as we draw a paycheque from the Commons or travel on an MP's allowance, we are living off the backs of the taxpayers of Canada. Let me repeat that: we are living off the backs of the taxpayers of Canada.

Canadians are not saying that MPs do not deserve a salary or that we do not deserve a pension. All they ask is that the salaries we earn and the pensions we collect be in line with what is in the private sector, what they might reasonably expect for themselves. This is a call the Liberals have ignored, to their shame.

Mr. Leonard Hopkins (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to say a few words about the quality of people who come to this place and the quality of people they represent.

How can the public respect MPs when MPs do not respect each other? If there is anything that has come up in this debate in the House, it is the haranguing across this floor about MPs and their qualities, as if they are a bunch of petty thieves.

There have been a lot of good people come into this House. Let me tell members that those who are speaking today with great purity are not necessarily in that category.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Hopkins: The Reform Party remarks in the House are downgrading public life.

Mr. Hermanson: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I hope I did not hear what I thought I heard. I thought I heard the hon. member make some remark about thieves and then try to apply it to members on this side of the House who had spoken. If that is the case, I would ask that the member retract those comments. They are absolutely insane and untrue.

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I think the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster ought to be careful after some of the comments we have heard from some of his colleagues this morning about pigs to the trough and so on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order. I will take the time to review the blues, to look at the wording and the context of the wording. If necessary, I will come back to the House.

I have been listening and will continue to listen attentively to this debate, which is a very vigorous debate. There is a great deal of emotion and some strong views.

(1205)

Mr. Hopkins: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for that and I thank the parliamentary secretary also for his remarks. If the hon. member who raised the question had been listening as carefully as you had been, he would not have had any need to get up to his feet. What I said was that they were talking about MPs in this House as if they were petty thieves. I never applied it to anyone.

I am only repeating your own words. If you are ashamed of them—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order. Given the nature and the strong views of the debate, I continue to intervene for members on both sides of the House to please direct all comments through the Chair.

Mr. Hopkins: Mr. Speaker, you are absolutely correct.

The hon. member for Calgary Centre made reference to the chief government whip and called him by name, of course out of order, and also made reference to the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada and talked about the money they would be making. How do you know how much money they would be making on their pensions, Mr. Speaker? When it comes down to this, I will guarantee you that the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada are going to be in this House long after the member who uttered that statement is gone and forgotten, and they will still be serving Canada.

The hon. member was using projected figures, just like the citizens' coalition uses projected figures. It is using inflation rates, and it does not know what the inflation rates will be in the years to come. The same old story that we have heard for years is coming out here

Where is the decency in all these things? Where is the decency from across the way? You do not come to this place, Mr. Speaker, just to get a pension. You come to this place because you want to serve your country. This whole issue is being used as political opportunism.

I got a letter the other day asking me to tell these people in the Reform Party to get on with the major problems of the country instead of always downgrading the public life of this country. They do not know what they are here for.

Most members who come here are very sincere. Hon. members, as I said, do not go into politics to get a pension. If I wanted to get a pension I would have stayed out of politics. The profession I was in would have paid far more than I will get here. I came into this Parliament because I felt I had something to offer. I still think I have something to offer.

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If there is anything I can do to settle this big quarrel about downgrading public life in Canada, I think it is here that we should show the public that there is something more to politics in this country than hammering one another, being vindictive to one another. We should practise some decency on the floor of this House with each other. People come here to do something useful.

It reminds me of the biblical story about the two people who go into the temple to pray. One stands there as a sinner and he says "Forgive me, Lord, for the way I have sinned". Then over here you have the publican who was beating his chest and saying "Thank God I am not like one of those". That is the mentality and that is the attitude we are hearing from the Reform Party today, saying "Thank God we are not like one of those".

Mr. Hermanson: You have it the wrong way around. You do not even have your scriptures right.

Mr. Hopkins: I have here a good example of the decency. This shouting is part of the new conduct they brought to the House of Commons. They are sitting over there today screaming and shouting at me. Obviously some of these words are getting through to them. When they came to Parliament they were going to bring decency to this House of Commons.

I hope the microphones are sensitive enough to tell the Canadian people how these Reform Party members are shouting and screaming and disrupting the proceedings of the House. That is their new contribution to the decency of this House of Commons.

(1210)

The hon. member for North Vancouver wrote a letter to *The Hill Times* a while ago, saying "What planet has Hopkins been living on?" I know what planet I have been living on. I know where the hon. member for North Vancouver came from, and I also have a good idea of where he is going in the life hereafter.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Hopkins: I have them going again.

One of my constituents sent me a day's pay and I felt obligated to match that when I gave it to the Minister of Finance for Canada. I thanked my constituent for that, but the hon. member for North Vancouver wrote a letter saying "What planet has Hopkins been living on?" As I said, I know what planet I am living on, and I appreciate it very much.

He said that he has donated 10 per cent of his salary toward the deficit. Imagine that. Does he think this is something brand new? In come the Reformers and they are going to donate 10 per cent of their salary. I can say without any lack of confidence that I have given 10 per cent of my salary since day one to various organizations, to good organizations, for the good of people who are in need. But I am not the publican in the temple who goes out on the street corner to say "I did this, and thank God I am not

like one of those". I do it in my own quiet way and I do it in a dignified way.

I say to Reform members that if they came here to add some decency to Parliament, they might change their attitudes a bit and get away from this. They are not the only ones who ever thought of doing anything for mankind. My goodness, Mr. Speaker, I know that you do a lot for your constituents.

The quality of people who come into the House of Commons is very high. Those people are here to do something useful and they want to do something useful. However, when a debate such as this is held and the Reform members come into the House saying that they are going to set a new tone for Parliament, they are not; they are setting a worse tone for Parliament. Beyond that, they are giving the people of Canada no reason whatsoever to believe that there is decency in the House. They are giving the people of Canada no confidence that the Parliament of Canada is working as it should, on their behalf.

Let us get on with the real issues of the nation and let us practise a little decency on the floor of the House. Only by doing that will people realize that there is some decorum in this place. The Reform Party has brought anything but decorum to the House of Commons.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have a difficult act to follow.

One thought that occurred to me is that perhaps the hon. member should consult with the minister of Indian affairs, who has an inside track to a bishop. He often quotes letters from the bishop. Maybe the hon. member could get clarification on some of the scriptures.

It is with some remorse that I stand to debate this issue today. That is because I represent the point of view of ordinary Canadians who are fed up with the type of thing that has been happening with the MPs' pension plan for the last number of years. I regret this, because I have a lot of respect for members of the House. I believe that all of us, when we decided to run for election, did so with high motivation and because we wanted to serve our country.

I have never been involved politically before. I was an ordinary Canadian who dutifully voted, but I had never belonged to a political party and I had never participated in an election process. It was all new to me. One of the reasons I joined the Reform Party, and there were many of them, was because of the fact that it was promising integrity in government. It was promising integrity, openness, and accountability.

(1215)

That appealed to me. When I joined I sent a donation never contemplating I would ever run for this office; that came later. I was attracted to the party because it believes governments should live within their means just like all other businesses and all other Canadians. Reformers said back in 1988 in a brochure that they believe MPs should be representing their constituents,

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not to be told here how to vote but to represent and to reflect the wishes and aspirations of those who elected them.

I was also attracted because they indicated a member of Parliament should represent and promote the well-being of the country and the constituents, not his or her own well-being. When I came here and found the pension plan available to members of Parliament—

Mr. Hermanson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There were a large number of Reformers who listened to what the hon. member on the other side of the House had to say. Now when a Reformer is speaking we only see three Liberals in the House. There are only three members who will listen to this speech—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Before I take up the matter of quorum I want to remind colleagues that conventions are that reference to the absence of members from either side of the House is something we refrain from.

Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I see a quorum. The hon. member for Elk Island.

Mr. Epp: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your encouraging the people to hear my words because I do speak them sincerely and hope they fall on sympathetic and understanding ears.

When I came here I was very sad to see the MP pension plan, knowing also the public perception of it as being excessive. There were many different terms used to describe it. The words obscene and excessive are often used. Being a mathematician I did some work on the MP pension plan from a mathematical, actuarial point of view. It was with great regret.

I am a family man with a wife and children. I am getting old; not very old, I am still young and energetic in thought. I am approaching that age when I need to think seriously of my pension. My wife was always a full time mom and so we have always lived on my income. The pension plan I had where I worked before accrued at the rate of 2 per cent per year. In terms of a possible pension benefit that means when I reach the age of 65 my deferred pension from my previous institute will give me 54 per cent of my best years in that place, which means I will get a pension of approximately \$30,000 per year.

(1220)

So there is no question as to whether I am double dipping, I am not now receiving a pension. I will be receiving it as a deferred pension when I reach age 65. Those are the rules. Had I not come here I would have reached my full pensionable age at 61 and I would have had 70 per cent by then.

However, having left my other employment I no longer am able to accrue pension benefits there. I came here and realized immediately I could not with integrity face the electors who elected me and participate in this pension plan.

At the time of our election in the fall of 1993 when I went to do all of the book work and fill in all the forms that we had to do as new employees of the House, I asked if I could opt out of the pension plan. I was told by a very kind person I could not because it was controlled by legislation and until the law was changed I had no choice.

Therefore, against my wishes I was registered into the MPs pension plan. I was being forced to pay into the plan approximately \$590 per month. I do not object to paying \$590 per month as long as I receive a fair pension on retirement, but there is a real problem with that pension plan because not only do I put in \$590 a month but presumably the employers, in our case the taxpayers of Canada almost directly, are matching it.

What is wrong is this pension plan permits me as a member of Parliament to accrue pension benefits at a rate not available to other Canadians. The Income Tax Act does not permit the rate of accrual even if the person is willing to make those payments into a registered pension plan at that rate.

However, and this is critical, in the Income Tax Act self-employed persons have higher limits for RRSPs. If we as members of Parliament were able to get out of the MP pension plan and put our investment into an RRSP like other Canadians with the same rules and limits we would be able to provide for ourselves a pension which would surely be adequate.

I have observed most people who serve in the House do so at mid-age as opposed to an early age. There are some young members here and I commend them for their early entry into the parliamentary process. Most already have RRSPs or other pension plans started. They will not be dependent totally on their earnings from the House of Commons.

It seemed to me very unfortunate the pension plan here was inadequate because I would like to have finished my pensionable years either by staying at my other place of employment or by being able to do a comparable program here so that the two of them tied together would give me a reasonable pension and look after my needs as I enter those years of non-productive work, although for me hopefully that will be many years hence. That was not available. Hence we began to call strongly for the ability to opt out of the plan.

I want to address primarily and specifically that aspect of the plan. I do not know what words to use because I do not want to be unkind. I saw the proposal in Bill C-85 on the retirement allowances act for members of Parliament a one time provision which states that after it is brought into force all members will

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have 60 days in which to indicate their willingness to continue in the plan, which is simply a spin on allowing opting out.

(1225)

I thought this was particularly politically vindictive. There are people on this side the House elected by the electors who have as much respect for them as every Liberal elected to the House. I promise that. Those people are now being told: "You do not have the same rights and benefits as others. We will give you back your money and you will have to pay taxes on it". They are basically saying those of us who want to stand on principle will pay a very high price.

I am not backing down. I am doing this on a matter of principle. Frankly, my Reform colleagues and I are taking a tremendous economic hit on this. We are doing it on principle because it is right. We understand we will receive a little interest. Meanwhile members not opting out are telling the public their service here, as far as the pension portion is concerned, is worth two and half times as much or more.

When we calculate this we find if we were to make even reasonable assumptions on interest rates and inflation it would require an additional deposit of about \$2,500 per month per member in order to provide the kind of pension these people are asking for. Clearly it is a vindictive, very malicious attack on those who want to stand on principle. I object strongly.

The rules of the House should apply equally to everyone. The fault of the government is that it divides people by saying some are in this class, some are in that class and some are in another class. Consequently there is an increasing amount of rancour and bitterness which could be avoided if we were fair with each other.

I am sorry my time has expired. I would like to speak for another half hour given permission. Should I ask for unanimous consent?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. John Bryden (Hamilton—Wentworth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will keep my remarks short. I echo the concern expressed by my colleague for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

What concerns me most about the debate is it is denigrating all of us as members of Parliament. As did the member for Elk Island, I ran to become an MP because I wished to serve my country. I had idealism and a feeling I could contribute. The question of remuneration, be it salary or pensions, was not in my mind.

However, my colleagues opposite may be interested to know I have no pension whatsoever at this time. I would have to get re-elected to qualify for any pension.

I want to place the debate where I think it belongs. A letter was sent to me by a 16-year old from my riding. She comments on the debate and feels obviously MPs are basically cheating the system. They were all at the trough, to use the expression of the member for Medicine Hat, with respect to MPs like me.

I resent that because it is an inflammatory remark and gives the impression we are not qualified members of Parliament, that we are not dedicated to helping fellow Canadians. I will read a paragraph because this is where the debate really belongs. It reads:

I have five other sisters and a brother and my dad has no job. About three years ago he lost it. He worked at the company for 22 years and now my mom babysits an extra five kids to help pay for the groceries. My dad has written thousands of resumes and has done about four different jobs but nothing has really stuck.

(1230)

The issue raised by that child should be the topic of debate today. This is what we should be talking about, not denigrating politicians, not denigrating members of Parliament. Members of Parliament should all be trying to help—

Mr. Hermanson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Both you and I can see who is not here so I will not mention them but we are again short of a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): A quorum is present.

Mr. Bryden: Mr. Speaker, members of Parliament in the House of Commons should be concentrating on helping Canadians like this child whose parents are in need rather than engaging in an acrimonious debate that as far as I can see from my colleagues opposite is basically an attempt to gain publicity.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the issue we are trying to discuss today is important to Canadians. As was mentioned earlier by one of my colleagues, it is one of the top three or four items listed on correspondence I receive from my constituents about abuses of taxpayers trust, abuses of taxpayers hard earned tax dollars. They want to see the issue discussed and MP pensions properly fixed.

It is extremely disappointing that on the government side there is no one speaking out in favour of the legislation, talking about how proud they are of the legislation, talking about the details of the legislation and hoping to convince Canadians that the legislative idea has any merit whatsoever.

If they were proud of the legislation, if they would go on the public record and be counted, I could perhaps believe that they actually meant what they were talking about. I do not see that.

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Reformer after Reformer gets up and speaks. On the government side there are a few words about not talking about it. Other than that they just want to plough ahead. If they made these comments at a public town hall meeting in my riding supporting the MP pension plan, it would be better to have a car running and parked behind the stage. By the time they finished the speech the tomatoes would start flying and they would be on the run. This nonsense from the government side would never sell in Fraser Valley East.

There are many symbols we are proud of in Canada. We are proud of our hockey teams. We are proud of our flag. We had reference to the 30th anniversary of our flag recently. We are even kind of proud of our winters in the great Canadian north. We are proud of our peacekeepers. We like the Calgary Stampede. These are positive symbols that Canadians like to rally around.

However, the MP pension plan is also a symbol. It symbolizes waste. It symbolizes why Canadian taxpayers do not trust the politicians they put in charge of the public purse. It is symbolic. It symbolizes political arrogance that has been inbred after years and years of trying to pull the wool over their eyes. They think the symbolism of public distrust is somehow okay. It is not okay. Canadians in my riding have no stomach for half baked change. I will not call it reform. It is an abuse to call it reform.

(1235)

I sent out a questionnaire in my riding and I would like to give some of the results in case members wonder how much support there is for the MP pension plan. Most Canadians feel an MP pension plan is all right. Eighty-five per cent of the people said that there should be an MP pension plan. They do not have a problem with that. That does not surprise me. Canadians are generous and understand there should be a reasonable pension plan.

However, listen to the kind of pension plan they consider reasonable. In my riding the constituents said that the member should be at least 58 years old and have worked at least 15 years and that the pension should not be indexed. That is the minimum requirement they expect of members of Parliament.

What does the half baked change call for? Members still get a fully indexed pension after six years of service. They can still get 75 per cent of their best earning years. It is still a gold plated, feed at the trough pension plan. If I voted in favour of it I would be ashamed to go home.

There are no speakers on the other side but I cannot believe the verbal nonsense they utter. I would love to be invited to any Liberal riding in Canada to debate the issue. I will make the trek from this place or my place back home to their ridings to debate the MP pension plan on the public stage. They would be

ashamed to issue the same type of guttural nonsense we hear from that side in a public forum.

Here there is no public to throw tomatoes at them. Here they are not answering directly to the voters. That is why they are not saying anything. They are not on the public record. They are just letting it slide by. They hope we will be quiet so that they can slip it through like other pieces of nonsense the Liberals have brought forward.

There are things other than this wasteful MP pension plan that are starting to become symbolic of liberalism. One is the idea that they can jump across a huge chasm in two short leaps. It is what they did on the budget. They recognized there was a problem. They realized that we had to balance the budget. What did they do? Instead of taking the aggressive moves necessary to get us across the chasm, to give us a game plan to span that chasm, they said they would jump halfway across and as soon as they started to come down they would try to figure out how to make the next jump to get the rest of the way. It is symbolic of liberalism. It is a half baked, half hearted attempt.

The MP pension plan is probably the most visible and most disgusting item. They make a small change, hoping that people will consider it to be a real change. They may even pawn it off as a reform, which of course it is not, and hope they can cross the chasm of MP pension reform in two jumps. They cannot cross a chasm in two jumps. They either mean it or they do not. When they start to make the jump they had better have in mind whether or not they mean it.

Time and again I have said there is nothing wrong with an MP pension plan. People just want a reasonable plan. They want an MP pension plan matching dollar for dollar, one to one, just like hundreds of thousands of other pension plans where the employer matches one to one. It should not be three or four to one. It should not be a special deal for members of Parliament. It should be the same deal as everyone else gets.

The other day we found out that the mileage members of Parliament can claim on their cars is higher than anyone else in the private sector can claim or higher than any other government employee can claim. Members of Parliament have a special mileage rate.

I do not mind submitting expenses. By all means it is legitimate. I put in my expense form for my mileage, crossed out the new rate and put down the old rate. Until Canadian people can charge that much I am not going to accept it. However it came back stating that I could not do that, that I had to accept the new rate.

What are they thinking about? Why would we have one set of rules for parliamentarians and another set of rules for ordinary Canadians? That duplicity, that double standard, has lowered Canadians' trust in politicians.

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(1240)

It is not what we are saying in the Reform Party. We are merely illustrating, highlighting or echoing the concerns of people in our constituencies. We are merely pointing them out. We are just taking the highlighting pen and showing Canadians what the Liberals are doing in case they are interested, and they are. That is all we are doing. We are not writing this garbage legislation. We did not come up with this kind of half hearted proposal. We have come up with an alternative.

The member for Beaver River stands to say that she will opt out of the program. It is going to cost her \$1.5 million. If I wore a hat, my hat would be off. I respect someone who stands on principles instead of diving into a sea of gravy and keeping afloat. I respect the principles she espouses.

I issue one more challenge. I will argue the issue with the Liberals anywhere they want. I will not be taken up on it. I guess it is a cheap thing to promise. In any event I promise I will do it if they would like to debate it.

I also issue a challenge to the Bloc. All Reform Party members are going to opt out of the pension plan because we stand on principle and do not swim in gravy. We are going to opt out. The Bloc members want to opt out of Canada. My next challenge is that I would expect every one of the 53 Bloc members of Parliament to opt out of the MP pension plan because they do not want to be part of Canada anyway. That is the second challenge.

First, I will debate anyone over on the other side who wants to debate. It is not going to happen but I sure would love to do it. Second is an announcement that all MPs from the Reform Party will opt out because we stand on principle. Last, I expect every member of the Bloc Quebecois to opt out. I would love to see it written in the papers. I would like it to happen as soon as possible to see if there are any principles over there or whether it is another chance to grab the gravy train.

Mr. Hermanson: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not believe there is a quorum.

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order. A quorum is present.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to say a few words about this bill. I would like to start by making some comments.

[*English*]

I am really disappointed that colleagues from the Reform Party, knowing full well that my colleagues are having lunch,

would stoop to silly procedural wrangling to embarrass us. On a percentage basis they are much less represented than we are.

Mr. Milliken: There are only three out of fifty-three here.

Mr. Duhamel: I see. I am surprised as well that the Reform Party did not spend any time talking about what the government had promised and what the government had done. The government had promised in the red book during the election campaign, and it has honoured the promise, to raise the age of eligibility. It promised to remove double dipping and it did so. It went beyond that. What else did it do? It reduced government contributions by 33.3 per cent. That is what it did.

It did even more. The accrual rate has been reduced by 20 per cent. We have to work 20 per cent longer to get the same amount of money. It went beyond even that. It said that it would be possible for those who do not want the pension plan not to have it. I was really quite surprised that my colleagues from the Reform Party failed to mention this. I know why they did not mention it. They do not want to be fair. They do not want to deal with the facts. They want to exaggerate. They want to attempt to excite the passions of people and make them believe they have the answer. They do not have the answer. They do not even look at the facts.

(1245)

Let me mention something else I have done in order to assist my Reform colleagues. There is a document entitled "Commission to Review Allowances of Members of Parliament". My colleagues from the Reform Party like to suggest that everyone is young, they will retire young and everyone will take home a large pension.

If everyone were to retire right now there would be fewer than 13 per cent of the people eligible for retirement. This means there are fewer than 13 per cent who are less than 54 years of age.

An hon. member: That's wrong.

Mr. Duhamel: One of my colleagues in the Reform Party says I am wrong. He should take it up with the commission to review allowances of members of Parliament. My colleagues in the Reform Party always think we are wrong when we deal with the facts from a neutral third party. The commission is not a political party trying to take cheap political shots because it has no issues or trying to create an issue and going down the tubes. This is a neutral third party that is dealing with the facts.

It is rather interesting to look at the number of retirees during the last decade. Roughly half received retirement allowances. The other half did not receive any pension at all. In the Parliaments of 1984, 1988 and 1993, that is exactly what happened. Do the Reformers mention that? Do they mention that roughly half receive no pensions? Of course not.

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My colleagues in the Reform Party also like to pretend everyone walks out with a huge pension. Do members know that over 60 per cent of the 445 people receiving pensions today receive a pension that is less than \$29,999 a year? They will not deal with that. They would rather deal with catcalls and emotions. They do not want to deal with the facts.

Let me share some other interesting statistics and look at our current plan in comparison with other provincial and territorial plans. They have a minimum age requirement. For example, in Nova Scotia the minimum age is 50. In Ontario it is age and years of service which equals 55. In Saskatchewan the minimum age is 55. In New Brunswick it is age and years of service which equals 60. In Quebec the minimum age is 55. My colleagues all know this but Reformers do not want to deal with facts. In Newfoundland, the minimum service requirement is two elections in five years, Nova Scotia is two elections in five years, Ontario is five years, Saskatchewan is one year only and Quebec is six years. Is this not interesting?

Let us look at the maximum pensionable level. In Newfoundland it is 75 per cent, Nova Scotia is 75 per cent and Ontario is 75 per cent of as high as a 36-month average. There is more.

Let us look at the post-retirement adjustment. Does the House know that the post-retirement adjustment in New Brunswick is indexed to the rise of the CPI?

I could share more with members but my colleagues do not want to deal with facts. They would rather deal with rhetoric, emotion and passion and try to pretend that they would do what is right. However, when they were given the opportunity to do what is right with the salary cuts only a handful took them. When they tried to pretend they were never going to be travelling on executive class, of course that did not happen.

I have gone beyond the provincial and territorial. I am going to go to the international level. We have looked at Canada.

[Translation]

The contribution rate here is 11 per cent. As for the minimum age and service requirement, Canadian MPs must have at least six years of service; the maximum pensionable level is 75 per cent of salary with full indexation to the cost of living.

In Australia, the contribution rate is 11.5 per cent, while the maximum pensionable level is 75 per cent of salary—the same as in Canada.

(1250)

In the United Kingdom, the two Houses have a contribution rate of 6 per cent; pensions amount to 67 per cent of final salary but are fully indexed to the cost of living.

In Belgium, the contribution rate is 7.5 per cent, and the minimum age and service requirement is 55 years, or 52 years plus 8 years of service. The maximum pension is 75 per cent of final salary.

In France, the contribution rate is 7.85 per cent, the minimum age and service requirement is 55 years, and the maximum pensionable level is 84.375 per cent of final salary, indexed to the national salary growth rate. And I could go on and on.

[English]

I have proven my point. I have shown clearly that the government has gone beyond its two promises to raise the age of eligibility, which it has done, and remove double dipping, which it has done. It has gone beyond 33.3 per cent less contributions from the taxpayers to the pension plan and 20 per cent less take home by MPs. Besides, for those who do not want that, they need not take it. The government has gone beyond what it has promised.

In the provincial and territorial scene, the benefits are as good or better in a lot of areas. It is the same thing in the international scene. The benefits are as good or better in a number of other countries.

The Reform rhetoric is not based on fact. It is absolute nonsense for them to suggest that. They are plummeting in the polls and have lost their credibility so they are trying to create an issue. That is what they are trying to do.

When the leader of the Reform Party went to the press conference he referred to the current pension plan as trough and to the changes as trough light. I wonder what we need to do with respect to the Reform Party's latest suggestion that MPs' salaries ought to be increased to \$150,000 a year. At a 2 per cent accrual rate per year that would give us in excess of what we have on pensions as well. Are we supposed to call this trough premium plus?

Mr. Ed Harper (Simcoe Centre, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak today on Bill C-85, an attempt to reform the MP pension plan. Before I do I would like to address a couple of comments of the member for St. Boniface who attempted to make such an eloquent defence of the indefensible.

This really has not been much of a debate. Very few have come to defend this so-called reform of the MP pension plan, although he did make a feeble effort. He talks about being fair. I wonder who we are attempting to be fair to here. I suggest it is about time we were fair to the taxpayers who have been paying the bill for all of these years for this gold plated pension plan.

He also talks about what the provincial governments are doing in their pension plans. He forgot to mention the promise of Liberal Party in Ontario to scrap its pension plan and put in

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something that is more in line with the private sector, as has already happened in Alberta and will happen in P.E.I. Those provincial governments have got the message that these gold plated pension plans have to go. The federal government has not got the message yet.

It is obvious from this bill that the members of the government still do not understand that what we are talking about here is integrity, credibility, and getting a handle on the deficit and debt by showing leadership by example.

The President of the Treasury Board said during his opening remarks that the pension debate has been discussed here for 10 years. For the same 10 years it has been cussed in the rest of Canada. The voters have been upset with it and have been growing more upset. I can assure all members of the government that Bill C-85 will not end the discussion or the cussing. It will continue because the bill does not address the problems. I can assure the House this will be an issue in the next federal election because we will be there to make sure it is.

(1255)

When we had some limited debate, Liberal comments were that the amount of money is small when it is taken in the context of the total debt.

An hon. member: Shame.

Mr. Harper (Simcoe Centre): Shame. I would like to see that statement made to a group of taxpayers. "Why worry about our gold plated pension plan? It is only a little bit of money in the whole scheme of things. Surely you do not begrudge us a little bit of extra debt".

They talk about what members of Parliament do after they get booted out of office. Some of them are unemployable. Based on the job they do here I think they should be unemployable. Canadian taxpayers should not be funding a lavish lifestyle for MPs. I want to hear MPs tell that to the thousands of Canadians who are unemployed or under employed because they have lost a job through no fault of their own. They were not booted out by the voters. I have difficulty finding any great sympathy for MPs.

Then I hear some talking about the great sacrifice they have made to serve the Canadian people. No one held a gun to their heads and made them run for office. We sought the nomination. We went out and campaigned. Now we hear the rhetoric about the great sacrifice they made on behalf of the Canadian people. The only members of Parliament who might even have a hint of credibility in that area are those who were nominated. The nominated candidates of the government may have some justification for remarks like that but certainly none of the elected members would.

The red ink book promised reform and all we have in the bill is window dressing. I recall the comments of the former leader of the opposition, who is now the Prime Minister, during the election campaign. He challenged the government: "Recall the House. We will deal with the pension plan right away". It was a burning issue with the Canadian people. How times change. Once elected to office, it is no longer a burning issue. Eighteen months later we get around to dealing with the pension plan but it all window dressing. It is a minor tune-up when a major tune-up is required.

The money and perks are not the incentive for members of Parliament to run for office. Anyone who is here because of the money and the perks is here for the wrong reasons. I suggest there are not many members of Parliament on either side of the House who are here for that reason.

Canadians would agree there must be a pension but it must be a fair pension. The Canadian people are fair. They want the pension to be adequate and they want fairness to be part of it.

With the gold plated pension plan members are staying in office because they see the gravy train and they want to get aboard. That is the wrong incentive for people here. As a matter of fact, it suggests that perhaps we should be looking at the possibility of term limitations to remove the carrot.

As the Liberals have a habit of doing, we are mixing apples and oranges. They have demonstrated a penchant for it in the gun control bill. They are mixing the criminals with the law abiding. What are we doing with this bill? We are mixing pensions with salaries. They are two different issues and should be dealt with separately. There is absolutely no basis to combine them. We are here talking about pensions and we keep hearing about the salaries of hockey players. That has nothing to do with the debate today.

Mr. Milliken: Ask Silye what he thought about it; \$150,000 salary, that is what he is talking about.

Mr. Harper (Simcoe Centre): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are fair, but that fairness is being abused in the bill. All they are asking for is fairness. They are prepared to give it, but they are not getting it back now.

What are Canadians saying about this? No issue has a higher profile. Two years ago during my campaign it came up at every all candidates meeting, at every door I knocked on. It certainly continues to be brought up at every town hall meeting I go to. They ask: "When are you going to do something about that gold plated pension plan?" That is what Canadians want to know and they are asking it from coast to coast.

Let me quote from a survey by Environics. Eighty-six per cent of Canadians say that the MPs pension plan is too generous. Ninety-three per cent believe the federal government should

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fundamentally reform the plan before cutting government spending, including spending on social programs.

(1300)

Eighty-eight per cent support bringing the plan into line with private sector pension plans. Ninety-three per cent believe that the value of the MPs pension plan should have the same limit on growth as the private sector plans. Ninety-one per cent believe that MPs should only begin to collect their pensions at age 65. Sixty-five per cent say that MPs pensions should not be indexed to inflation.

The government had a great opportunity in this bill to restore some integrity to this place and it missed it by a country mile. It is most unfortunate. Politics have changed in Canada for the better. Canadians are no longer going to be dictated to from the top down.

The old guard who has been here for a number of years has not received that message. I was hoping that the 205 new members, many of whom are from Ontario, would have understood that the Canadian people are not going to take this lying down any more. They will stand up and be heard.

Let us look at what the consultants said about this MPs compensation package. On eligibility Ernst & Young said that it should be age 60 and not age 55 as it is in this bill. On pension accumulation, they recommended 2 per cent. What do we have here? We have double that. We have 4 per cent. On indexing they said only to inflation in excess of 3 per cent. What does this bill give us? Full indexing.

Mr. Milliken: What did they say about salaries?

Mr. Harper (Simcoe Centre): The member opposite is missing again. He is talking about salaries. We are talking about pensions. There is a blockage over there. We have great difficulty getting through but believe you me, we are going to keep on trying. There may be some hope down the road. It is pensions and not salaries we are dealing with.

Seventy-eight per cent of the plans in the private sector do not have indexing. Why do we have it? Why are we so special?

About the contribution rate, Ernst & Young said it should be reduced from 11 per cent to 5 per cent. Bill C-85 instead of going down to 5 per cent gives us 9 per cent.

There is one good part about this bill. That is the opting in clause. I am proud to say I will not be opting in and I am also proud to say my Reform colleagues will not be opting in. We are out of it and I am proud to stand in the House and say this.

It will be a major issue in the 1997 election or whenever the next federal election is. These members' replacements, and they will be replaced, will not appreciate that they were not given the

opportunity to opt out. They will waste no time in changing the plan. I can assure members of that and we will be here to help them do exactly that.

Mr. Andrew Telegdi (Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recall vividly after the election when we first came to this House in January 1994. A party which came from the west promised to do politics differently. Its members promised to take the moral high ground, if you will. They wanted to make this Chamber work more effectively. Sadly, after all this time, we know that is not the case. I want to talk about that. It is important that Canadians who are watching understand the hypocrisy in the House coming from the west and that they have a chance to reflect on it.

The debate on pensions was introduced as an opposition day motion on November 22. At that time, Reform Party whip wanted members of Parliament to be paid \$12,000 a month. On top of that he wanted members of Parliament to have a 5 per cent pension contribution matched by the government.

I noticed that since the debate has started once again, it is no longer \$12,000 a month that the whip of the Reform Party wants members of Parliament to have. Now it is \$150,000 a year which is more than \$12,000 a month. It is amazing. If we leave it for another six months, he will be asking for \$200,000. I have answered a number of letters about that issue. I have pointed out the hypocrisy of that position.

(1305)

When I talk about some of the hypocrisies, let me focus on some of the things that have been said by Reform Party members. They said that they oppose any assistance to political parties from public funds, including any refund of candidate or party electoral expenses. Guess what the reality is. They have taken the refund for 50 per cent of eligible campaign expenses estimated to be between \$2 million and \$3 million.

Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River): What did you do with yours?

Mr. Telegdi: They are doing politics differently, like they promised they would. Just listen to them howling in the back.

Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River): Talk about hypocrisy, look in the mirror.

Mr. Telegdi: In their blue sheet the Reform Party states it supports the re-examination of MPs' and senators' expense allowances, free services, staff privileges and limousines. The leader of the Reform Party has a \$31,000 annual expense account paid for by the Reform Party which is supported by the taxpayers of this country.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

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Mr. Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, it is hard to speak over the howls coming from the would-be preachers down to the left.

Let us talk about double dipping. The champion double dipper sits on the Reform side. Does any Reform Party member stand up to denounce it? Does any Reform Party member stand up and say: "No, this is wrong. We will not do it because there is only one taxpayer's pocket"? They do not.

He served in the provincial legislature and gets a \$60,000 a year pension and he sits in the House and collects a member of Parliament's salary. Surely even Reform Party members can understand the hypocrisy of their position.

The fact is we had a red book and we made promises in the red book. Have we lived up to those promises? My answer is yes. Not only did we live up to them, we have gone beyond them. We even had some grudging commendation on that from members of the Reform Party, including the Reform Party whip.

Let me say for myself and my colleagues in the House, and we have to say this often, Liberal members of Parliament do not believe that a member of Parliament should be paid \$150,000 a year, unlike the suggestions by the Reform Party whip.

The hypocrisy goes beyond just the pension issue. It goes back to the early days of this House when members of the Reform Party stood up and said they wanted to do politics differently. Having watched the House before, they are not doing politics differently. They are taking politics to a new low. Talk about political opportunism. They would misrepresent the workings of this House for pure, selfish, political gain.

Mr. Epp: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I know it is difficult to keep the relevance rule going, but I think instead of the hon. member talking about the Reform Party we should be discussing Bill C-85. I would like the member to describe for us the wonderful aspects of Bill C-85 and how it solves the problems.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I believe the member for Elk Island is correct. The rule with regard to relevancy is one that is at the best of times very difficult for the Chair. However, certainly his presentation I think was a matter of debate more than a point of order.

(1310)

Mr. Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I expect the Reformers to keep interrupting. Of course they would because they do not like to deal with the shortcomings of their position and the hypocrisy surrounding it.

Reformers promised to come to the House and do politics differently. They have not done that. I am saddened by it.

An hon. member: Talk about the pension.

Mr. Telegdi: This deals with the hypocrisy of the Reform Party position, if the member must know. Doing politics differently certainly has not been their long suit, except to take us down a few notches in the public perception. Is it working? I suggest it is not.

It is not working because the Canadian public sees through it. The Canadian public sees through that opportunism. When the leader of the third party talks about a code of conduct and talks against expense allowances and turns around and collects \$31,000, then the hypocrisy is clearly pointed out.

In terms of being up front and straightforward with the electorate, we had a campaign. The reforms were spelled out during the campaign. This government has gone further than it said it would in its red book. I can best characterize members of the Reform Party in the House as chicken littles running around saying the sky is falling.

Reformers would do the same thing with some of the major issues facing this country, which can cause our economy a great deal of damage. Instead of dealing with the issues that are of great importance and impact on the daily lives of Canadians, Reformers choose to sidetrack. The Reform Party, instead of doing sincerely what is best for Canadians and the House, has reduced itself to rhetoric, from reasoned argument to basic, simplistic political games. It is not working. Hypocrisy day after day becomes very obvious and it shows.

Mr. Hugh Hanrahan (Edmonton—Strathcona, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous speaker, I will confine my remarks to the bill before us. His comments show the obvious lack of confidence in his own party's bill.

It gives me great pleasure to address Bill C-85 which deals with the issue of MPs pensions. This issue is of great concern to myself, the Reform Party and to all Canadians. This plan was indefensible even in the good times when Ottawa's vaults were overflowing and the public was feeling generous toward its politicians. However, in bad times such as we are now experiencing, when many Canadians are suffering and the government is hard pressed to fund basic programs, the MP pension plan amounts to little more than the great Canadian ripoff.

When I say I know Canadians truly do want the MP pension plan reformed, I am speaking for those individuals who live in my constituency of Edmonton—Strathcona. I asked my constituents for some feedback on this issue in my first householder. The results were overwhelmingly in favour of pension reform. I cannot help but believe if the Liberals were to ask their constituents the same question, they would find the same result.

Constituents were asked at what age should an outgoing MP be able to collect a pension. Seventy-five per cent of my

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constituents felt an outgoing MP should not be able to collect until after his or her 60th birthday.

(1315)

The second question asked regarding MP pensions was how many years should an MP serve before being eligible for a pension. The results again are staggering in favour of pension reform. One hundred per cent of respondents said the number of years should be no less than eight. Eighty-one per cent felt the minimum number of years of service should be no less than 16.

Answers to these questions are a far cry from the present situation in place today and also a far cry from the pension reforms the government has introduced. It is important to illustrate a few facts about MP pension plans, as they will clearly illustrate why the constituents of Edmonton—Strathcona and Canadians as a whole feel there is great need for the present pension plan to be reformed.

First, pensions are payable immediately upon retirement and only after six years of service no matter at what age the MP retires or is not re-elected. Second, payments continue even if the ex-MP holds another permanent job, which would be defined as double dipping.

Third, pensions begin at \$23,390 per year and increase 5 per cent per year of service to a maximum of 75 per cent average salary. Fourth, inflation indexing kicks in after age 60 but is retroactive to retirement day.

Fifth, MPs pay 11 per cent of their base salary into the pension fund. The government matches this amount and covers shortfalls, an unfunded liability which cost Canadian taxpayers nearly \$160 million last year.

By no means is this list inclusive. There are, however, a few items of concern to me. I have stated in the House repeatedly that Reformers have come to Ottawa to make a difference. I ran for Parliament to serve my constituents. I did not run for a pension.

The Liberals state in their red ink book: "A Liberal government will reform the pension plan of members of Parliament and put an end to double dipping". Bill C-85 is a poor attempt at addressing the issue of pension reform.

We have been sitting in the House for over 18 months and we are discussing still the pension issue. Obviously it was not as important a commitment to the Liberals. It is also interesting to note the current Prime Minister challenged the former Prime Minister to recall Parliament if she were truly serious about pension reform. This was just before the last election. I quote the present Prime Minister: "Reforms would pass in a day". It has been over 500 days since he became Prime Minister and still no reforms have been passed. I find it ironic the only member of the

House whose benefits are not reduced by this bill is the Prime Minister.

Canadians will not tolerate political injustices. The evidence lies with the now defunct Conservative Party. We on this side of the House know the government has delayed on the issue of pension reform. Perhaps it is because the Liberals are concerned about having to adapt to another of the Reform Party's policies such as they have done in the past on issues such as the Young Offenders Act, parole reform, criminal justice reform, debt and deficit reduction, and let us not forget immigration.

All this is doing nothing but costing the taxpayer more and more money each day. As we know, the National Citizens Coalition set aside a day this year and called it national trough day in which another group of 52 MPs of all political stripes became eligible for this outlandish of extravagant pension plan. These new members of the trough club could collectively receive \$53 million if all of these 52 MPs quit today and lived to the age of 75, while at the same time the average Canadian citizen must work 35 years to accumulate a pension which is not nearly as gold plated as this.

(1320)

This gold plated MP pension plan should be renamed from pension plan to cash for life rip off of the Canadian taxpayer. This plan is perhaps one of the federal government's most offensive examples of waste. What strikes to the core of the issue is we as parliamentarians have to set an example for all Canadians and delaying issues such as pension reform is no way to lead by example.

I can stand in the House and state unequivocally that the Reform Party is different. We want to see changes in the pension plan; not just superficial changes, substantial changes.

These changes would include a pension plan brought in line with pension plans offered in the private sector, an end to full indexation, postponing eligibility until at least age 60, ensuring the MP pension plan is adequately funded by MPs for the benefits they will receive so there will be no shortfalls, allow MPs the option to opt out of the pension program and allow the flexibility to invest in a private pension plan such as an RRSP with a maximum contribution in accordance with the Income Tax Act.

Let us now look specifically at what the Liberals have introduced. They have decreased the contribution and benefit rates, but only marginally. They have raised the minimum age to 55 for benefit eligibility. I refer to a survey of my riding in which 81 per cent of constituents feel the minimum age should be 60. The Liberals claim to have ended double dipping and yet benefits will continue to grow under the generous inflation indexing provisions. They offer an opting out clause but it is a one time deal, as coverage will be compulsory for members of future Parliaments. The benefits will continue to be fully

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indexed to inflation from the date they retire. This has not changed and that is no big surprise to me or to the Reform Party.

We must stop this insanity. We must make real changes and real reforms to the MP pension plan now.

Mr. Julian Reed (Halton—Peel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will tell the Reform Party a little story.

In 1975 I was elected to the Ontario legislature and served for ten years. Because I was self-employed, when I retired I assumed it would be a very simple process to pick up the pieces where I had left off and re-enter the career I had left. However, I discovered it took four years to regenerate the income level I had prior to my retirement from public life. I suggest to members of the Reform Party that unless they are farmers the transition back to private life will not be nearly as simple as it seems. I say that with all sincerity. I say that to defend the pension plan and the pension reform.

(1325)

Why do we have a pension plan at all? We could accept the \$150,000 a year the member for Calgary Centre is proposing. I am sure the people of Canada are not ready to embrace that concept. I suppose if all members of the House wanted to accept that salary and do away with the pension plan entirely I have no complaints. We can do it that way.

The pension plan was set up to ease the return to private life, and also the severance package members get at the end of their service. It was done to recognize we are here generally during the highest earning years of our life. The longer we are here and the older we get, the more difficult it is to resume the practice we had before.

We could take this right to the extreme. We could return to the old ways when members did not get paid at all, no pension. The requirement was that one had to be independently wealthy to serve or one had to have a patron. I am not sure the people of Canada are ready for patronage of that kind again. That is the way it was.

The idea of a pension plan was to allow people of modest means to participate in the life of the country. It was no longer then the sole preserve of the elite.

Right now there are approximately 600 former members of the House. Approximately 400 never qualified for any kind of pension whatsoever. They did not serve long enough to qualify. The pension is being delivered to approximately 200 former members of the House.

The Reform Party criticized the plan on one hand and on the other hand some of its representatives, at least one for use, said do the same thing another way, in spades, \$150,000 a year. It is interesting but we cannot walk both sides of the street on this issue.

I am a strong supporter of pension plans for members of Parliament for the reasons I have outlined. Whether the package is too rich is a matter of debate. We decided it should be modified somewhat. We also decided it was essential to preserve it. Sooner or later all of us here will not be here any more. All of us will face a new reality as we go on to resume our lives or go on to new lives.

All the populist rhetoric in the world does not allow us to escape from that reality. I know it has been very popular to zero in on MP perks, as they are called. I have not found any yet but I am still looking. It annoys me to no end. The reality is if pensions are done away with the next generation of members will make a decision based on whether there is security at the end of its tenure. If there is limitation on the availability of standing for election the quality of governing will decline remarkably.

(1330)

It was done for a reason. We have taken a lot of brickbats because the pension plan exists. I think that is due to a general lack of understanding of the reality. There is even a lack of understanding that the pension plan as we have it is contributory, that we actually contribute a portion of our own salaries to the plan.

I support the bill we are debating today. I support the changes being made. However, I think we should all very seriously consider the realities of life and not just the populism that we think everyone wants to hear.

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay West—Revelstoke, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I intend to speak primarily on one aspect of the bill the opting out section. However, I cannot begin until I make a comment on the speech of the hon. member who just spoke.

He made it sound as though we would be destitute without the pension and that the Reform Party proposes that there should be no pension. We have no problem with the concept of a pension, only that it should be a pension that is reasonable and fair, given the marketplace and given the economic conditions in which Canada and Canadian taxpayers find themselves.

The hon. member for St. Boniface rose in the House and, shedding great crocodile tears, informed us of the hardship of 60 per cent of the MPs who are retired and who have to somehow make do on less than \$29,900 a year. My heart really goes out to them. That is a real hardship, I am sure, given that we are asking Canadian taxpayers who make less than that in total income, who are trying to raise their families and pay mortgages, pay taxes so that we can then—

Mr. Duhamel: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My comments are being interpreted completely inaccurately. I did not say that those people were destitute. I pointed out that we were being misled into thinking that high pensions—

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order. I must report to the House and the member that is not a point of order. Certainly it might be a matter of debate before the House.

Mr. Gouk: Mr. Speaker, I will clarify that he did not suggest they were destitute, but he did seem to shed some tears for their situation. Many of those people who are somehow scraping by on less than \$29,900 a year are in their fifties, in their forties, and some are even in their thirties. Perhaps they have found themselves a job and they are able to support themselves.

Another comment, which involves the specific point that I wish to address, which is opting out, was made at the start of this whole debate by the chief government whip. The chief government whip used the word hypocrisy. I am really surprised to hear him use that word, given the hypocrisy on the government side over the whole issue of opting out. The opting out is the biggest hypocrisy this government has ever dumped on the floor of the House. If the Liberals were serious about opting out, they would have offered any conditions that could have been offered that did not cost the taxpayers money.

Opting out means a refund of contributions. This is what they are offering. The majority of that refund cannot simply be transferred to an RRSP. Contributions paid by MPs are specifically earmarked for retirement. During the period of contribution MPs are cut off from an RRSP contribution due to the fact that they are participating in a registered plan. The total amount MPs pay into the government plan is less than the amount they would have been allowed to contribute through an RRSP if they were not blocked from doing so.

(1335)

If the Liberal Party were really interested in saving the taxpayers money, it would make opting out a more attractive alternative. Why is it not doing this? If opting out were handled seriously instead of punitively, the Liberals may find that many of their own members would be opting out, and this would embarrass the government. They cannot have that. What is more, they would run into a situation where suddenly, with so many people opting out, they would have a problem justifying continuing the old plan for those few members who remain and may be forced to give up the lucrative pension for those who are looking forward to this high income for life.

What could they have done? What is the alternative? One alternative is to create a matching RRSP contribution, pure and simple: 50 per cent from the MP and 50 per cent from the government. The advantage to this is that it is \$1 to \$1 instead of the old \$6 to \$1, which has only been dropped by half a point in the new proposal. Now they have mixed some accounting magic and say that given the number of people who drop off, we will

not count them and we will not count some other things. So they came up with some lower numbers. No matter how they play with it, it is still considerably higher than \$1 to \$1. That \$1 to \$1 does not have the potential of any kind of accounting magic whatsoever. It is a real and genuine \$1 to \$1.

The other advantage of this is the cost to the taxpayer stops when the service to the taxpayer stops. This would be a pure and simple matching during the tenure of the MP, stopping as soon as they no longer served as an MP.

The very minimum the government would offer if they were serious about the opting out would be an amendment to the Income Tax Act that simply allows the pension contribution made by MPs who were opting out to be transferred into an RRSP. This is money that was put aside for the specific purpose of retirement. This would not involve any matching amounts, but would ensure that money MPs have put aside for that purpose continued to be held for retirement purposes.

Then there is the matter of the future opting out. There is none. If this were a serious thing that we should be considering, MPs at any time could either decide if they wanted to get into whatever the pension plan was at the time of their election, or if they found it as distasteful in the future as Reformers find it now then they would have the ability to opt out as well. This is not being offered. Once again, the Liberals are afraid that if too many people start opting out they may be forced to do so as well.

The first speaker today, the chief government whip, started with the word hypocrisy. That is the word I will end with. It is hypocrisy on the part of the government to offer a facade that is really not in the interests of taxpayers. It is only in the interests of those high income Liberal MPs.

Mrs. Daphne Jennings (Mission—Coquitlam, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak on Bill C-85 because when I ran for election in the 1993 campaign the MPs' pension plan was a major concern to my constituents in Mission—Coquitlam.

As a Canadian I was angry about the lucrative plan, which is an insult to the Canadian taxpayer. I promised when campaigning that I would do everything I could to try to change the MP pension plan. Today I hope there is someone in government who is listening, someone who cares.

I know many Liberals are concerned about the plan. I am sure there are others in the House besides Reformers who find the existing plan repulsive and have difficulty accepting the plan as it is.

I hope the government will take a long, hard look at the bill and reconsider its approach to rush the bill through Parliament, recognizing that the better process would be to allow more study on the bill and a lengthy debate.

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Perhaps one major concern here is that members of Parliament make the decisions regarding their own remuneration. It is way past the time when MPs should set their own wages. The public has no input. By sending 52 Reform MPs to Ottawa, our constituents, many in the west, were saying among other things that they were sick of the obscene pension plan and wanted it changed.

(1340)

Sometimes when politicians come to Ottawa they forget the very people they are supposed to represent, the Canadian taxpayers. I really wonder how many of the Liberal members of Parliament visit regularly with their constituents.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mrs. Jennings: I am sure they do. I am hearing from the opposite side that they do. What do they discuss? Surely Canadians in the Maritimes, Quebec, Ontario and the rest of Canada are not happy with the MP pension plan. I find it very hard to believe that only Reform constituents are concerned about this terrible injustice. How did this pension plan get so far out of control?

Bill C-85 suggests some changes to the existing MP pension plan, but are they really constructive changes? The purpose of Bill C-85 regarding contribution and benefit rates decreases the accrual rate from 5 per cent to 4 per cent. I understand the recommendation was 2 per cent. This is still double the rate of most private pension plans. It also lowers the rate at which individual members contribute to the plan from 11 per cent to 9 per cent. If Reform MPs opt out, as they plan to do, how will this plan be supported?

Bill C-85 proposes a very generous age for retirement, 55 years of age. I started a new career at 55. I am sure that with the hardships in today's society many other Canadians are having to look for new routes to follow as well. I believe 60 or 65 would be more appropriate to discuss as a future MP retirement age with a pension.

Bill C-85 eliminates double dipping, although we see benefits will continue to grow under generous inflation indexing provisions. I am concerned about the opting in clause, which requires that MPs who wish to be included in the plan indicate this within 60 days of the bill receiving royal assent, but further that those MPs can never get back into the plan.

Reformers are committed to reform, and reform means to change things that need to be changed. If Reformers stick with determination and commitment to work to change the way government legislation reads at this time and if they should be successful in finally bringing about a decent pension plan that is comparable to the private sector plans, then why would Reformers or anyone else disgusted with the present government abuse

of taxpayers' dollars who had previously opted out of this plan not be entitled to receive a more decent pension plan?

I am not against pension plans. It is my firm belief that everyone who works is entitled to a decent pension plan, one that in this case should reflect that government is living within its means. Members of Parliament should receive pensions that are comparable to those that ordinary Canadians receive in the private sector and that meet all requirements for registration under the Income Tax Act. This bill clearly does not accomplish this. Reform has called for the government to bring their pensions down to private sector levels. Clearly they have failed to do this.

Reformers are average people, with families and mortgages. They would love to belong to a reasonable pension plan. These so-called reductions to the Liberals' pension plan barely make a dent in the cost to taxpayers. According to Treasury Board officials, most of the savings we will see are actually due to actuarial factors, not the government's changes.

Taxpayers are still paying over three and a half times as much as the individual members are for their pensions, with \$3.50 from the government for every \$1 for the Liberal contributor. The taxpayer's contribution is still too much. The only thing I like about the Liberals' pension scheme is that all MPs have a chance to opt out; in other words, to make a statement. They can tell the government to leave this money where it belongs: in the taxpayers' pockets. That is what all of the Reform MPs are doing.

Members in the House are in a very privileged position. As I have said before, not only do we make laws and budgets that affect all Canadians, we also set our own remuneration, our own salaries, our own pensions and our own perks. This is a responsibility not many people have, and one that must be protected from abuse. Herein lies the problem.

Perhaps the most disturbing part of all this is the government's attempt to hide just how generous their plan really is. They tell us in the public accounts how much each member spends maintaining their office or travelling and how much their salary is, but they will not tell us the cost of their pension. This information must be made readily available now and in the future. How else can the public judge the fairness of this scheme?

In an effort to skirt the issue of MPs' pensions in the next election, new MPs elected to the 36th Parliament will not be allowed to opt out. The Liberals do not seem to realize that until substantive reforms are made to this plan, likely by a Reform government, it will continue to be an election issue. The government professes to have brought down a tough budget. I do not think it was tough enough, certainly not in this area.

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(1345)

We cannot keep spending money we do not have. The interest payments are killing our jobs and our economy. Watching the government cut the benefits other Canadians get and raise taxes on necessities like gasoline and utilities, so far it appears the only thing the budget has been tough on are taxpayers' wallets. It is time to admit we cannot afford to pay millions of dollars in retirement benefits to politicians

I remind all members how privileged a position we hold. It is a position of trust. Not only do we make decisions that affect all Canadians, we also establish our own remuneration. Not many people have this power and responsibility. We must guard against its abuse.

The best protection against abuse would be the introduction of citizen based powers like initiative, referendum and recall. In the absence of these measures it is a pretty clear indication this power is being misused when 52 members feel they must opt out of the government's pension plan on principle.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the government has demonstrated once again it lacks the will to get the job done. It cannot balance the budget. It does not understand Canadians want concrete and not imaginary changes to the justice system and it has failed to introduce real MP pension reform. Canadians are tired of making sacrifices, tightening their belts and watching the government squander their tax dollars.

We saw what happened after the government failed to bring in a tough budget. Moody's downgraded our credit rating when it became clear the government is not committed to eliminating the deficit. Likewise, these cosmetic changes to the MP pension plan prove the government is not serious about MP pension reform either.

Canadians have seen the government waste countless dollars on study after study, review after review, with no tangible results. Bill C-85 is yet another charade with few substantive reductions to the extravagant MP pension plan. The government knows that due to its lack of hard fiscal policies there will be difficult days ahead. It knows if it does not tackle the debt Canadians will have fewer social safety nets left at the end of the day. Does it care? Obviously not. It is padding its own retirement coffers while it ignores a looming financial crisis. How serious is it about getting Canadians back to work and turning the economy around if it is going to such great lengths to protect an exorbitant MP pension plan?

With the ever increasing debt, will the Canada pension plan survive? With rising debt service payments, will the government cut deeper into RRSP savings plans? At the same time as it sets

ridiculously low targets for tackling the deficit it makes taxpayers pay ridiculously high amounts into MP pensions.

Young people saving money now may not have enough put away to live above the poverty line when they retire. Yet MPs will receive fully indexed pensions at age 60, indexed from the moment they retire from public office.

The government has its priorities screwed up. MPs are here to serve Canadians. Canadians are not here to serve the interests of MPs. They will not stand for these double standards much longer. Canadians will still pay \$3.60 for every dollar an MP puts into this plan. Why can the government not bring it into line with private schemes? Why can it not face reality and realize even MPs must tighten their belts?

Time and again as we have questioned the Prime Minister about excessive MP pensions we have seen him avoid the real issues. Time and again we have seen him deflect the discussion about retirement plans and begin to talk about MP salaries. These are two distinct issues and he knows it. We are discussing pensions today, not salaries. I am perfectly willing to discuss salaries. Do not confuse an extravagant retirement plan with the argument that MPs are underpaid while they hold office.

If the Prime Minister wants to discuss salaries, fine. First he can set the wage at what it should be and take away the special allowances. Get rid of the tax free allowance and provide an equivalent in taxable income. Get rid of the \$6,000 travel allowance we use to maintain a second residence in Ottawa and make sure our income will cover the additional costs we must incur. Do not avoid an honest debate on the validity and sustainability of the proposed pension plan by throwing up smoke and mirrors about the unrelated issue of salaries.

(1350)

The truth is the government knows this plan is too generous and knows the public will not support it if it is debated on its own merit.

There is a one time opt out clause. Only members of this 35th Parliament will ever be able to opt out of the plan. There is a significant financial disincentive for the class of '88 to opt out because all of the money it has accrued in the pension plan since 1988 will be returned to its members in one lump sum this tax year. Only one-third of it can be rolled into RRSPs or private retirement plans and the rest will be taxed this year if they choose to opt out.

While we are on the subject of how insubstantial the changes to the MP retirement plan are, I ask the government why it did not consider a mechanism for making some of these changes retroactive. Why has the government not included a clause which would allow us to buy out the multi-million dollar pension packages some of the sitting MPs will be looking at

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when they lose their seats in the next election? They will still be in their forties but entitled to fully indexed pensions.

Is this an admission that spending too long in this place leaves one incapable of doing anything else? I notice Reformers are opting out and confident of supporting themselves, so perhaps this inability to find gainful employment has something to do with being tied to traditional parties, reliant on traditional perks and privileges.

The government does not want MP pensions to come up as an election issue next time around, but I have news for the government. Until the MP pension plan is brought into line with private pension plans it will be an issue at every election. As more Canadians realize that despite their best efforts they will not have enough to retire on, they will look at retired MPs supported by public funds and grow increasingly bitter.

Yes, we work long hours in this job. Yes, we frequently work seven days a week. Yes, we must make sacrifices and spend time away from our families to do our jobs properly, but so do a lot of other Canadians. They get paid for the time they put in. They do not expect an unrealistic, unsustainable retirement plan as a result of their hard work.

As a grain farmer I have grown up expecting I will have to take responsibility for my own retirement. Farmers know there will be good crop years and there will be droughts. We have to plan ahead to make sure we can get through the bad years. That also means putting money aside for old age.

Farmers, like all small business people, do not have a company pension to rely on. Small business is the economic backbone of the country and the driving force behind new employment opportunities, and yet most small businesses cannot afford pension plans for their employees and everyone must save for their own retirement.

It would be nice if all Canadians had a pension plan as lavish as that of MPs, but let us be realistic. Why should taxpayers support someone so generously just because they held public office for six or more years?

I never believed other Canadians should be responsible for supporting me after age 60 or 65 and I certainly have not changed my views since I was elected. MPs are no different than other Canadians. We just have a different job. Yes, it carries a lot of responsibility but we chose to go into politics.

If the government cannot bring the MP pension plan into line with private pension plans it is holding MPs up as more deserving than other hard working Canadians. I do not believe that is the case and that is why I will be opting out.

I did not get into politics for the retirement plan. I came here to help change things for the better. Maybe that is idealistic of me but at least I will be true to my principles. When I look across the floor to my hon. colleagues, the vast majority of whom will accept this plan, I cannot help but wonder how they can look some of their constituents in the eye.

In my riding office I receive calls from seniors concerned about missing income security cheques. I receive calls from people on unemployment looking for work. I receive calls from people on disability pensions. These Canadians have a tough time making ends meet, even if their cheques are a few days late. That is how close to the line they are. Yet the government is asking taxpayers to toss almost four times as much as we do into our personal retirement funds.

(1355)

How can my Liberal colleagues across the way opt into this generous pension plan and then turn to help their constituents with no shred of shame? I know I could not.

If the government had the best interests of Canadians at heart it would bring the MP pension plan into line with private pension schemes and demonstrate a real commitment to fiscal responsibility to ensure all Canadians will be able to retire in comfort.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I will approach this issue in a slightly different way than my colleagues have. I thank the members opposite for providing an issue that will guarantee my re-election in MacLeod.

As I campaigned this was a significant issue. I tried to figure out in my community why this had become so symbolic of what is wrong with government. I tried to figure out why this was a flash point for the public at home for me.

I found that during the campaign when the question was asked of all the members who were running in my area what they thought of the MP pension plan, the incumbent said nothing. The Liberal candidate said: "I will not take the plan". The NDP candidate said: "I will not take the plan". I found myself aligned with those two individuals.

I looked for a different way to say to those potential constituents of mine that I will not take the plan. I wrote in public a letter to my constituents: "I, Grant Hill, the Reform Party candidate for the MacLeod riding, do hereby state that I strongly oppose the current MP pension plan. I will not accept this pension if I become eligible for it and I will do everything that I can do to reform the plan and make it fair".

Then I had the people of my constituency witness it. I went around to my public meetings. I am sure members opposite would like me to table this document. I am willing to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member will have the floor when we resume debate. It being 2 p.m., we will now proceed to Statements by Members.

[English]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

WINNIPEG CITY COUNCIL

Mr. Gar Knutson (Elgin—Norfolk, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Winnipeg city council for its initiative in keeping 1,500 obsolete police revolvers from finding their way back on to the streets.

The city council was offered \$115 per gun as a trade in allowance. However, this forward thinking municipal council chose to melt down these weapons because the manufacturer was to resell them to an American arm's dealer. One can only imagine how many of these would fall into the hands of irresponsible gun owners and how many tragedies would follow.

Because of the actions of this council I am convinced lives have been spared. Those who contribute \$115 to Winnipeg's retire a gun scheme to help offset the lost revenue should also be commended.

This is an option that Canadians should be encouraging other municipalities to choose. Congratulations, Winnipeg.

* * *

[Translation]

CHECHNYA

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as a tribute to the people of Russia and the former USSR, who suffered over half of the human casualties of the second world war, the Prime Minister is participating today in Russia's last round of celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the Nazis' capitulation.

Moscow has stated that it intends to pursue its military offensive in Chechnya as soon as the celebrations are over.

Instead of treating the Russian authorities with complacency, we hope that the Prime Minister will have the courage to publicly state Canada's opposition to this war and to vigorously protest the massacre of Chechens.

We hope that the Prime Minister will use some other means to get his message across than what he used in China, which was to discretely whisper it in the ear of his counterpart.

TREASURY BOARD

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the deliberations of the government operations committee on contracting out have been hampered because annual contracting activity reports have not been approved for release by Treasury Board.

For two years Treasury Board has held up these reports even though they are required by Treasury Board's own guidelines. Responding to a question in the House, the minister promised these reports by the end of April. Now it is mid-May and the committee is still in the dark with no way of knowing the year to year status of government-wide contracting activities.

What will the report show about contracting out? What does the government have to hide? Where are these reports?

There are enough members of Treasury Board on Parliament Hill right here, right now to hold a short meeting and approve the release for these two documents. I call on the President of the Treasury Board to fulfill his promise by approving the annual contracting activity reports for release today, not as soon as possible, do it now.

* * *

MANITOBA

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, May 12, 1870 marked the entry of Manitoba into Canadian Confederation which we celebrate this week.

Canada and Manitoba have since this union strengthened each other in politics, culture and social and economic prosperity.

We are known for our 100,000 lakes as much as we are known for the multicultural richness of our people, a microcosm of Canada. I am a proud Canadian; I am a proud Manitoban. It has been my privilege to call it home for the past 27 years. Our four sons have known no other home.

Many Manitobans have excelled in various fields of human endeavour in the history of our nation, including a former governor general and a former chief justice of the Supreme Court of Canada.

Manitoba prides itself in being a member of the Canadian family. Please join me in wishing my home province a happy 125th birthday. Welcome to Manitoba.

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NATIONAL NURSES WEEK

Mr. John Murphy (Annapolis Valley—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am wearing a pin to honour Canada's 263,000 registered nurses during this, National Nurses Week. This year's

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theme, "Your Families' Health—Nurses Make the Difference", will allow us to focus on the valuable contribution nurses make to the overall health of Canadians.

Nurses play a vital role in providing care and support for families while assisting them in making meaningful choices during challenging times. As well, nurses provide information and assistance in health promotion, illness prevention and during periods of illness and recovery.

I have spent 30 years in the public health field. I know firsthand the important role nurses play. I am therefore honoured to rise today to offer my thanks to all those individuals who chose nursing as a career. Through their efforts they truly make a positive impact on the health of Canadians.

* * *

V-E DAY

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 50 years have passed since the allied victory in Europe. That victory was, as we know by our cost, hard fought and dearly paid for. Canadians, united in the struggle for a better world, fought shoulder to shoulder with their brothers in arms to bring freedom and peace to Europe, almost broken on the wheel of war.

In my constituency of Huron—Bruce we have a strong Dutch community. Its people are proud to be Canadian and their energetic contribution to our community is a continuing and valued one.

They say, as we must echo, those years of horror must never be allowed to return. I know I speak for all of us when I say we must never forget what price was paid for freedom 50 years ago. In remembrance and in gratitude to those who gave all that was theirs to give, let us dedicate ourselves to working toward a better world for ourselves and those who follow us so that the sacrifice of those who have gone before may not have been in vain.

* * *

[*Translation*]**MINISTER OF LABOUR**

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, desperately in need of francophone spokespersons for federalism in Quebec, the federal Liberals recruited a former minister from the Bourassa and Johnson governments.

Not even six months after her recruitment, the Minister of Labour has already done a brilliant job of assimilating the credo of the proponents of very centralized, orthodox federalism.

Yesterday, she abandoned Quebec's minimum demand, recognition as a distinct society. In the same breath, she forgot all of the years she spent defending the five minimum conditions set in Meech, promoting the Allaire report and fighting the federal

government's infringement on areas of provincial jurisdiction as a member of the Liberal Party in Quebec.

(1405)

It is regrettable that the Minister of Labour's political ambitions have made her betray the convictions she had up until her arrival in Ottawa.

* * *

[*English*]**JOHN BLACK AIRD**

Mr. Ed Harper (Simcoe Centre, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Ontario and indeed all of Canada has lost a distinguished and dedicated Canadian with the passing of John Black Aird.

Mr. Aird served his country extremely well in several ways over a number of years. During the war he served as a lieutenant in the Canadian navy. After serving in the Senate for 10 years, from 1964 to 1974, he served as Lieutenant Governor of Ontario from 1980 to 1985. In both of these positions he gained the respect and admiration of all those he worked with.

His caring and concern for Canadians was vividly demonstrated when as lieutenant governor he devoted much of his time to helping the disabled.

John Black Aird served his country well; a fine role model to all who hold public office. Canada has lost a statesman and we share this loss with his family.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

* * *

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT PENSIONS

Mr. John Solomon (Regina—Lumsden, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I offer my congratulations to the Saskatchewan NDP government for its initiative on capping MLA pensions and abolishing the premier's pension bonus.

The Saskatchewan NDP has set an example for the Liberal government to follow. I challenge the Liberals to abolish the special bonus pension for the Prime Minister which totals \$50,000.

The Saskatchewan NDP has proven its commitment to fiscal responsibility and fairness with a money purchase pension plan for MLAs that has been in place for 16 years.

Unfortunately the Liberal government did the absolute minimum in addressing the concerns of Canadians with respect to MP pensions. The government did just enough to make the pension issue go away. However, it is an improvement over the Reform Party idea of doubling MP salaries.

Unlike the Reform Party, New Democrats have respected the concerns of taxpayers by keeping both salaries and pensions in check. This is an issue on which the Reformers and Liberals

come together in their race to the trough. They are taking different routes but end up in the same place.

* * *

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I offer sincere congratulations to the CBC on its coverage of the Victory in Europe celebrations.

I am sure members from both sides of the House will join me in praising the CBC for its reporting of these important events, including eight hours of broadcasting on the main television service during prime time.

[*Translation*]

I would like to congratulate the employees of the CBC for this coverage, which will benefit not only those who lived through those war time horrors, but also future generations who will want to remember the sacrifices their ancestors made.

[*English*]

I am confident all Canadians are proud of the men and women who contributed so courageously to that victory 50 years ago and also applaud the men and women who ensure those actions live in our memories.

We will not forget those men and women as well as their sacrifices due in part to the work of our national public broadcaster in bringing these once in a lifetime celebrations to the attention of our citizens.

* * *

GRANDPARENTS

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville—Milton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week when the House passed the motion by the member for Mission—Coquitlam, we together affirmed that we regard the opinions of grandparents regarding the welfare of their grandchildren as important. I hope we assign the same importance to their opinions when they speak on the issues of the day.

This morning a small group of grandparents gathered outside the Centre Block to express their views on gun control and Bill C-68. In costumes they sang humorous songs in support of gun registration which they see as an integral part of civic responsibility. It was the Ottawa chapter of the "Raging Grannies", a nationwide group of grandmothers advocating world peace. Its members see our legislation as a logical next step in their efforts to ensure a safer social environment for their grandchildren.

We all understand the special love and dedication grandparents have for their grandchildren. We recognized it last week. We would do well to heed their advice on all issues which affect the welfare of children.

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(1410)

As a mother and grandmother I welcome and support the participation of the "Raging Grannies"—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Niagara Falls.

* * *

NIAGARA FALLS

Mr. Gary Pillitteri (Niagara Falls, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend Niagara Falls celebrates the 36th anniversary of the blossom festival parade.

The tender fruit lands of Ontario delight us with the beauty of their blossoms. Its industry, which contributes to our economy, is also the source of 15,000 jobs.

A severe crisis is facing the industry. Its survival may well depend on the implementation of the strategic plan completed by the working group on December 19, 1994. Because of escalating labour costs, tariff cutbacks under the free trade agreement and the deregulation of the industry, growers are experiencing heavy ongoing losses.

Imports control prices so growers cannot recover cost increases from the market and the lands are frozen for agricultural purposes.

The recommendations contained in the revitalization plan may provide workable solutions to the problem.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MINISTER OF LABOUR

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Labour dismissed out of hand the modest constitutional demands of the president of the No camp in Quebec, Mr. Daniel Johnson.

When asked to comment on Mr. Johnson's remarks that some day, Canada would recognize Quebec's national identity, which in political terms would translate into new powers, the minister answered as follows: "We will see what that means. This is very difficult. Do not ask me to comment. I do not even know what he is talking about".

After criticizing the federal government's policies on education, health and manpower training, after urging the rest of Canada to recognize Quebec as a distinct society, the minister has now become the apostle of quiet resignation. Instead of representing Quebec in Ottawa, the Minister of Labour willingly echoes the federal position in Quebec.

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[*English*]

WESTRAY MINE

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to mark the third anniversary of the Westray mine disaster.

Oral Questions

The tragedy claimed the lives of 26 miners and plunged the community of Plymouth, Nova Scotia into a state of grief. Sadly in many ways the healing process will not begin until an ongoing public inquiry has done its work and miners' families have answers to the most basic questions—why?

As a guest in the riding of Central Nova last summer I was struck by the enormous sense of community and warmth among the people who had to bear this tragedy. The fact that hazards of mining are well recognized does not make the tragedy any easier to bear.

It follows that today our sympathy should be with the miners' families and the community as they commemorate those who died. We should also recognize the courage of not only those who labour far beneath the earth's surface but of those who risked their lives in an effort to rescue the survivors of the blast.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the victims of the Westray disaster, the families and the community still mourning the 26 men who lost their lives underground.

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Mr. John Maloney (Erie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our health care system is one of Canada's proudest and most envied achievements. Every Canadian has a right to receive the care he or she needs when sick, regardless of personal circumstances. It is an affirmation of Canada's commitment to human dignity.

The constituents of Erie were concerned about the future of the health care system. Unlike Bob Rae's government, the Ontario Liberals have a plan to protect the province's health care system.

I am pleased to see that today Ontario Liberal Lyn McLeod announced her vision of health care for the province, including the establishment of a health research and development council, a call-in care pilot project, expanded 911 and restoration of health care coverage for out of country emergency services.

Medicare was introduced and developed by a succession of Liberal governments, providing a tangible example of the commitment of all Liberals to compassionate public policy.

The government also has plans for the well-being of Canadians. We will not withdraw from or abandon the health care field. We will not accept the notion of a two tier health care system, one for the rich and one for the poor, one for the advantaged provinces and one for less advantaged provinces.

Thanks to the government and the plans of Lyn McLeod's Liberals, Erie constituents can put their fears of a Bob Rae health care system to rest.

(1415)

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have learned that Ontario NDP Premier Bob Rae is campaigning today in my riding of Lambton—Middlesex. I imagine Mr. Rae is also continuing with his dialogue of misinformation with respect to federal funding for health and how this is supposedly resulting in hospital cutbacks in long term care and so on.

Let me set the record straight. The federal commitment to medicare in Canada and in Ontario is as strong as ever. Contrary to what Mr. Rae has been spreading, federal EPF health transfers to Ontario have been rising over the term of this government. At the same time the Ontario government has been cutting the amount it spends on health care.

By rolling all transfers into one, the Canada health and social transfer, the federal government is strengthening its ability to enforce the Canada Health Act.

Liberals do not need to take any lessons from Mr. Rae on medicare. After all, Liberals introduced the Canada Health Act in 1984. We have always defended strong and reliable funding of medicare and we always will.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in its first budget in February 1994, the federal government announced it was cutting an additional \$2 billion from its contribution to provincial social programs in 1995-96 and 1996-97. In its second budget, it hit the provinces a second time by offloading its deficit in the form of new cuts that will total \$2.5 billion in 1996-97 and \$4.5 billion in 1997-98.

My question is directed to the Minister of Finance. Would he confirm that according to the distribution formula for the Canada social transfer in Bill C-76, the latest budget's additional cuts in transfer payments to the provinces will, next year alone, result in a shortfall of \$650 million for Quebec?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, next year, I believe the shortfall for Quebec will be about \$350 million.

In fact, this amount is well below 2 per cent of Quebec's revenues. If we consider the cuts imposed on other provinces, Quebec has been treated very well.

Oral Questions

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I challenge the minister to deny what I am going to say, considering what I just said. Under the item “transfer payments to the provinces” Quebec’s loss, for this year alone, will be \$650 million. That is what was said, Mr. Speaker.

And I would ask the Minister of Finance to confirm that over the next three years, additional cuts announced in his first two budgets will mean, in the case of Quebec, a total shortfall of more than \$3 billion in funding for health care, post-secondary education and social assistance.

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have had this debate in the House before. I must say the Leader of the Opposition is just tossing off figures at random. No decision has been made concerning transfer payments for the years after the first year in which cuts will be made. It is quite clear that we are going to negotiate with the provinces and subsequently reach a decision.

Now I would like to ask the Leader of the Opposition the following question: Is he saying this is the way he wants these cuts? That is certainly not how we see it.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must say I understand why the Minister of Finance is too embarrassed to admit that these figures were taken directly from his own budget.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Bouchard: I would refer the minister more specifically to page 17 of his budget speech, where he announced that he was prepared to fund social assistance the same way the government funds transfers for health and post-secondary education, in other words, on a per capita basis, as opposed to real need.

Consequently, would the Minister of Finance agree that based on these criteria, the main victim of the cuts in his latest budget will be Quebec, which in 1997–98 will be saddled with 41.7 per cent of the cuts or \$1.9 billion, and that this is why he refuses to discuss these cuts publicly within the framework of a federal-provincial conference to be held before the referendum?

(1420)

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Leader of the Opposition is creating a problem where none exists, perhaps because he cannot find enough issues to criticize. First of all, I said that I was prepared—and it is my intention—to have a federal-provincial conference with my counterparts, as soon as all provinces have tabled their budgets. The provinces asked us to wait until they had all tabled their budgets.

Second, the Leader of the Opposition is drawing certain conclusions from talks that have yet to be finalized. Yes, we did provide overall figures, but it is clear it will depend on the outcome of the negotiations.

[*English*]

It is beyond belief to hear the Leader of the Opposition. Six provinces have said that they will have to absorb over 217 per cent of the cuts. It is a mathematical impossibility.

What amazes me is not that an individual minister of finance or premier of a province would fall into that trap, but that the Leader of the Opposition would basically say that he has so little faith in the capacity of Quebecers to negotiate on their own behalf that he would concede the argument beforehand. It is the same kind of thing that he has done consistently, that is he has conceded that Quebec cannot make it in Confederation. Let me tell him as a Quebecer that Quebec can make it in Confederation.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

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[*Translation*]

CHARLES R. BRONFMAN FOUNDATION

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

While the francophone and Acadian communities struggle to conserve their rights with exceedingly limited financial resources, we discover that, under the 1994–95 budget, the Minister of Canadian Heritage subsidized the CRB Foundation to the tune of \$2 million from official language programs in order to finance a series of historical vignettes to be broadcast on television.

How can the minister justify such a substantial grant—\$2 million—to the Bronfman Foundation, which is managed by Tom Axworthy, the brother of the Minister of Human Resources Development, whereas in 1992–93, the last year the public accounts recorded a figure, this organization received only \$200,000, or ten times less?

Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am the Minister of Canadian Heritage and proud to be. I am interested in Canadian heritage. When a group is prepared to help put our heritage in a historical context, I support it. This Bronfman Foundation project is a magnificent one, but clearly of no interest to our colleagues. These vignettes have done a lot of good in teaching people about the history of Quebec and of the rest of Canada.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the budget of all the organizations receiving government support has been significantly cut, are we to understand that the more than substantial increase given the

Oral Questions

Bronfman Foundation has to do with the particular lobbying abilities of its officials or with the imminence of the Quebec referendum?

Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's support is based on only one thing: the quality of the product they have put on the screen.

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[English]

PENSIONS

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board is one of the chief ministers responsible for fiscal restraint in government. That means one of his jobs is to promote the prudent use of taxpayers' funds among public servants and the recipients of government services.

There is no way the minister can do that effectively while at the same time promoting and defending an obscenely generous pension plan for members of Parliament.

(1425)

Does the President of the Treasury Board appreciate that for him job one in promoting fiscal responsibility is to kill the Cadillac MP pension plan?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated many times before, the government promised during the election campaign that it would deal with the issues of double dipping and a minimum age for pension.

We have dealt with the commitments, the obligations we have made. We have gone beyond that because we recognize this is a period of fiscal restraint. It is a period of time we need to get our house in order, to get the deficit and the debt down. We have reduced the contribution, the members of Parliament compensation, by some 33 per cent.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, if the minister is going to defend the plan he is going to have to defend the real numbers.

These are the numbers: \$2.5 million for the Deputy Prime Minister, \$3.1 million for the Minister of Health, \$3.6 million for the minister of public works, \$3.9 million for the minister of fisheries, \$4.5 million for the member for Sherbrooke—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Manning: These are the numbers that the minister should admit are indefensible.

How can the President of the Treasury Board possibly justify those numbers to taxpayers or to seniors when the finance minister is planning to reduce pensions for ordinary Canadians?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Reform Party and his entire party, as we have seen many times in the past when dealing with budgetary issues and pension issues, have a way of extremely exaggerating and taking out of context the figures relevant to compensation.

They sure know how to put forward the Cadillac when it comes to increasing the compensation for members. Over a 50 per cent increase in compensation is what they have suggested while the government is reducing it by some 33 per cent. Over a 130 per cent increase in salaries is what they recommend. That is unconscionable.

The government does not stand for that. The government stands for fiscal restraint.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the principal issue in MP compensation, and everyone in the House knows it, is the MP pension plan. What Canadians would accept as fair in the plan is one where the government matches MP contributions on a one to one basis.

What the minister is trying to justify under pressure from the Deputy Prime Minister and others is a scheme where taxpayers contribute over \$3.50 to every \$1 that the Liberal fat packers contribute.

Will the minister do the honourable thing? Will he do the prudent thing? Will he do the fiscally responsible thing and bring the MP pension plan into line with those available to other Canadians?

The Speaker: The President of the Treasury Board.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the standing ovation for me.

This exercise is about what is fiscally prudent. That is what the government is doing. That is not what the Reform Party is doing.

The bottom line is what it will cost taxpayers. What we are proposing will cost taxpayers less. What they propose will cost taxpayers more.

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[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

Oral Questions

At a seminar organized by the Public Policy Forum in March, the Deputy Minister of Human Resources Development, Jean-Jacques Noreau, opened up to the participants, saying that his department's first challenge was to rethink the UI program. He even went as far as to state that it might be necessary to create a new federal-provincial agency, composed of government, business and labour representatives, to administer the UI fund.

(1430)

Can the Minister of Human Resources Development confirm his deputy minister's statement, and why does he stubbornly refuse to call a meeting of human resources and employment ministers right now so that they can discuss this issue?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the present time we are looking very carefully at a wide number of proposals that we received during the public consultations last fall, the report from the House of Commons committee, the special report on seasonal work, and the representations we have received from a number of businesses, communities and union organizations.

We are pulling together all that information to look at what we think would be the best form of arrangements for a new unemployment insurance program. A number of different models are being considered, but no decision has been made yet. There has been no policy established. It is now simply a matter of putting those different proposals together.

As was indicated in the budget speech, we will be presenting a new form of proposals some time in the fall. I hope the hon. member can restrain her impatience until that time. I think she most of all would want us to do the job carefully, with prudence, to make sure that everybody's representation is listened to and responded to.

[Translation]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is the minister aware that there has been no federal-provincial conference since January 1993, that is to say, since the minister has been in charge of this important portfolio, while the provinces have been hard hit by the decisions made, especially with respect to unemployment insurance?

Far from trying to get out of job training, as demanded by all stakeholders in Quebec, does the minister not intend mainly to make the UI fund bear the costs of training not only the unemployed but also welfare recipients?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I suppose various members could engage in all kinds of idle speculation and put up their pet proposals.

If the hon. member is making a representation today that she thinks we should be using unemployment insurance money for social assistance, we will certainly take that into account. If that is something the hon. member feels strongly about, I would hope she would have the good grace to write it down carefully and give me her arguments and her reasoning. I would be glad to receive any proposals the hon. member would like to make.

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GUN CONTROL

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice.

In light of the analysis done by the Library of Parliament, which indicates that part of the gun legislation might be challenged in the courts as unconstitutional, is the justice minister as confident as his parliamentary secretary was yesterday in the House that all aspects of Bill C-68 are in fact constitutional?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, weekend newspaper reports indicate that the Minister of Justice is considering curbing the enormous powers given to police officers under Bill C-68 to search homes and places.

Are these reports accurate? If so, what prompted the change of heart? Popular opinion or the threat of a court challenge?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those clippings were drawn to my attention yesterday. My position has not changed from what I expressed to the committee when I testified before the hon. member and his colleagues on that committee on April 24 last.

As for the police powers to search the member should bear in mind that the powers, as he well knows, proposed in Bill C-68 are to inspect, not to search.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Rock: Mr. Speaker, if we are not to make distinctions in law then what is our function here? These distinctions are very important.

The power is to inspect, which is completely consistent with the approach taken in dozens of other statutes federally and provincially to ensure public safety. Those powers of inspection have been organized and presented in Bill C-68 in a fashion that

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has been held on more than one occasion by the Supreme Court of Canada to be both constitutional and appropriate.

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(1435)

[*Translation*]

OLD AGE PENSIONS

Mr. Maurice Dumas (Argenteuil—Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

According to an information sheet addressed to the staff of the Department of Human Resources Development the government has made decisions regarding reforms to the old age pension system, and I quote: "The amount of old age security benefits will be based on combined family income".

Since it seems that the government has already made this decision, will the Minister of Human Resources Development tell us how much he hopes this measure will save the government?

[*English*]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no decisions have been made; no policy has been set. Again I would refer the hon. member to the budget in which we indicated we would be putting together a white paper to be tabled in the fall that would set out a series of propositions dealing with the larger issue of aging in society.

The hon. member, who is a student of that problem and is very much engaged in the concerns of senior citizens, would recognize that the situation is changing quite dramatically and that we must take a look at a number of options to ensure that we can continue a base of income security for people in their retirement. Our number one priority is to ensure security for people in their retirement. We will be presenting a number of proposals that I think will meet that objective.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maurice Dumas (Argenteuil—Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before the minister rhymes off his automatic reply that the opposition is trying to scare seniors, will he admit that this proposal will erode the financial autonomy for which women fought so hard, and that it will discriminate against them?

[*English*]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be very glad to answer that if I knew what proposal he was talking about. There is no proposal presented.

I just told the hon. member we will be presenting a white paper with a number of propositions this fall. At that time, if the hon. member wants to raise questions about it, certainly we would welcome any representation. However, to try to state that there is already a proposition in place upon which he would like an answer, yes or no, it is impossible until I know what proposition the hon. member is talking about.

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CANADIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, a few years ago CSIS recruited a young man by the name of Luke Desilets to spy on the Aryan Nations. Unfortunately, since last spring he has accepted the Aryan Nations' philosophy and renounced his former ties to CSIS. Apparently Luke now spends his time travelling between Aryan Nation compounds throughout the United States while his parents wonder if their son will ever be normal again.

I ask the Solicitor General: Are he and CSIS prepared to take any responsibility for the state of this young man's life?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not in a position to confirm the hon. member's assertions. In any event, as the hon. member well knows, it is not the practice to confirm or deny whether somebody may or may not have been a source for CSIS.

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians would feel a whole lot better and have more confidence in the government if they would spend less time using national security to defend their mistakes and rather guarded secrets.

Charles Scott is a self-styled colonel in the Aryan Nations in B.C. Like many of those in the white supremacist movement, he found himself often lacking the financial resources to spread his message of hate. But once the CSIS source showed up, Scott's financial problems appeared to end. It seems that Luke even provided Scott with \$1,000 so he could attend the Aryan Nations congress in Idaho last year.

Is this another example of CSIS funding the groups it is supposed to be monitoring?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is stating certain assertions that appeared in the press as fact. I am not in a position to confirm whether or not that is the case. It is not a matter of hiding behind national security; it is respecting the law passed by this Parliament. I would suggest the hon. member show a willingness to do the same.

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice.

There is a serious flaw in the Criminal Code. A justice may order a suspect or an accused person to undergo a DNA test. However, once the test is completed, the results are inadmissible in the trial, even in matters of sexual assault or murder.

(1440)

In the light of the murder of Tara Manning, would the Minister of Justice tell us whether he intends to act diligently and quickly introduce amendments to the Criminal Code in order to fill the legal void concerning the admissibility of the results of DNA tests as evidence?

[English]

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises an important point. I met two weeks ago with the father of Tara Manning and spoke to him about the tragedy his family had suffered because of her murder and about the need for changes in the law to provide, as the hon. member has said, for the collection and use of evidence that will help in the detection and prosecution of such crimes.

We have just completed a consultation with respect to this issue. We are reviewing the results now. I can tell the hon. member that it is my intention to present legislation in the House that will amend the code to provide for the taking of bodily samples with a search warrant for the purpose of determining the DNA of an accused person and for the creation of data banks whereby such samples can be stored and to which resort may be made in future investigations.

[Translation]

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is the minister aware that, by delaying such an amendment to the Criminal Code until the fall, most likely, he will enable people accused of violent crimes to go free for lack of evidence? What is the minister waiting for in order to act quickly?

[English]

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not entirely right. The courts for the last seven years in Canada have been receiving DNA evidence as proof. It has been used by authorities to establish the guilt and from time to time the innocence of people implicated in alleged crimes.

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At present, the use of DNA samples is limited to those circumstances in which it is found and where the court determines that its use is consistent with principles of justice.

Our intended changes would broaden the use, both of the taking of samples to put it on a regular lawful basis and allowing the authorities to stockpile it to have a bank available for reference in future investigations.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Elijah Harper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

My riding in northern Manitoba suffers from the highest unemployment, up to 90 per cent in some communities. The services provided by the Canada employment centre in Thompson and its satellite offices are absolutely essential.

Could the minister assure my constituents that the reorganization of his department will not cut human resources services in northern Manitoba?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly conscious of the very severe unemployment situation in the hon. member's riding. It is probably the most serious in the country.

I can assure the hon. member that the Pathways budget, which provides services to aboriginal and First Nations peoples, has been maintained at the same level this year. At the same time we are endeavouring to retain the outreach services so that those services can be maintained in the remote communities.

Let me say something that applies not just to the hon. member but to all members. We are reorganizing the department, but I made it very clear that the guidelines must be that any reduction come from the overhead of the department, not from direct services to clients, so that we have much better control and discretion of decision at the local level. Decisions will be made to tailor programs at the local level and maintain clear accessibility for all citizens of Canada so they can get proper services to get back to work.

* * *

SOMALIA COMMISSION

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the information commissioner says that the Somalia commission does not have the power to bypass the Access to Information Act or the Privacy Act and the government cannot bend the rules to meet commission concerns. Further, the Minister of National Defence in his recent news release says that all information requests will be processed according to the two acts.

Oral Questions

(1445)

Given that national defence is notorious for its lack of respect for processing access requests, can the Deputy Prime Minister please explain what this policy will mean to all of us?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the policy, as the member indicated, was self-explanatory in the news release issued by the Department of National Defence on Friday last which states: "All access to information requests will continue to be processed in accordance with the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act". That coincides with the opinion expressed by Mr. Grace.

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the information commissioner also says that the access act is a law of Parliament and you cannot just opt out of it because you find it inconvenient.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister assure the House, because we are sincerely worried about this, that requests will not be denied just because it is a matter of inconvenience or the commission says so?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the news release issued by the Department of National Defence makes it very clear that in fact according to the law, all access to information requests will continue to be processed in accordance with the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act. I do not think the department could make it any clearer.

* * *

[Translation]

BOVINE SOMATOTROPIN

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Health.

On December 8, 1994, in response to questions from the official opposition about the conflict of interest created by Mr. Ritter's position with the Bureau of Veterinary Drugs at Health Canada, and his activities as a lobbyist for pharmaceutical companies seeking approval of the growth hormone, bovine somatotropin, the Minister of Health told us she would make inquiries and give us a report.

Could the minister indicate whether upon investigation, Mr. Ritter's conduct was found to be in accordance with the government's conflict of interest guidelines and could she table in the House the report prepared by her department?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we announced Health Canada's position with respect to Mr. Ritter. I have nothing to add at this point.

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer is not really satisfactory. I asked if inquiries

had been made and if the report was ready, because on December 8, 1994, she said in the House that she would make inquiries and give us a report.

Does the minister intend to take steps to ensure that there are no recurrences of unacceptable situations like this one at Health Canada?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said just now, I asked the deputy minister to make inquiries. She did so. We made an announcement, and at this point, we have nothing to add. I have nothing more to say.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of public works.

After cancelling the lease on a 37 square metre office in St. John's used primarily by the minister of fisheries, the government entered a five year deal on 348 square metres with a great view of the narrows.

Since the minister of public works has seen fit to spend \$87,000 a year on these swanky new digs on top of \$170,000 to renovate them to Liberal standards and over \$46,000 to lavishly furnish them, could he tell the House whether the minister of fisheries who will be the primary occupant of these new suites had any input of any kind into the decision to move to these new offices?

Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. The answer is no.

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): At least I got something out of the minister in the last couple of weeks. No is better than nothing at all.

On April 25 the secretary of state for fisheries stated in this House: "The St. John's offices were moved to another building according to standard procedure which requires a call for tenders".

(1450)

My question is for the secretary of state for fisheries. Since the *Evening Telegram* in St. John's now reports it indeed was not tendered, why did he indicate to the House that it was tendered? Which version of the truth is the truth?

Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not have all the details available about which the hon. member has asked.

I want to inform the House that the government embarked upon a policy of closing down a good number of ministerial

Oral Questions

regional offices across the country. In fact, 11 MROs have been closed at a saving of some \$3.5 million to the taxpayers.

The facility in Newfoundland will not only be utilized by the minister responsible for fisheries and oceans, but will also be utilized by all ministers of the crown. It will be utilized by various ministers of state as well as other government representatives who are doing business in a province in which we believe it is very important that we get some economic activity taking place.

* * *

FISHERIES

Mrs. Bonnie Hickey (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the secretary of state for fisheries and oceans.

On April 28, 1995 while Canadian fishery officers were conducting a NAFO inspection on the Spanish vessel *Mayi Cuatro*, the vessel dropped its net. The net has been recovered and both Canadian and EU inspectors confirm that the net contained an illegal liner.

Can the secretary of state tell Newfoundlanders and all Canadians what further action the government is taking to stop this kind of violation of NAFO regulations?

[Translation]

Hon. Fernand Robichaud (Secretary of State (Agriculture and Agri-Food, Fisheries and Oceans), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her incessant interest in fisheries.

[English]

On April 28 Canadian officers issued a NAFO citation to the master of the *Mayi Cuatro*. On May 8 EU inspectors boarded the *Mayi Cuatro* and sealed the fish hold. We have received word that the Spanish vessel has been ordered to cease its fishing activity and return immediately to Spain. These are very positive developments which indicate a clear willingness by the EU to take immediate and decisive action to meet the terms of the Canada-EU agreement.

* * *

[Translation]

SHIPPING

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment.

In September 1994, at the 12th conference of the International Maritime Pilots' Association in Vancouver, the Minister of the Environment said the following:

[English]

"I am happy that IMPA is constantly striving to optimize the latest aids to navigation, thus improving safety. Even the most modern equipment will not replace the human element, but will add to the tools available to the pilot".

[Translation]

Since the Standing Committee on Transport recommends substantially reducing the requirements for pilotage in Canadian waters, does the minister intend to convince her colleague at Transport to reject the committee's recommendations, which increase considerably the risks of an environmental catastrophe like that created by the *Exxon Valdez*?

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, the government will examine the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Transport and I hope that we will get some suggestions from the people we will be consulting with across Canada during the process which has already begun in the east.

It is regrettable that the hon. member who raised the question today did not seize the opportunity to propose suggestions which could have been of interest to the committee. He preferred instead to raise questions of the kind we just heard, which do not really help to resolve the problems with pilotage on the St. Lawrence and elsewhere.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is the Minister of Transport aware, does he realize that a reduction in pilotage activities will cause a directly proportional increase in the risk of maritime accidents or ecological disasters?

(1455)

[English]

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the whole question of pilotage, the St. Lawrence authority as well as any other pilotage authority operating in the country is subject to change. The transport committee, which looked at the question, has made some recommendations. We are going to continue to study it and we look forward to recommendations from the hon. member.

One thing we have insisted on throughout this review of the responsibilities of Transport Canada is that we will continue to exercise our fiduciary responsibility for safety and security. That includes how we deal with pilotage authorities.

* * *

PORT OF BELLEDUNE

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay West—Revelstoke, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in mid-April the Minister of Transport pledged not one cent of federal money would go into the expansion of the port of Belledune in New Brunswick. Now we find out that in addition to the colossal \$20 million loan, the expansion project will also

Oral Questions

receive an outright grant of \$6 million including a grant of \$1.5 million from the Ministry of Transport itself. This expansion comes at a time when the New Brunswick ports of Miramichi, Bathurst and Dalhousie are on the verge of closing down due to overcapacity in east coast ports.

Given that no private sector investors have been found for the Belledune project and other ports in New Brunswick are capable of handling the expanded capacity being planned, why has the minister had this sudden \$6 million change of heart? Where are the so-called sound business decisions he says are so evident?

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question put by the hon. member is riddled with misstatements. On the basis of what he has said, he does not even understand what is happening at Belledune.

One thing he did say is that the port of Bathurst, one that he says will be affected, is in my constituency. We are aware of the need to rationalize ports.

The port of Belledune has participation from the province of New Brunswick and the municipalities surrounding the port of Belledune. We believe it is a step in the right direction.

I ask the hon. member to point to other examples anywhere in Canada where municipalities, provincial governments, the private sector and the federal government are prepared to spend money on port expansion.

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay West—Revelstoke, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is very convenient when the federal government says to spend money on this or get nothing at all in what it decides.

The minority report produced by the Reform Party on federal port reform makes it very clear that subsidies are not the way to go in the port industry. They only end up causing excessive dependence on the public purse when the people of Atlantic Canada are really looking for economic self-sufficiency.

Will the minister explain to the House how Atlantic Canada will ever reach economic self-sufficiency if the government continues to fund unviable ports like Belledune so that it can compete for the revenues of the viable ports?

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has a very odd way of approaching this. He has mentioned the port of Chatham, the port of Dalhousie, the port of Bathurst, the port of Belledune. He probably knows there are a few other ports in New Brunswick.

What we have said as a policy is that in New Brunswick there will be two ports, the major port at Saint John which is a very important international port and a port at Belledune that was built in the late 1950s and early 1960s to handle Brunswick Mines which happen to be there. It is there because NB Power

has a thermal generating plant that happened to be built at Belledune.

If the hon. member had thought about what he was saying, he would understand that rather than have a half a dozen ports that need subsidies of all kinds to continue to operate, we will wind up in New Brunswick with two viable ports, one at Saint John and one at Belledune.

* * *

TRANSPORT

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport.

Last week the Minister of Transport called some of his department's plans to automate and privatize air navigation systems a mess. I agree with the minister.

There are increasing concerns about the automated weather system, the number of layoffs in 26 airports, emergency fire response, and the Transport Canada project to install automated aircraft and control systems over budget. Surely in the interests of public safety the minister should respond to the airlines, the pilots, the consumers and call an independent public inquiry in his government's policy to privatize and automate air navigation systems.

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again the Reform and the NDP must be drinking from the same cup of coffee.

The problem with CAATS which was raised by my hon. friend last week with respect to the overspending is as a result of the system that is in place now. The problem with AWOS is as a result of the system that is in now place.

If there ever was justification to go to the commercialization of the air navigation system where there are the deliverers of the service, the users of the service, and the people who pay for the service sitting at the table as the operators of ANS, the question that was just asked by the hon. member is the best rationale for all of that to be done.

(1500)

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Minister of Transport.

The minister will agree there is grave concern about the AWOS. He will know there are two investigations now of crashes where the AWOS is implicated. His department is going ahead with the AWOS. I have been to briefings by Transport Canada on this system. It is unproven technology.

It is time for an independent, public inquiry into this automation system and its commercialization. Will he not do it?

Points of Order

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that the AWOS has a number of flaws in it. We have recognized that and have taken steps to correct it. We are responding to the concerns she has expressed on behalf of the industry.

However, AWOs was designed in the current environment. CAATS was designed in the current environment. There are problems with both of those systems but she does not want us to change the system. She wants us to continue a system that has produced these kinds of problems. It does not make any sense.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the parliamentary secretary to the minister of defence.

It was recently reported that two members of the Maison-neuve Regiment in Montreal were associating with racist organizations. Can the parliamentary secretary tell the House what is being done about racism in the armed forces? What is the minister doing to prevent racists from joining?

Mr. Fred Mifflin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for a timely question.

I want to inform him and the House there are three things with respect to existing members. First, following the events in Somalia, procedures were implemented that strictly indicated a zero tolerance toward racism in the Canadian forces.

Second, the chief of the defence staff issued to all units in August 1993 a policy to that effect.

Third, the existing commanders have been directed by the chief of the defence staff to complement their present training systems with sensitized training in the area of anti-racism.

With respect to those joining, new procedures have been implemented in which all recruiting units are required to read the policy to new enrollees and make sure they understand them. If they do not agree they are not allowed to join the Canadian forces.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw to members' attention the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Doug Phillips, Minister of Justice, Yukon Territory.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it seems that when I finished my question, there was a breach of decorum in this House when the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine shouted "traitor". This was heard at the Table and by several members.

I would ask you to refer to the Table to confirm whether that was indeed the case and to ask the hon. member immediately to make amends for this breach of decorum, because this use of the word "traitor" reflects on the legitimacy of my right to sit in this House.

The Speaker: My dear colleague, I myself did not hear the term used. The hon. member in question is here in the House, and I will give him the floor.

Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes, the debate in Quebec is getting under way, and it is true we have been hearing all kinds of comments from the opposition these last few months about federalist forces, Liberals, and members lawfully elected in Quebec.

I admit I did use the term, but not in speaking to the hon. member. I agree that in the heat of debate, people say certain things. I certainly do apologize for using this term here in the House.

The Speaker: I accept your apologies on behalf of the House of Commons.

I believe there is another point of order. The government whip.

[English]

QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I call again to the Speaker's attention an issue that occurred today as well as one day last week in the House of Commons. It is the rule or the citation of Beauchesne's and the customs of this House with regard to anticipating orders of the day.

(1505)

Mr. Speaker, you will know that under the heading "Oral Questions" in Beauchesne's 6th edition, citation 410 states:

In 1986 the Speaker put forth further views in light of more recent conditions and precedents.

This was with regard to what could and could not be asked in question period. I refer to paragraph (14) of citation 410 which states:

Questions should not anticipate an Order of the Day although this does not apply to the budget process.

Points of Order

When members refer to bills that are before the House, unless those bills are part of the budget process, they should not be raised at question period if they are the subject of the debate that day in the House.

Not only are we talking about an issue which is listed on today's Projected Order of Business as being before the House, we are in fact talking about a bill that was the subject of discussion in the House only 15 or 20 minutes before it was raised by the hon. leader of the Reform Party.

Therefore, it is my submission that not only would it be a breach if members raised something which is on today's Projected Order of Business, but it is even more true when the debate was the subject immediately prior to question period and the House is reasonably aware that it will be the debate before the House immediately after question period.

Therefore, I submit that this kind of question is out of order. I ask the Chair to rule it that way in the future.

I also want to ask the Speaker about the rule of anticipation generally. Citation 512 of Beauchesne's states:

(2) The rule against anticipation is that a matter must not be anticipated if it is contained in a more effective form of proceeding than the proceeding by which it is sought to be anticipated, but it may be anticipated if it is contained in an equally or less effective form.

This is in reference to a 1936 application of that rule which basically states that if there is a more effective method of raising something it should not then be anticipated in this way.

I want to conclude by suggesting respectfully to the Chair that when a subject is discussed in debate immediately prior and immediately after question period, to raise it during question period under the pretence that it is not anticipating an Order of the Day is a flagrant abuse of the customs and traditions of the House.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this matter came up a couple of days ago and we responded to the allegation at that time. The question was very broadly based. It did not deal specifically with the legislation. Today it was obvious that the leader of the Reform Party was addressing his question to the minister responsible for the Treasury Board in relation to how he justified this on the one hand versus what he was doing with the civil service and general belt tightening on the other hand.

Therefore, it was a very broadly based question purposely crafted so it would not be in conflict with the standing orders. Mr. Speaker, I ask you to rule in that respect.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the submissions made by the hon. member for Kindersley—

Lloydminster only bolster the point made by the chief government whip. The three questions we are saying were out of order were directed to the minister responsible for the bill that is being debated in the House all day today.

Therefore, for the hon. member to suggest that by somehow asking the President of the Treasury Board about his own bill the question is in order is utter rubbish. Those questions were out of order. It was as plain as plain could be.

(1510)

I invite Your Honour when future questions arise concerning matters that are before the House for discussion on Orders of the Day to apply the strictures contained in Beauchesne, citations 409 and 410, both of which I quoted to the House in my remarks last Thursday when the member for Beaver River did precisely the same thing.

The citations in Beauchesne are intended to be mandatory guidelines directed to the order of question period. If the guidelines contained in Beauchesne are not going to be enforced and accepted by members, then the only solution is to change the standing orders of the House to put mandatory guidelines in them that then will be enforced.

I do not prefer that option and I am sure you do not, Mr. Speaker. There are times when we do not need to have hard and fast rules, when it is better to have guidelines which these are. They are guidelines. Consistent breaching of guidelines by using question period to further the debate on government legislation is improper. It has been condemned by Beauchesne. It is against the guideline in Beauchesne. It has been condemned by previous committees that have helped establish these guidelines in consultation with the Speaker.

In my submission the hon. member for Calgary Southwest should be embarrassed that he asked those questions today. I invite Your Honour in future to rule such questions out of order.

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is on the same point of order.

The matter that was raised in question period is about an issue that is very topical. The subject matter is of great interest to all Canadians. No reference was made to any specific issue that is being debated in the House. We cleared this matter with the people we are supposed to clear these matters with to get proper guidance and proper assurance that we are following the procedures.

This is nothing more than two bookworms whining and complaining about this issue.

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to say briefly that after I heard these interventions, it would seem to me that they are not being critical of my leader or

anyone who raised this question, but in fact they are calling your judgment into question. I think that is reprehensible.

The Speaker: The Chair takes no offence when points of order are raised in the House. I like to get advice from both sides so that we can see what is the lay of the land.

As to the remark from the hon. member for Beaver River, with all respect to her, I want her to know that I take no offence at these points of order being raised.

When this was raised last week I mentioned to hon. members that sometimes we are skirting the rules very closely. At that time I asked all hon. members give enough latitude to the Chair so we could have the normal give and take that occurs in question period.

It is true when we are debating a certain bill, I as your Speaker listen very closely both to the questions and to the answers. I have to wait until a question is asked to know whether I am going to make a ruling on it being in order or out of order.

I asked hon. members last week to please give your Speaker enough latitude to be able to conduct these question and answer periods for the benefit of the House. I thank both members of the government party for their interventions and all three interveners for the Reform Party. What sets questions up, and you know this and I know it, is the preamble. I have given all latitude to members asking questions and even in the responses I have allowed ministers and responders—

(1515)

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Please colleagues, I am trying to explain this for all of us. I give as much latitude as I can so that we can get at the facts, whatever they are.

If in my opinion a matter does not refer directly to the bill, if I feel it is in a general enough area, I will permit the question. I caution all hon. members that when we are crafting our questions it is incumbent that, if I might say with all respect, the Chair should be reasonably comfortable that the question is indeed in order. The more your Speaker is pushed to the line, the more likely he is to intervene on the questions.

I appeal to all hon. members in the crafting of the questions to please, if we have a bill being debated on that day, to consider that the questions be general enough in nature, which I judged them to be today, so that the questions can be asked. If you push your Speaker too close to the line, then of course I will intervene, as I have in the past.

All that to say that the points are well taken on this side. The points are well founded. The points made on the other side are equally good in the sense that they give a balance to the Chair as

Government Orders

to where we are going. With your continued support I will see to it that the question period is conducted in a civilized manner with respect on both sides and all members are carrying out their responsibilities in the way they should.

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this just arose while we were listening.

The whip hollered across: “You should be ashamed, but then again you probably do not know shame”. I ask him to withdraw that. Perhaps that would help clean up the level of debate. He said it, he knows it. Perhaps you could ask him to withdraw it.

The Speaker: Colleagues, I did not hear that.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will gladly admit to saying it and I will withdraw it, but it is not out of order.

The Speaker: We have a withdrawal. Remember, tomorrow is Wednesday.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT RETIRING ALLOWANCES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-85, an act to amend the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act and to provide for the continuation of a certain provision, be read the second time and referred to a committee; and on the motion that the question be now put.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has six minutes remaining in his intervention.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I will reflect on the position I took in my town hall meetings. I signed a document in front of my constituents saying that I would not accept the current MP pension. Those witnesses signed as well. I found that to be a different way to handle this issue rather than a tired old promise about the MP pension plan.

I was lucky enough, and some would not consider it so, to be elected to this position. I went to the department of supply and services my very first day here and said that I did not want to take part in the MP pension plan. I told the young man that I had made a promise to my constituents. The MP pension plan was not fair and I wanted to withdraw from it. He told me I was crazy, that it was a lot of loot. I agreed that it was a lot of loot, but asked how I could withdraw. He told me I could not withdraw. I did not want to participate so I asked him what I should do. He said that the money would be taken from me, but I could sign a document saying that I would not participate in the MP pension plan.

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(1520)

That is what I did. I wrote down that I did not wish to accept the MP pension plan and asked that the contribution not be taken off my paycheque. The young fellow told me that I was the first MP in Canadian history to withdraw from the MP pension plan.

I reflected on his comment that I was crazy, that it was a lot of loot. Why would a sensible person in my position withdraw from the MP pension plan? Am I a bit loony? Am I independently wealthy? Can I say this is insignificant to me?

In my lifetime I have raised seven children on one income. In 25 years of practice in medicine I have saved \$80,000 toward my retirement by putting money into RRSPs. That money is the only money I will draw when I retire. I need a pension.

I asked my constituents: Do you think that an MP should get a pension? Universally they said you bet, but all it needs is to be fair. When I asked what they considered to be fair, they simply said: "You put up a buck and we will put up a buck. It goes in the pot and when the pot is empty you are done". That is what Reformers are asking for.

I ask my Liberal colleagues in their caucus meetings to think about the discussion which took place on this issue. New members of Parliament faced people on their doorsteps as I did. There are 100 brand new Liberals who know they are wrong on the MP pension issue.

This is not a partisan issue. It is an issue that reflects integrity. Why has government lost integrity? I have gone over statements that were made over the last 15 years, back to 1976, concerning the budget. "Now that the recovery is well established and private spending is rising, it is equally appropriate these record deficits should recede". That was a statement by Donald Macdonald.

Michael Wilson: "When the government came to office we encountered a debt problem of massive proportions. The buck was passed to us. Well, the buck stops here". On we go to Don Mazankowski: "We will substantially reduce the deficit". All the while the deficit was climbing, going to the ceiling. Finally, we get to the government of today which says exactly the same thing.

Is there integrity in these Chambers? We are told that MPs will be eligible for pension at age 55. I got my calculator out and calculated the average age of MPs in the House. It is 49.4 years. Think of it. We will not have to wait long.

I went home and asked the people in my riding, the butcher in Pincher Creek, the pharmacist in Blairmore, the grain farmer in Vulcan, the housewife in Fort Macleod, the retired doctor in Claresholm, the stockman in Nanton, the nurse in High River,

the barber in Okotoks, the teacher in Bragg Creek, the elder on the Siksika Nation: What do you think of the newly reformed pension plan. They replied this pension plan is wrong.

I started my intervention today by saying I wanted to thank the Liberals opposite, and I do. I want to thank them for giving me the opportunity of telling my constituents that if I choose, I can run in Macleod for the rest of my days on this issue alone. I have been given the platform that tells people there is integrity in some parts of the House of Commons.

As I did for the pension plan when I arrived, I will be withdrawing my name from this pension plan, as will my colleagues. I wish to say loudly and clearly to the House that I would like a fair pension. I would like to be able to look my constituents in the eye and say: "You put up a dollar for me and I will put up a dollar which will go toward my retirement". That is fair, that is just, that is equitable, that is proper. I will not take this pension plan.

(1525)

In every forum, think of it for the next election. Line up the candidates and ask whether they will take the MP pension plan. As was said when I campaigned: "Oh, no". There is a group who will not take this pension plan but will reform it. How will they reform it? With 100 more Reformers here, a transmission across the floor and then the MP pension plan will be reformed and reformed properly.

Once again, thanks to Liberal strategists, thanks to senior cabinet ministers, thanks to the class of '88, thanks to all those who did not listen to the new Liberals, thanks to the old time politicians and thanks to the Bloc for making Reformers the only individuals in this Parliament with integrity on this issue. Thank you very much.

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on questions and comments, I share something in common with the previous speaker. Having served more than 15 years in this House, the legislation before us does not affect me either. It does not affect him because he has not earned a pension. It does not affect me because I have already earned one and this law is not retroactive and does not take away property and contributions we have already acquired.

I note with some interest that his constituents have told him they will accept a pension plan where the government adds one dollar, as the employer I suppose, to every dollar that MPs put into the pension plan. I have done some of the calculations.

In my own case over 15 years, had the government contributed dollar for dollar to my contributions and had we been able to earn the kind of interest that is available through RRSPs, the accumulated value of those funds at 8 per cent would have been more than enough for me to have taken the equivalent to what I

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am going to be getting if and when I retire at the maximum amount forever. When I died my estate would still get the bulk of the money.

That is with the kind of contributions that were made in the past 15 or 16 years. The only difference is that the government has not been contributing one dollar each year. Its contributions have had to come willy-nilly whenever the fund runs dry.

The other factor that most of the public and certainly my friends in the Reform Party seem to be missing is that the program we were all forced into when we became members a long time ago pays for the use of the funds that we have contributed. They go essentially to the government to use and spend as it chooses. At the end of each year, it allocates 4 per cent simple interest for the use of those funds. The funds have not been earning market rates of interest. Our pension deductions have been used to subsidize the operation of government.

Miss Grey: We have to pay tax on the 7 per cent.

Mr. Althouse: Yes and when we start to collect pension afterward, anyone who collects the pension will be paying tax on it as the money comes back. When we pay into the RRSP we do not pay taxes either and that is the other option available.

I understand from the hon. member who just spoke that his constituents told him they would accept a pension where the member puts in a dollar which is matched by the government and is treated like an RRSP. The point I am making to the House is had that option been open to older members such as myself when we came here, we would have such a large fund accumulated that we could take money out at 8 per cent and we would be taking a larger pension than we will now be getting under this fund.

(1530)

Our pension contributions have been used to subsidize the operations of government, and I think it is not unfair for government in those few cases, when those members retire, to make up for the fact that it got very cheap money at 4 per cent simple interest over all those years of contribution.

I think we are saying virtually the same thing. I am in agreement with the constituents my hon. friend just mentioned. Had we had that option open to us, those of us who have served 15 or more years would have had a bigger pool of money than using the current fund. The proposition he is offering is actually a richer form of supplementing people who have served in the House of Commons than the old system, and there is leftover money in the fund, which becomes the property of the retired member and becomes the property of his heirs and successors after him.

I can understand the proposal that is being put forward by members of the Reform Party. It is a very good proposal, because it leaves long-term members more money and it leaves a fund for their heirs and successors, which the current fund does not.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe that the hon. member for Mackenzie said he was rising on questions and comments. If he did, that would indicate that he thought we were in 20-minute speeches. In fact we are in 10-minute speeches, so the House will treat his questions or comments as being an intervention.

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Lisgar—Marquette, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, being a farmer, I always say that a bin of grain is a bin of grain. When I see a pension of \$5 million, it is \$5 million. It amazes me: one member says that if we only put in a dollar we get it and another member says that if we put in five or six we will get that. What mathematics are correct?

I have known a lot of business people and I have known a lot of farmers, and for some reason I have not been able to find those guys with \$5 million pensions. Where are they hiding?

It is a pleasure to address this bill. I also like to remind the members across the way that during the election campaign one of the main issues was that of MP pensions. Canadians clearly voiced their opposition to overly generous pensions. They were seen as yet another example of the greed and the self-serving interests of the government of the day. We heard so much about Mr. Beatty's pension during that time, and a few others, and the Liberals kept reminding us of those pensions. Now they have all of a sudden forgotten about that. Maybe we need another election.

Even when the Liberals realized that their pensions were glorified, they kept harping on them. It reminds me a little of a Fordson Major tractor: when you had to start that thing you had to really turn the crank, because if it was turned halfway it would backfire and break your arm. I think it held the record for broken arms.

When I looked at the recent Manitoba election, there were at least two broken arms on every Liberal. It was the gun registration and the pension plan that left them with a little toehold of Liberal policy in Manitoba. I would like to emphasize that they should remember that taxpayers do have a vote. So far we still have that opportunity.

The bill establishes a minimum age of 55 for eligibility and it eliminates double dipping. Hurray. That is what we wanted. That is a good point, but it does not do the whole job. While the age limit has been increased, the interest on this well funded plan keeps multiplying. When I look at the calculations, I think it is something like a 10 per cent decrease if it is calculated out to the final end.

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(1535)

When I look at some of the people and the cuts they have taken, especially in western Canada, when I look at the WGTA and some of these things, 10 per cent is minimum. I do not know how I am supposed to convince my farmer friends, when 48 per cent of their income is coming from off farm jobs, that we politicians need a \$5 million pension. That disturbs me, really.

I heard the previous speaker admonish us to be reasonable and to address issues the way they should be addressed. We keep badgering each other about this pension plan and will not do anything about it. That bothers me.

A 10 per cent cut over all the time that we debated this issue is not enough. When I look at the problems we have in the farm community, when I look at the problems we have in the undernourished children in our schools and certain places, how can I justify this?

It is up to us MPs to finally buckle down and make some decisions. I was very impressed with the students we have had over the last couple of weeks under the forum for young Canadians and how well informed these people are, how they have started looking at the issues of the day. I was impressed by one of the students when she said: "Mr. Hoepfner, we are prepared to take the cuts. We are prepared to take a lower standard of living if you somehow give us the opportunity to get our feet on the ground to do it."

If I look at the situation today, if we do not make those tough decisions and bring that deficit down to zero, these students will not have the opportunity to do what they know they should be doing. It is up to us to give these students that opportunity. If we do not, history will record us as those MPs who did not have the willpower, who did not take the opportunity they had to pass on the torch to future generations so that they could at least do what has to be done.

When I look at the past 25 years of government operations and see \$550 billion passed onto the backs of future generations, I am sick when I even think of this pension plan. It is disgusting that we have to debate it even, that we cannot take the necessary steps to make it honest and to make it accountable. If we do not, we will be held accountable. We cannot pass that blame on to anybody else. It is imperative that we make this decision, that we do not pass on criticism continually.

When I heard the hon. member the other day mentioning that we as Reformers were now brainwashing teachers and that students were writing him letters about this gold plated pension plan, I said maybe there is hope. I will take that responsibility for having that effect, if we are creating it. It is a must. It is a must not because we want to be put on a level playing field, but it is a must that we preserve this country. This country is too great

to let it hit the wall. I have seen countries that have done it, and I do not want to have the consequences.

When I look today at the Mexican situation, it looked so bright just a year ago and then all of a sudden, because of a few bad political mistakes, boom, it hit the wall. What is happening today? When one looks at Chiapas today, its people are getting restless. I hate to think even of what would happen if they start revolting.

I again urge members in the House to make the decision. Let us not fool around. Let us not badger each other. We know that \$5 million for a pension plan is too much today.

(1540)

In the future, some day when we get the country back to the prosperity it should have, maybe it is attainable. Let the future generations do it because they will have to cope with \$5.5 billion of debt, which they had absolutely nothing to do with.

We should give them that opportunity to use their expertise, to use their enthusiasm, and not try to squash that. If we as members in this House do not react to their request, we are going to be recorded in history as being the ones who squashed their incentive, their initiative. I think we deserve to do that much in the House.

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on the motion before us today to move this bill one further step along the way.

The hon. government whip this morning called for the question to be put in order to move this bill on to committee. I think that is a wonderful idea. When this bill goes to committee, we will be calling witnesses to find out what they think of this bill. If we are to call in interested people regarding this bill, every taxpayer in the country deserves to be heard with their opinion on this bill. Bring them in, bring them all in.

The Reform Party would be quite willing in this particular situation to approve a travel budget for this committee to go right across the country to find out what taxpayers think of this bill. All taxpayers have an interest in this bill, not just the ones around here, not the special interest groups we normally hear from, but the taxpayers, each and every one of them, those who have to squeak by and eke out a meagre income and yet pay taxes for us, as well the rich and the famous who do not mind paying their taxes, but even the small individual Canadians who have to be squeezed by Revenue Canada to get that last nickel out of them.

We have heard how the Minister of National Revenue has said that they are going to be aggressive to ensure that tax collection policies collect the taxes owing. We expect these people to pay the taxes while we sit in the lap of luxury for the rest of lives. These are the people we should be hearing from. They want to be heard.

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That is why I think this committee should travel right across the country and stop at every little town, village, and city along the way to find out if there is a consensus for the government's policies it has brought in on this particular bill, if there is a consensus in the country to support what it is trying to do. I very much doubt it. I do not think there is any consensus whatsoever. In fact if there is any consensus it is in total and absolute opposition to this bill introduced by the government.

I think the motion today is quite appropriate, that we move on to the committee stage. Let Canadians speak. Let them be heard. We have talked for days in this House on this particular subject. There has been acrimony and animosity. Let us find out what Canadians, the rank and file, really think about this subject. I am quite sure that they support the Reform Party's position, which is if you want a pension let it be reasonable.

According to the Deputy Prime Minister, we have made such great sacrifices. I said before, show me one person in the House who has been dragged in here kicking and screaming to serve. I do not think there is one, not one. Therefore there is no sacrifice. Everyone who sits in this House is here because they want to be in the House. That is the reality of it all. It is not the idea that we have served so much and we have given so much that we are entitled to live in the lap of luxury at the taxpayer's expense for the rest of our lives. That is not defensible in this day and age. The previous speaker talked about how he would not want this wonderful country to hit the wall. Neither would I. We all know that is a possibility.

(1545)

We are standing here today debating a bill that will make legislators rich for the rest of their lives. A few weeks ago we debated a budget and looked at the very real consequences and possibilities of the country hitting the wall. Future generations will ask: "Where were they when we hit the wall?" I will tell the House where we are. We are debating how we can keep ourselves rich.

An hon. member: How we can protect ourselves.

Mr. Williams: How we can protect ourselves so that everybody else who has no say in the House except through us will have to depend on the decisions made in the House.

The economy will rise or fall based on the decisions made in the House. We will or will not hit the wall based on the decisions made in the House, but we will look after ourselves. We will be all right, Jack. They will point the finger at us and say: "We elected you to run the country on our behalf. We wanted responsible government. We wanted honest government. We wanted a government that would provide jobs for us, education for us and a future for our children". That is why we are here.

What have we done? We brought in Bill C-85 that will let us be rich for the rest of our lives.

This brings to mind a famous French queen who said: "Let them eat cake". We will be eating cake while we expect everybody else to get out there to try to find a job that will pay them an income so that one bread winner can go out to work and the other spouse can stay at home to raise a family. We do not even see that in Canadian any more. Jobs of that kind are few and far between. Yet there are MPs in the House who expect to retire in the lap of luxury and without having to work. Prior to the introduction of the bill there was one member who would have received \$70,000—odd a year. I believe that continues to apply in some cases.

At age 55, without having to work, they will be able to live the rest of their lives in the lap of luxury without having to produce a single thing while Canadians will have to work hard, slave hard, do without and pay more taxes for us. I cannot justify it. I do not think any one of my Reform colleagues could justify it. They have spoken one after the other, saying they will not take the pension.

I will not take the pension. I cannot go back to St. Albert, stand before my constituents and say I will opt in, thank you very much, I appreciate the money. When they are in my office saying that they have no jobs, what am I supposed to say?

Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River): Let them eat cake.

Mr. Williams: No, I cannot say that because my responsibility is to lead, to govern and to represent the people of St. Albert. I do not think they sent me down here to vote for this kind of largess for myself at their expense.

The last budget told us that 45,000 civil servants with families and children would be laid off. Their careers have come to a full stop. Some of them are young and perhaps can get started again. Some are middle aged and some are looking at retirement not that far away. They say: "I had a career. I worked hard. I made my contribution to the country. I have earned my salary. I have made my pension contributions". The pension they can expect is a lot less than half of what we can expect. They made their pension contributions and all of a sudden the curtain came down and that was the end of it: "Thank you very much. We do not need you any more. You are out on the street and you can look for a job".

(1550)

Where are the jobs? Where are they? Surely it is the responsibility of the House to provide jobs and they are not there. There will be 45,000 people with families on UI with their self-esteem destroyed and with their careers in tatters and ruins, and we are debating Bill C-85 to make ourselves rich.

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I have a very serious problem with Bill C-85. I have a very serious problem with members of the government who stand to say how greatly we have sacrificed and how much we have given to the country. There are tens of thousands of unspoken, unnamed Canadians out there who are giving every bit as much, even more than we are.

The recognition they get is a Canada pension plan that perhaps may not even have any money in it to provide any kind of pension for them when they retire. We are now talking about elevating the age from 65 to 67 while for ourselves it is 55. Surely the double standard should cease. That is what we are saying. The double standard between those who legislate and those who are legislated has to cease. Why do we not start right here with Bill C-85, have it withdrawn completely and bring it back with a reasonable pension?

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting to note that virtually the only people speaking to the issue are the people from the Reform Party. It is particularly interesting to note because a debate implies there are two sides: the good side and the bad side or the up side and the down side. In this case it is interesting that virtually none of the Liberal members of Parliament are prepared to stand in an attempt to defend this pension plan.

It is also instructive to take a look at what else is happening in the country in legislatures. I think of the B.C. Liberal leader. I will quickly read a news release that was put out under his name on April 22:

B.C. Liberal Leader Gordon Campbell announced today that pensions for Members of the Legislature will be eliminated under a B.C. Liberal government.

Campbell said it's time to put an end to the special pension and tax privileges that have traditionally been given to MLAs in British Columbia. "Elected officials should be treated no differently than any other British Columbian when it comes to receiving pension benefits from taxpayers. The MLA pension is not appropriate for a job that is based on an elected term of five years".

"Most people believe MLAs deserve fair and appropriate compensation. To ensure that happens an independent commission should be established", said Campbell. "There should be a single standard for all people of this province with MLAs paying the same taxes and having the same choices as other British Columbians".

Under the current system an MLA can receive a monthly pension if the member has served for seven years or more or has served in more than two Legislative Assemblies. "We don't want to penalize people for running for public office but we also do not believe there should be special perks".

This is interesting because Mr. Campbell is a Liberal. I have always felt that a Liberal is a Liberal is a Liberal. He spoke of the old style Liberal politicians that seem to inhabit this place.

Campbell said that old style politicians set up systems that have isolated them from the realities that British Columbians face on a daily basis. "That's why B.C. Liberals say no special pensions and no special tax benefits for MLAs".

I wonder what happens when members like the member for Vancouver Quadra or the member for Vancouver Centre or the member for Victoria, a cabinet minister, manage to get across the mountains from British Columbia. Is there a change in the water in Ottawa? Is there a change in the smog in Ottawa? What is it that makes the difference for members who come from Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia? What happens when they arrive in Ottawa that suddenly they seem to be in absolute total contradiction to the leader of the B.C. Liberal Party or the Leader of the Opposition.

(1555)

It is not just British Columbians who seem to have this gross failure of understanding, some kind of a short circuit somewhere. It would seem as though the Ontario Liberals, currently seeking a mandate for their members of the provincial Parliament, have seen the light. For some reason it seems to completely elude the comprehension of the people who bear the Liberal stripe and come to the House.

There is a major difference between the federal and Ontario Liberal proposals. The difference is a defined contribution plan versus a defined benefit plan. These people are calling for a defined benefit plan so that the Canadian taxpayer will be on the hook and continue to pay and pay and pay for members no matter what happens. That is a defined benefit plan.

The Ontario Liberals are calling for a defined contribution plan, which is precisely what the federal Reform Party is asking for. We are simply saying that we should be going to a growing industry standard, which is matching dollar for dollar. In a defined benefit plan, if the employer and employee contributions plus plan investment performance do not match the promise made by the employer, the employer has an unfunded pension liability.

That leads me to members who were in the House in a previous Parliament. Some of them are currently in the House. Politicians were telling Canadians that there was no problem, that their porky pension plan was taken care of. Lo and behold, a few years ago Canadians were suddenly told: "Oops, we made a small \$110 million mistake. Isn't that too bad? We will make sure we are properly funded. We will just take \$110 million for ourselves from general revenues".

Although that was supposed to have resolved the situation, the following year they had to take another number in the tens of millions of dollars from the poor, hard working, overburdened, much shackled taxpayer. This is absolutely unconscionable.

I ask again as I did at the start of my address why it is, if federal Liberals are right and we are wrong, that we have virtually zero participation by Liberal members of the House in

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the issue. Why is it that we have put up tens and tens of speakers out of our 52, whereas they have only put up a handful on the issue?

Mr. Hermanson: We are opting out and they are not.

Mr. Abbott: That could be. We are opting out and they are not. Maybe that says something.

There has been a lot of talk about what is fair for an ordinary Canadian to be able to come to the House of Commons. I think of myself as a relatively ordinary Canadian with a mortgage and a couple of used cars. I live off the salary I achieve through my work in the House of Commons. I am not independently wealthy. By opting out, the government has seen to it that I and the rest of the Reform Party members who are to opt out in good conscience will be personally severely disadvantaged financially.

(1600)

It is punitive. All we are asking in very simple terms is a defined contribution on the part of the employer, namely the people of Canada, a matching of \$1 for \$1. Instead of that, the government is saying: "Either you come in and share the booty, get in on this \$3.50 contribution for every \$1 that you put in and become a millionaire at the expense of Canadian taxpayers or you are out without anything. You get no matching funds. You get no matching contribution".

I find it exceptionally ironic that members opposite will frequently speak up and say that we are taking some kind of advantage, that we are trying to take some kind of political gain. This is not a case of political gain. This has to do with a commitment to the Canadian people on the part of Reform politicians that we would listen to them in the same way that the Liberal leader in the province of British Columbia and the Liberal leader in the province of Ontario have clearly listened to the people of their provinces.

Justice must be done in this case. Justice is the exposure of this obscene plan that the Liberals are trying to perpetrate on the people of Canada. Let us take a quick look at how they managed to bring the legislation into the House.

A couple of Fridays ago there was the Progressive Conservative wake in Hull. Knowing that some people would be turning up at that thing, the Liberals chose that day to introduce their legislation. It was a Friday afternoon. If the Liberals really thought this legislation was worthwhile and would be accepted by the Canadian people, why would they try to get it into the House in the quietest possible manner when there might possibly be a diversion across the river?

Mr. Hermanson: They are ashamed of it.

Mr. Abbott: That could be. Maybe they are ashamed of it.

Let us look at the events of last Thursday. We came to the House to debate. Again, there are up sides and down sides. There is good and there is bad. That is what debate is all about.

We rose to speak in the debate. One or two Liberals ended up speaking rather sheepishly about it. Near the end of the day they pulled a bit of a prank. They decided we would be able to debate this all night long if we wanted to. They knew full well that what they were doing—the people of Canada must understand this—was getting the bill into and out of the House so fast it would make a lightning bolt look slow. They wanted to slide the bill through so quickly that there was no way that anybody would see the blur going by.

It makes me think of the little mouse that I had under the seat of my car one time. I could hear a little rustle when I was driving along at night. When I stopped I would still hear the rustling going on. I turned on the light and could see a little brown blur. Then it would disappear.

That is what the Liberals were trying to do with this legislation, get it out of the light of the parliamentary channel, the light of this process so that Canadians would not realize that once again the Liberals had done it to them.

Mr. Milliken: We are giving you all kinds of time to explain.

Mr. Abbott: I will explain it further to the people.

The Reform Party found a procedural way around it and the whip really went rather ballistic on Thursday night. It was something to see.

We are exposing the bill to the Canadian people. I for one would vote for millions of dollars of travel so that the parliamentary committee could take this bill around Canada and expose it to Canadians. The government would then be able to see what the people of Canada really think of this legislation.

(1605)

Mr. Lee Morrison (Swift Current—Maple Creek—Assiniboia, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I do not mind admitting that on election night in October 1993 my family and I were thrilled and proud that I would be coming to this place. Now when strangers on aeroplanes ask me the inevitable question: "What do you do?", I usually tell them, quite truthfully, that I am a farmer and a retired engineer. I do not ordinarily mention this aspect of my life unless the conversation turns to politics.

It is not entirely because of the obscene pension plan which we are debating today, although that is certainly a major part of it. I have stated publicly on many occasions that I will never be a party to this daylight robbery, so it is easy to dissociate myself

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from the unrestrained greed which is going to be allowed to continue, with minor modifications, if Bill C-85 is passed in its present form.

It is no great honour to participate in a charade. My colleagues and I on both sides of the House know, and the public knows, that what we say about Bill C-85 or any other bill is of little consequence. A dozen or so people make the decisions and all of the debate in the world will not change those decisions.

Whenever I hear an articulate and well researched speech in this place I think: "My God, what a waste". If the argument had been presented at a rural municipal council meeting where the participants, working essentially without remuneration, actually make decisions, the speech would have had great value.

I look around me and I see less than a dozen members. We are outnumbered by the clerks, the stenographers, the translators and the pages who make this place work. Where are the spear carriers? Where is the chorus? They are not here because they know that their presence is not required. Three times during debate on this bill there have been quorum calls. The reason is clear.

Hon. members on both sides of the House know that it does not really matter what we do about it here or what we say about it here. Even if government backbenchers and members of the opposition were here in great numbers, the ministers, the people who we might wish to influence, are almost never here except for question period. Then we ask them questions which we know will not be answered and the ministers do what is expected of them: they do not answer. They and their parliamentary secretaries respond like naughty children. The atmosphere of this place rapidly degenerates to that of a zoo at feeding time. I have to admit that I am as guilty as anyone.

Does the role of straight man or straight woman to the inner cabinet really merit a pension worth anything from a few hundred thousand to millions of dollars? I doubt it. Does it merit a pension scheme four times richer than anything available in the private sector? I doubt it.

The most objectionable features of Bill C-85 have been thoroughly explored by my colleagues, but as far as I can recall nobody has yet referred to the fact that the bill is silent on the question of former members who are dipping into this particular goody bag.

With the Speaker's indulgence I will read a couple of paragraphs from a letter to the editor in last week's *Western Producer* by Mr. Delon Bleakney of Turtleford, Saskatchewan. It reads:

I think we should deal retroactively with the gold-plated pensions of the MPs who voted for them for themselves while systematically bankrupting our country over the last 25 years. Somewhere in our civil service there must be some financial wizards capable of calculating the contributions (plus interest) that our MPs, serving and retired, have made to their pensions.

The people of Canada might even be generous enough as employers to kick in a percentage consistent with private plans.

When these calculations are complete, I suggest that we try to borrow enough money to issue each of the "trouthees" with a cheque. (The borrowing shouldn't be hard, that is one thing they do excel at.) This cheque can be accompanied by an explanation of the calculations and the advisement "Here is your pension, you are responsible for yourself henceforth".

(1610)

In this country retroactive legislation to relieve governments of contractual obligations or to impose financial obligations on citizens is certainly nothing new. The only novelty of my proposal is that it would be aimed at politicians instead of the public.

Saskatchewan did it with the GRIP program. Alberta did it years ago in order to tear up royalty agreements. This very government did it with the helicopter deal and is now trying to do it with the Pearson deal. Our very own Minister of Justice has been very busy instituting retroactive regulations to confiscate the property of Canadian gun owners without even going through the motions of parliamentary democracy. There are retroactive orders in council to deprive Canadians of their lawfully required property.

Defence of the gold plated MP pension plan sullies all of us in this place. We should be talking of eliminating them, not modifying them. We are all touched by this national scandal regardless of the personal stands which we may take in this place on this matter.

I beg members for the sake of the reputation of us and of this place to defeat Bill C-85 so that we can all stand a little straighter and walk a little taller.

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was not supposed to speak in the House today. I was not planning to do so but I was touched by a few of the arguments of my friends from the Reform Party.

One of my friends from the Reform Party said, and I fully agree with him, that we the people of the House of Commons are getting rich while the poor people in Canada are getting poorer every day.

First, the goal of the Bloc Québécois is the sovereignty of Quebec. There will be a referendum soon. If we win it, and I think we will, all the people from the Bloc will lose their jobs and we will have no pension. We are not in the debate for that reason.

Second, I was also touched by an argument that is often brought forward by my friends in the Reform and I fully agree with that argument too. Slowly but surely we are hitting the wall and it is going to be quite soon.

I was reading this morning that a few economists, probably Canadian economists, were talking about a possible recession not later than the beginning of 1996. I saw a few papers last week where a few economists from the United States were talking

about a possible slowdown in the U.S., say in 1997. All these things ahead of us are not good news at all.

Also we accept the fact that the *Wall Street Journal* was talking of a possible breakdown of Canada from an economical point of view. We can look at the budget too. My friends from the Reform Party said it many times and I agree with a lot of their suggestions.

(1615)

If we look at the budget we see all the cuts and we very well know that despite the billions cut the debt problem will be there next year and the year after. We are in a vicious circle and if we do not do something, nothing will get us out of this circle.

Since the beginning of this Parliament I have been listening to the ideas of my friends from the Reform Party. If there is one thing I realized throughout all the arguments, I never said it before but I will say now, people in the Reform Party came here with a certain naive point of view. I say very positively they had a new way of seeing things. They wanted to change things in a system that has been going on and on forever. We have to have a naive point of view to change things.

Most people were in a type of profound deception and realized today that despite all the good ideas nothing will be changed. Up to a certain point I understand their feelings. The Reform Party should realize that despite all the good ideas it has, and some are effectively good ideas, it will never be able to put them to the test because the political situation will not allow it.

Perhaps my friends will not like this comment, but the Reform Party will never be elected in Quebec. My friends from the Reform who were second in many areas in Ontario could very well think of winning an election if Quebec were not there.

My friends should think seriously about supporting the sovereignty of Quebec. Otherwise all the good ideas will stay good ideas with no meaning at all because the Reform will never be in power to put those ideas to work.

I remind my friends we do not want to destroy Canada. We fully understand Canada must go through a profound change. We think one change has to be a political one. Our friends believe and I also believe it also has to be an economic change. We are ready to make the first part of the change, a political one, to become sovereign, and to take our fair share of the Canadian assets and the debt and pay it. Every day we will pay our share of the debt and we will go on. Canadians will be able to control their country the way they want to and Reform will be able to think seriously about getting into power and making the major changes it feels it must make. For the moment this is only a dream.

About three months ago I had a discussion with one of my friends from the Reform Party. He told me the only thing Quebec wants is more power and more money. My friend is absolutely

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right. What my friend did not seem to understand is that it is the federalists in Quebec who that. The sovereignists do not want that at all. We do not want more power and more money. We want all the power and no money at all. We want to be at home in Quebec. We will pay our fair share of the debt and the Reform Party will be able to get into power in Canada and make the major changes.

For the moment this idea may seem strange but it is one to think about. I hope my friends will think about it.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to address the issue today.

If one issue has given ordinary Canadians a very sour view of politicians it is the grossly over generous MP pension plan. It has become a symbol of the elitist mentality that has overtaken our politicians when they are entrusted with the strings of the public purse.

(1620)

It seems when we get there we give people the impression we think on a higher level. This MP pension plan has become a symbol for that type of elitist mentality. People have become so cynical about those who are put in power as their elected representatives that they are skeptical that any good thing can come out of this place. The cynicism is so widespread they do not believe a thing politicians say any longer.

When I worked in underdeveloped countries we lived out in the rain forest. In our home, besides cockroaches, ants and all that other kind of stuff, we had tiny lizards called geckos. My wife did not like these things so she ask our son to throw them out. If one tries to grab them and is not quick enough and only catches their tail, they have the amazing capacity to drop their tail. They are not harmed. In one's hand is this wildly wiggling tail and the gecko gets away.

When I came back to Canada I saw the same thing in our political arena. We have an election and when the election is done all we are left with is a wildly wiggling tongue. We have these politicians who make these promises, their tongues wiggling wildly, and they escape to Ottawa. They do their thing there. They line their pockets with this over generous MP pension plan. The public is outraged at the money being spent on this MP pension plan. They think it is a public disgrace.

There are some secondary effects to the MP pension plan. People are concerned about the millions being paid out through the plan. It is a disgrace. It is a plan put in place by the very people who will benefit from it. The people here use the taxpayers' hard earned money to line their pockets and people find that unacceptable.

However, there is something else. There are some secondary effects to the MP pension plan. The MP pension plan gives people the wrong incentive in the performance of their job. The plan is totally out of line with what people who are not elected

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could realistically expect; a plan so structured that an MP who can get re-elected can dip into it. It is structured in a such a way that the longer one is here the greater one's benefit so that it accrues into the millions of dollars if one can get re-elected for several terms.

What does that mean? Politicians can come to this place with the most honourable of intentions but when they see they will make a huge pile of money if they can get re-elected, that they can get the equivalent of winning a lottery, they become distorted in their vision of the country. They become blurred with the dollar signs before their eyes because of the MP pension plan. Most people do not realize it is not just the money we spend on this, it is the negative spin off effects because of this MP pension plan.

What is one of the biggest problems before the country today? Most people would say it is the economic condition. We have a huge debt and deficit. There is a lack of jobs and unemployment is way out of line. Our taxes are too high. How did it get that way? How did we come to the point at which we have overspent to the tune that we have enslaved our children for years to come?

Politicians made promises so they could get re-elected. They have the incentive built in with the MP pension plan that if they can only win the next election maybe things will hang together long enough.

(1625)

Let me propose this. Let us remove this Cadillac pension plan. Let us reduce the salary of MPs until they solve our debt and deficit problem, until they begin to reduce taxes, until the jobs come back into the country.

Let us reduce that incentive until it is all fixed. If we were to take half of our salary, if we were to do away with the MP pension plan until all these problems were fixed overnight we would have a wonderful solution to everything ailing us. There is no incentive built into the system to make politicians do what is right for the country. The incentives are in the reverse.

MPs made promises just to get re-elected. They will cater to special interest groups and give them promises so they can get re-elected. They will raise taxes so they can promise more. They will spend more to get votes in their ridings. They will do whatever they can to get re-elected and feed at the trough.

What is another big problem in the country? I alluded to it when I told a little story about the wiggling tail and the wiggling tongue. We only have democracy for a very short time every five years. Politicians listen to the people only when it is convenient.

I see this very clearly in the gun control issue which I have been dealing with. Politicians will hide what they are doing. They do not even ask the people what they think. Politicians are

afraid to put democratic reforms in this place so the people will have more to say.

Why do they not put in referendums? Why do they not allow for citizen initiatives? Why do they not allow the recall of an MP who does not do their job? It is because those citizens might say: "You are putting too much into your own pocket. You are not running the country the way we want it run".

There was an old farmer once who was on hard times, as many farmers are. He had a donkey. He had a hard time feeding the donkey. He thought he would put a little sawdust into his oats to make him feel full.

The first day he put a little sawdust into the oats. He gave it to the donkey and the donkey did not seem to notice. The donkey felt full and did not complain. He did it again the next day. He put a little more sawdust into the oats and he continued to do it.

He thought he was fooling the donkey. The donkey seemed fine. To make a long story short, one day he came out after the donkey was on a diet of almost pure sawdust and all four legs were up in the air.

That is what is happening in this country. It will soon have all four legs up in the air because people are being fed sawdust, a little more every day. The politicians keep adding it to their diet and think people do not notice.

They can put the MP pension plan in place. They think: "I will put this along and the people will swallow it. They will accept it". At some point people will say: "That is enough. We really have had enough of this sawdust. We might feel full today but hard times are coming".

We need to have real MP pension plan reform because it is hurting the country. It provides the wrong incentive for people to get re-elected or even to get elected. This is supposed to be the highest court in the land. That is an absolute joke.

We on an average day have very few people here listening to the debate, wondering if the legislation is good or not because we do not even have a say. The Prime Minister and the few people he surrounds himself with control the whole thing. There are no free votes in here.

The people of this country do not even have any input as to what the pension plan will be. The government will ram it through. That is why we do not have anybody sitting around here listening to the debate. It is because this is not the highest court in the land any more.

We have made a mockery of this place and what happens here. People do not even bother to show up to listen. I came here to build up the country and to make positive changes. People want to see people in public life there because they believe in sound principles, willing to serve their country selflessly.

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(1630)

The MP pension plan gives people the wrong incentive. It gives people elected to this place the incentive to remain here, not necessarily just to serve their country.

I have lived on the farm. I have raised pigs and I know what pigs are like. I wish everybody could see what it is like when they get to the trough. They stand there and defend their places. The biggest pig gets his snout in there and all the little pigs dare not disturb him. The pigs keep their snouts in there until they get fatter and fatter. They are pig headed. I wish I had time to explain what pig headed is. It is well illustrated when observing them. They will not listen to reason. They will do what they are bent on doing and will not change their plans in any way.

I see that happening in this place. We do not just have our noses in the trough; we are also being pig-headed in this whole issue.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have followed the debate today with great interest. I thank my colleagues for strongly debating Bill C-85 and the massive problems with it.

I also thank my colleague from the Bloc Quebecois who rose to speak to the bill. He actually made a number of very good points. Of course there were a couple of points with which I would vigorously disagree. However, I thank my colleague from the Bloc for indicating that we are in fiscal trouble in this country and that we do need to see a more responsible approach to economic concerns by the government, which is something we have not seen.

I rise today to again debate Bill C-85. This bill would be more appropriately entitled: "an act to make minimal changes to the gold plated MP pension plan". It is clearly a case of the government not being honest with the Canadian public. Its overblown pension scheme is nothing more than a back door way of increasing MPs' remuneration. It would rather do it through the back door with fat pensions and hope that the public will not notice or kick up a fuss.

I do not understand why this government is fighting so hard to hang on to its ridiculous pension. Other jurisdictions have come to grips with reality and have done the responsible thing: they have reduced or even eliminated their members' pensions.

The province of Alberta completely eliminated the pension plan for its MLAs as there was such public hostility to the very rich compensation plan.

In the past week or two, in my home province of Saskatchewan, Premier Roy Romanow announced a major reduction in pension levels for MLAs, including himself. That was done in an attempt to help his cause in the upcoming provincial election.

He has eliminated the taxpayer ripoff and is instituting a matching dollar for dollar pension system for MLAs. It seems that Saskatchewan can set up a pension system with a ratio of one to one but 3.6:1 is the best this government can do.

This is a Liberal government and that is a socialist government. I have heard members opposite talk about how terrible these socialist governments are. I certainly am not a socialist. I never was and I do not intend to become one. However, it is quite revealing when even a socialist government in Saskatchewan comes forward with a more responsible pension plan for its MLAs than this government brings forward for members of Parliament.

What the public objects to is the fact that the pension plan for MPs is not only out of line with other pension plans, but it would be illegal if it were not specially protected by Parliament. The same government that wants to continue the fat cat pension would prosecute any private firm which set up a similar plan. How is that for two-tier irony?

Reformers on this side of the House have long said that members of Parliament should not be treated better than other Canadians. Bill C-85 does not bring the compensation package for MPs any closer to private sector levels. Rather, it underscores and reinforces the differences between private Canadians and members of Parliament.

This is, after all, the House of Commons where ordinary Canadians are to come together and govern themselves. It is not the House of Lords, to be filled with aristocracy. I always have trouble with that word, probably because I do not fit in that class. It is not an exclusive club reserved for the privileged, even though the Liberals like to treat it as one. Members of Parliament have the means to provide for their own retirement and they should do that, the same as many Canadians have to do.

Not being part of the aristocracy, I was a self-employed farmer before the election. Being a self-employed farmer, I had to make arrangements for my future retirement. The only pension plan available to me as a farmer was the CPP, which I may speak about later if I have time.

(1635)

Canadians want to move toward the next century with enthusiasm. They want the government to be in touch with reality. Government members have forgotten that it is Canadians they are here to represent. Canadians want the government to reflect society's progress into the future. They do not want to be dragged back a few decades.

The Liberals are unwilling or unable to come up with new plans and structures suitable for the Canadian society of today. The only new thing this government has come up with is new taxes. It seems to think the role of government is to invent new ways to take money out of the economy to support old gov-

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ernment programs that are out of date and not living up to our expectations, including an outrageous pension plan.

The government's refusal to really change the MP pension plan is a good example of this resistance to the kind of change Canadians are demanding. When compared with the massive problems with the state of our government, the MP pension plan may not seem like a big deal. However, if the government cannot solve a simple problem like this when the solution is so clear, when do we have any hope it will be able to deal with the big questions facing our country?

Plain old common sense says that if we take care of the little things the big things will take care of themselves. The government is failing on the smaller issues, particularly these issues of principle. It is no wonder it is way off base when it comes to the larger problems facing our country.

The issue of early retirement has not been adequately addressed. In the private sector if someone takes early retirement, benefit levels are lower for each additional year they draw from the plan. Private sector pensions do this because they believe in being actuarially sound, a concept that seems to be foreign to this government.

The total national and provincial debt exceeds 100 per cent of our GDP. Government programs like the Canada pension plan are threatening to collapse because of the hundreds of billions of dollars in unfunded liability. The Liberals have never done anything on an actuarial basis, but it is high time they started. They do not even know how to balance the books. They never have and I am becoming convinced they never will. It seems only Reformers have the knowledge of how to balance the books.

How can this government and the Trudeau and Mulroney administrations before it explain to Canadians that they have ruined CPP, the people's pension plan? They have ruined it, thereby jeopardizing the retirement plans of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Canadians. At the same time the government worked hard to protect and preserve the MP pension plan. It is purely self-interest and nothing more.

The Liberal government is putting its own interests ahead of the country. Its members are selfish. As the member for Macleod so aptly said, they should be described as hypo-grits. That is one of the best descriptions I have heard in days.

The pensions being drawn by some past members have been brought to the attention of the House. Massive, luxurious pensions are being given to Perrin Beatty, Ed Broadbent, Joe Clark, Brian Mulroney and John Turner. It is interesting that John Turner moonlighted while he was here. Not only did he

collect his MP salary, but he was in business. He was never in this place. He collected two salaries. Now he leaves this place and he collects a fat pension. Where is the responsibility? Why do we not start designing programs that are fair and reasonable, not this kind of nonsense. Mazankowski, Wilson, they are all receiving their fat pensions.

Future recipients will be the member for Yukon, the member for Hamilton East, the member for Halifax, the member for York South—Weston and York West. Where will this money come from?

It will come out of the pockets of fishermen with lower incomes or perhaps no income at all because there are no fish. It will come out of the pockets of farmers who are paying higher grain transportation costs. It will come out of the pockets of salesmen who are paying an extra 1.5 cents a litre gasoline tax. The money will come from the pockets of small business people. It will come from the pockets of retired folk who are paying for this luxurious pension plan.

I am sick and tired of the whining from the members opposite about how tough it is for retired MPs. I just received a notice from Gowling, Strathy and Henderson in my mail. It is pleased to announce that the Right Hon. Ramon J. Hnatyshyn has rejoined the firm as a partner. They are having a little party to celebrate that and would like me to come. I think I will pass up on the invitation.

In this so-called pension reform the government has refused to stray too far from the old cushy system in this plan. It is reticent to cut off its own gravy train no matter what the public thinks about it. Despite the fact that the Canadian public disapproves of the MP pension plan, the government is unwilling to significantly change it.

I ask the member for Kingston and the Islands to listen. The Liberal frontbenchers are like alcoholics who have tasted the booze and want a generous supply. They cannot control it. They are pension addicts. To them public money is like alcohol, one dollar is too much and a billion is never enough.

(1640)

The Liberals should do the honourable thing and go cold turkey. They should opt out of this plan. They want to make their backbenchers pensionaholics too, just like they are so that they can all cry in their beer together. They have to have trough regular or trough lite. They are addicted to the pension and cannot walk away from it.

Bill C-85 fails to deliver on effective pension reforms in two ways. It fails to bring the MP pensions in line with the private sector plans available to most Canadians. More important, it fails to bring MP pensions in line with what Canadians are

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willing to provide for members of Parliament. We cannot lose sight of the fact that we work for the Canadian public.

I will be opting out of the pension plan. I want to represent the wishes of my constituents in this matter. They have told me in no uncertain terms that the MP pension plan is totally out of line.

I did a survey in my riding and 97 per cent of the respondents said that the MP pension plan is irresponsible and they would like me to have nothing to do with it. I want to do the right thing. I am proud to opt out of this thing. I would much rather take less income and have no pension when I leave this place than do the wrong thing and be an embarrassment to my constituents and my country.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Mackenzie—agriculture; the hon. member for Bourassa—immigration.

[*English*]

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak on the issue of MP pensions.

I represent a constituency where there is a very large number of retired Canadians. Part of my constituency is described as God's waiting room because of the number of elderly people who live there. From the responses I get I can see that the make-up of the constituency is changing.

There is a lot of concern, not only from the elderly people in my constituency but from those in the middle age category and the younger people who live there. I take a bit of ribbing from my colleagues because I have developed a two way communication with my constituents. I often have stacks and stacks of letters from them, letting me know what they have to say.

My latest return had over 2,800 responses. The most consistent concern of my constituents is the overbloated MP pension plan. In their comments I hear a real contempt for members of Parliament and their overbloated pension plan. I would like to share some of their comments.

One constituent says: "I think government pensions are too early for too few years and too much. We cannot afford it. The general public do not get pensions like that". Another says: "MP pensions should start at age 65. MP pension plans should be in line with the general public. Cuts to MP pensions are not deep enough. They are whittling away at our pensions but are still feathering their own nests. We worked hard and long to save for our retirement but we might as well have sat in a bar and drank our savings. To this government it seems sloth is rewarded

and hard work and responsibility are penalized. Let the MPs cut their excessive pensions before they cut ours."

"Why do government pension plans still totally out perform private plans? How can they say they want to increase eligibility to 67, yet they are eligible at 55? MP pension plan changes and cuts are not nearly enough, in fact are quite inadequate and presumably made to prevent rebellion. Your disgusted taxpayers are expected to make large sacrifices to help pay off the huge debt."

"MP pension changes must be more drastic." No one should be allowed to have pensions before the age of 60. Changes should be retroactive to include all former members of Parliament.

(1645)

"The MP pension plan is a joke. The proposed changes are a joke. Would Svend and Ms. Copps make well over \$1 million pulling down a pension from the private sector? Could you, Val?"

"Government pensions should be equivalent to the private sector. On members of Parliament pensions further cuts should be made here. Why should MPs receive higher pensions than one would receive in private industry? Changes should have been more drastic and no pension should be paid out before 55, regardless of when the MP started. MP pensions should be in line with industry". I could go on. I took one small handful from the stack I have.

I repeat, the one consistent message I get from my constituents is they will not accept another change to the pension plan that leaves it as bloated and as unresponsive to the demands of the constituency, that leadership be shown by the members of Parliament in the House. They expect if sacrifices are to be asked of them there should be like sacrifices from the people sitting in the House.

Like my associate, I will be opting out of the MP pension plan. I have given notice to my constituents that I will be opting out of the plan. I have received many phone calls and many letters supporting that decision. They do not feel I should be here without any kind of compensation. However, they feel the pension plan is asking too much from the ordinary taxpayer. I have to agree with them.

The Reform Party has come up with a very plausible pension plan that would make plenty of sense not only to members of Parliament but to the people we expect to pay for the pension plan. I suggest the government side take a close look at the alternatives placed before it from the Reform Party; a plan that would be adequate, a plan that would be fair and responsive to the years of service MPs put in. That would not be any more than what the person in the private sector of the people in my constituency can expect.

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I hear from some of the seniors in my constituency that many of them are retired on \$975 a month after 30 years of working for the same company. How can I possibly defend a pension plan that allows a person to collect after 55, that allows individuals who sat in the House for over six years to collect millions of dollars over a period of time up until they are 75. How can I defend that? I cannot.

I ask the House to please reconsider the bill before us now and to be responsive to the thousands and thousands of Canadians asking the House to show leadership and to show members are responsive to what Canadians are asking for.

It disturbs me to hear the responses and the comments from across the House. They do not seem to feel there are any expectations of them to make this kind of sacrifice. It disturbs me these people sitting in the House of Commons who have been put here to represent Canadians in their constituencies are not listening to what Canadians are saying. They are certainly not representing Canadian views in the House of Commons.

I hope before the debate is over they will get the message from their constituencies. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to share my constituents' concern with the House. I hope their message is shared across the country and listened to by the Liberal government.

(1650)

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I join the debate with some reluctance. I was very proud to be elected to the House and to be a member of Parliament. When I ran and became involved in politics I felt one of the most important things I could and should bring to the House is leadership.

I knew then and I know today our country is facing some very difficult times. We are into a period of financial restructuring in our country which will make what has gone on in the last year or will go on in this next year seem like child's play. Sooner or later we will have to come face to face with the reality that our country is \$550 billion in debt and in the hole at the rate of \$120 million a day.

If our country did not have this onerous debt then I do not think the pension problem would be necessarily as fractious as it is. The debate has brought out a level of meanness in the House which has not really been here in much of the debate that has taken place, even though there have been some very contentious issues debated.

When we talk about pensions and income we are talking about where people really live. When we take the facade off the role of the life of a member of Parliament every one of us has exactly the same problems and wishes as every other Canadian. Every one of us is making a mortgage payment or a car payment or has

a child in university or has someone else they are looking after. Every one of us has financial obligations.

Being a member of Parliament does not mean one's life automatically magically changes. Many people in the House make a substantial financial sacrifice to come to the House. What happens is people are making less than they did before they were elected.

Everyone having been elected knew that before they got the job and should not complain about it once they have it. We went into this with our eyes wide open. Why should members of Parliament be prepared to make the sacrifice? That is the essence of the debate.

As our country goes into this period of travail as we learn to live within our means the people in positions of leadership have to exhibit leadership by taking the first hit by leading by example. I do not think any Canadian begrudges a fair income or a fair standard of living or a fair remuneration to a member of Parliament. However, they do not want to see members of Parliament living far beyond what is available to anybody else in a similar circumstance. Why are there two sets of rules, one for the law makers and one for everyone else? That is precisely the reason Parliament has brought disrepute upon itself, having one set of rules for everybody else and one for Parliament.

The basic question is does the remuneration package in any way help or hinder the development of good governance in our country?

In my private life I would ask the question from a business perspective. Does the remuneration package offered to people in this business help or hinder the development of the business? Does it attract and retain the very best people or does it retain people we do not want to retain who perhaps should move on somewhere else? Does it lead to the very highest ideals or does it lead to mediocrity?

I will pick up on a theme presented earlier in the debate that perhaps because the salary level is low, which has been said by the Prime Minister time and time again and others in the House, the pension is abnormally high because the salary is abnormally low.

(1655)

I suspect our remuneration package does more to bring mediocrity to the House than it does to bring a level of commitment and excellence we should all hope for. The pension is such a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow any normal human being will be affected in their day to day decisions with how they can go about getting into that pot of gold.

The question is when we come here and make a decision, are we making the decisions best for the country in the long run? Are we making decisions best for the next generation or are we making decisions for the next election? Are we statesmen or politicians?

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If our decisions are motivated by winning the next election rather than doing what is right for the next generation, I submit we are politicians. We will never be statesmen. The pension is so rich human nature would automatically cause people to think: "How should I respond in this situation? Will it help me or hinder me in the next election? Will it help or hinder me within my caucus? If I go against this program, am I likely not to get a nomination? Am I likely to be pushed out of caucus? Am I likely to be dropped from a committee? What would happen to my image if I am not a team player?"

That is the reason members of Parliament should be fairly compensated. They should look after their own pension arrangements like everyone else. We should be well paid and we should look after our pensions.

We should have a dollar for dollar contribution to buy an RRSP, just like everyone else. The decisions we make that affect us should not hold us harmless from the effect of these decisions on the economy as a whole.

If we in the House and those who came before us manage to mismanage our economy to the point at which 35 cents of every dollar collected by the federal government goes to paying interest on money we have already spent, should these people be rewarded with a pension for life? Hardly.

Should people be motivate to be re-engaged to have a political life because of the pension, which begs the question whether our function as members of Parliament should be to act as a board of directors. Should we be micromanaging the economy as we are wont to do?

Why all of a sudden does Parliament have to sit 180 days of the year? Why can we not retain our real lives and come here just enough to be a board of directors and have a professional civil service actually run the country?

I suspect as human nature drives this remuneration package none of us on any side of the House is perfect. What on earth is the point of the government's hiring outside third party arbitrators to make decisions on remuneration for members of Parliament and then ignoring the advice?

It is a pox on our Houses. How can we be determining what our income or remuneration should be? Why can that not be done by an impartial qualified third party and accept the results that come from that impartial third party? Why should it be done internally?

I want to close with a spirit of optimism because I have great faith in our country. I still have great faith in Parliament. Remember, what is done today can be corrected tomorrow, and that is the beauty of Parliament.

Although the legislation will pass, there will be another dawn. There will be a tomorrow. In the closing stanza of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", the poem that says water, water every-

where and not a drop to drink, the parable of the story is he will rise upon the morn, a sadder and a wiser man.

(1700)

I suspect that the result of the Liberal government, having had the opportunity to do the right thing and taking a half measure, hesitant step and calling it an achievement, will rise upon the morn and rue the day sadder and wiser at the next election.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, normally it is a great pleasure for me to rise to speak in the House, but today I find the need to speak to this bill is not much of a pleasure.

In 1952 the Liberal government of Louis St. Laurent introduced the members retiring allowance. He described it as actuarially sound and a matter that would operate without any further charge on the public funds than the matching of the contributions to be made by all members of Parliament. That is the way it should work.

How in the world did it get so far off track? Today the taxpayers contribute 80 per cent and the members of Parliament contribute 20 per cent.

Only a government with its head in the sand would ask Canadians, who have the fastest growing personal tax burden in the industrialized world, to shoulder the burden of deficit reduction without first putting its own house in order.

Bill C-85 tells Canadians that the majority of the people they elected to Parliament in 1993 care more about their personal financial security than they do about the deficit or the tax burden.

Canadians will soon learn that while all 52 Reform MPs are opting out of the pension plan, only one Liberal MP has the fortitude to say no. Canadians will soon realize that the majority of members they elected to Parliament do not really care about the debt or the tax burden ordinary Canadians have to face. They talk the talk, but when it affects them personally, and when it is going to affect their retirement, they quickly seek refuge back at the trough.

Pension reform was a major issue in the last election, and I suspect it will be in the next election. When my colleague was quoting from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", a line occurred to me as well: and like a cross around my neck the albatross was hung. This is an albatross the Liberal government will have a difficult time getting off its neck.

Mr. Milliken: Maybe we should call an election to find out.

Mr. Johnston: Maybe we should. The hon. member suggests that there should be an election. I challenge him to call an election on this issue. It is an excellent idea.

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They even boasted in the speech from the throne that pension reform was a plank in their platform. They have made a mockery of their own promises.

Bill C-85 was not at all what the Canadian taxpayers expected. Instead of real pension reform, the Liberal caucus agreed to protect senior MPs and youthful cabinet ministers, because it knows that when the Reform Party forms the next government, and it will, contrary to what my friend in the Bloc suggested, the Liberals will not be getting any patronage jobs to supplement their incomes.

They claim to have eliminated double dipping. However, even if they were to get a federal job, their pension benefits would keep on growing, thanks to inflation indexing.

I am amazed that with only two years left before the government has to face the Canadian electorate it would have the gall to introduce a bill that would give MPs a pension other Canadians can only dream of, especially since it is the average Canadian taxpayer who will have to pay for this now silver plated pension plan.

(1705)

How much will they have to pay? They will have to pay plenty. For every dollar contributed by all those Liberals and Bloc MPs who are rushing to opt into the plan, the taxpayer contributes \$3.50. It is hard to believe that the government is not embarrassed to boast about a reduction of 1 per cent in the accrual rate, from 5 per cent to 4 per cent. Wonderful, but it is still double what it is in the private sector.

Where else but in Parliament could one receive a pension for only six years of service and that pension would be indexed for life and payable starting at age 55? This is early retirement by anyone's standards.

In the private sector, only 22 per cent of the pension plans are adjusted automatically for inflation. It takes MPs only 19 years to qualify for a full pension. A person in the private sector would have to work for 35 years to be eligible for anything similar.

The Prime Minister attempts to justify this premium pension plan by saying that MPs have a difficult time readjusting to private life and finding jobs in the outside world. Surely to goodness they cannot have that much difficulty. If they do have that much difficulty, I fail to see how it could be the taxpayer's fault.

Often when we ask the Prime Minister to justify his continued support for this cash for life scheme he compares MP pensions to hockey players' salaries. For one thing, we are talking about salaries, as opposed to pension plans; let us get that straight. For another thing, I believe the Liberals are skating on very thin ice on this one, because in Winnipeg we saw what happened when the players demanded too much. The players and those who

hired them parted company. On the next election day the Canadian taxpayers will be telling the players in the government they would just as soon part company with them.

The provincial legislators in Prince Edward Island and in Alberta realized that the taxpayers could not afford to support them forever and have scrapped their pension plans. In Manitoba, Premier Filmon promised to cancel the pension plan and replace it with a registered retirement savings plan arrangement.

We are not suggesting that members of Parliament should not be properly paid for the job we do. We all know that we work hard here at this job and that we are eligible and we deserve a decent salary for it. But let us separate salary from pensions. The Reform Party does not say that members of Parliament are not deserving of some sort of retirement benefit as well. Let us have a retirement benefit that we can take in good conscience and we can look our constituents in the eye and say yes, I contributed and yes, you contributed; it was equal and it was dollar for dollar and we do not have the feeling that we are taking advantage of the people who pay our salary and put us here in the first place.

Canadians are being asked by their government to do with less. In the vast majority of cases Canadians can accept that. They can accept that there is not enough money to fund all the government programs that have been created over the last 30 years. They cannot accept the excuses offered by this government to continue to fund a pension plan that Canada cannot afford. The government has to get its own financial house in order before asking Canadians to support them for life.

During the 1993 election campaign I promised the constituents of Wetaskiwin that I would not participate in the existing gold-plated pension plan. As a matter of fact, one of the first things we did when we got to Ottawa was to go over to pay and benefits and sign a declaration there saying that we were paying into this pension plan only under duress and that we had no intention whatsoever of collecting.

(1710)

This is not something we came up with in the last few hours so that we could debate it in the House. It is something we signed at an early date because we in good conscience did not want to participate in a pension plan of this type.

On February 24 and during our annual general meeting, when I explained to my constituents how meagre the changes in this bill were, I told them there was only one acceptable clause in it, and that was the one that would allow me to remain outside of the pension plan.

I question the intention of the government. Perhaps I am treading on thin ground here, but I think there was some malice in that very clause. It was aimed directly at the Reform Party. The idea of course would be that some would opt out and some would not and it would effectively split our caucus. I can say that

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this has not happened and that our caucus has decided individually and collectively that we will opt out of the program.

Members have probably deduced by now that I am opting out of this plan with its silver lining. I recommend that anybody in the House who plans to be here for more than one term follow suit and do the same.

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, one of the guiding principles of leadership is that the leader set an example. People despise double standards, especially with regard to leadership.

In the past, Canadian governments have been marked in their leadership and have been characterized by inaccessibility, arrogance, a disregard for the masses, in fact contempt for the masses, some corruption, and rule from an ivory tower mentality, a them versus us mentality. The proof was in the last election, when the government of the day was in no uncertain terms turfed from its position in government into an insignificant number in the House.

An hon. member: It will happen again.

Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): What were the Canadian people saying in that election? We want democracy. We want to be heard. We want fairness, accountability, transparency, and above all else we want honesty from our elected officials. We want our elected officials to represent the people and we want to do for ourselves what we do unto others.

The single most objectionable thing that typifies the last government and in some ways applies to this government is the MP pension plan, this gold plated plan, which is unlike those in the private sector.

In response to the dogged efforts of the Reform Party, the government has finally buckled under and decided to revamp the plan. Is that what it truly did? Not at all. It brought out a plan that is mere window dressing. We have seen a lot of it.

Yesterday when we spoke in the House on the OAS and CPP bill we saw much the same thing. Let me explain why. What happens with the new plan? The accrual rate decreases, but it only decreases from 5 per cent to 4 per cent. This is still double the rate in the private sector.

Furthermore, the Income Tax Act says that there can only be a maximum of 2 per cent. Therefore, the plan put forth by the government and the preceding plan are illegal.

The new plan is fully indexed to inflation. Do we see that in the private sector? Not at all. In the private sector, 80 per cent of plans are not indexed to inflation.

What is the new minimum age? It is 55, not 60. That is fine to an extent. However there is no decrease in the payments that are

down if anybody collects before the age of 60. Again I bring your attention to the Income Tax Act.

(1715)

The Income Tax Act says that pensions must be reduced by at least 3 per cent per year if collected before age 60. Does this occur in the plan before us?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Does it occur in the new plan?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): What does this do? It is another MP pension plan that contravenes the Income Tax Act and is completely illegal.

This new plan decreases the contribution rate from MPs from 11 per cent to 9 per cent. What does that do? It increases the pay that MPs take home. This plan is at least two times as lucrative as private sector plans and continues to contravene the Income Tax Act in at least two cases. Therefore that makes it completely and utterly illegal.

We in the Reform Party, as all members, have been given the chance by the government to opt out. What happened? To a person, the members of my party have opted out of this plan. When many of us, myself included, were given the sheets to sign for our pension plan when we came here in January 1994, we wrote on the top that we would not sign out of protest because we would not be a part of this plan.

It was an election promise we made and one that we keep. It is not only we who will opt out of this plan. There are a handful of hearty souls from the government side who, under duress and intense pressure from their own people, have decided to hold strong and represent the wishes of their constituents and opt out.

Are the members of the Bloc Québécois, a group that is committed to destroying the country and tearing it apart, to be members of this plan? Absolutely. I find it completely hypocritical that these members are rushing to be members of a pension plan in a country they are running away from. Why does this group want to join a pension plan from a country that it wants to tear apart? It is hypocrisy. Its members should look in their souls and in the mirror when they decide to do this.

In this party, we propose not to be destructive but to be constructive. We have said all along that we want to be a part of the community, to join hands with the rest of the country to make it strong. One of the things that we can do is have the same pension plan as the people who voted for us.

We want to have the same pension plan as the private sector and in essence, lead by example. Therefore, we should collect

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the MP pension plan at age 60 and decrease the contributions by the taxpayer. As one of my friends from my party just said, we should make it a one to one contribution. Above all else, let the MP control and manage his or her pension plan. It is interesting to reflect on this for a moment because it shows the difference in mind set and philosophy that we in the Reform Party have to the government.

Government members believe they should get their lecherous tentacles into all aspects of people's lives from business to MP pensions. We in this party and the majority of Canadians believe that it is not the government members who should do the majority of things in the country, but people, individuals and private organizations are the ones who can best deal with the problems that affect them. Let government do what government does best and what the private sector cannot do and let the people and individuals do everything else. Our job is to empower the people to do that.

One of my colleagues was musing the other day about the so-called increase in pay. What he was really doing is trying to find ways of decreasing the cost to the taxpayer. He proposed abolishing the MP pension plan, abolishing the allowance but increasing the salary to compensate for this. He qualified this by saying that this does not in any way, shape or form represent the will or the wishes of this party.

Nobody in this party wants to increase the salaries of any one of us. The hon. member for Beaver River started off when she was a lone person in the House by voluntarily decreasing her salary by 10 per cent. She was the only individual in the House to do this. It is important to understand that out of the 295 members only one MP at that time did that. That MP was from the Reform Party of Canada.

(1720)

Other things we have done that members of the other parties have not done is that we took the bull by the horns and tried to find out other constructive ways of saving the taxpayer money. We saved money on our flights by flying economy. We in my office managed to save the taxpayers at least \$10,000 to \$12,000 per year by flying economy and on cheap flights. If all of us were to do that we would save the taxpayers at least \$3 million a year. We should look at that because it is certainly something constructive that we could do.

Many of our constituents have complained about this MP pension plan. Many of these people are individuals who fought in the last war, which we celebrated this week, and who have worked all of their lives only to have pensions of less than \$1,000 a month. Furthermore, on that amount of money they are

remorselessly taxed by the Canadian government. It is not something I would lay at this government's feet right now as it is something that has gone on for a long time.

I ask the government to look with compassion on those individuals who have made such a significant contribution to the backbone of the country. They have worked all their lives to make it the safe place that it is today.

I implore the government to lead by example. Give the people the confidence they need in their elected officials. As we saw in World War II, we came together to do great things, to defeat the fascism of Nazi Germany. That hope is not lost on us now. In 1995 we can all come together to build Canada, the greatest country in the world, to once again stand on its feet and be the middle power that it can be. We can only do that by coming together, leading by example and working together for the benefit and future of our wonderful country.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, during the election in 1993 I made one promise to my constituents. I promised that when I got to Ottawa I would take every opportunity to let their voice be heard. Therefore, I am pleased to have the opportunity. For all my Wild Rose friends out there in TV land or wherever they are, this is for you. My Wild Rose constituents say scrap the obnoxious, ridiculous pension plan of MPs. I agree with them wholeheartedly.

Yesterday school students from the county of Wheatland in my riding visited me. Some of my colleagues joined me and we had a great visit. I really have a hard time understanding how a member of Parliament could stand in front of a group of young people in today's times and say to them: "We have this huge debt of \$550 billion. It will be \$600 billion or more by the time this Parliament ends or maybe even more than that".

"Your future does not look too good. It will be very expensive to get an education because we are really in trouble financially. We are sorry about that. Probably the old age pension, the Canada pension and things of that nature which we have grown so accustomed to admiring and having in this country will be gone when you get my age, but that is just the way it goes. We really tried hard. Of course you won't mind, students", as I told them yesterday, "if I hang on to a pension, would you, that will provide me with several thousands of dollars during my old age while you will probably have nothing".

The students quickly told me how much they minded. I know that same message is loud and clear at any school. If any member wants to go to a school and has the nerve to tell the students exactly what the situation is and then turn around and tell them that he or she is well looked after, let us see how they respond back.

(1725)

I have a funny feeling there are a lot of members in this Parliament that would not even dare do such a thing. That is a little too honest. That is a little too much up front.

When this Parliament first met the minister of human resources would stand up to talk about the one million children in the country living in poverty and how we had to address that. Eighteen months later, we are still talking about the one million children living in poverty. Let us give up our pensions, let us feed the hungry kids. Does that make sense? Not if you are greedy, it sure does not. If you are a greedy individual, you will accept this pension plan. We will hear the minister of human resources talk about hungry children again next year.

I received a call from an individual who works with the Children's Aid Society, a relief society. He asked if I would come to the House and encourage the members of Parliament who are flying around the country to give that up and donate the money to his children in Ottawa. They could sure use the extra few thousand dollars that is being spent.

Look at news items like: Goods news, MP junkets will not be cut. "We are going to Europe, Asia and Africa. Never mind, we are only \$600 billion in the hole. We have hungry children all over Canada. Never mind, we are going to take these trips". What kind of leadership is that? Where are their hearts? Where are their minds?

An hon. member: They are greedy.

Mr. Thompson: Greedy is right, the exact word. If we were to call a consultant to come into Parliament to address this group I am sure the consultant would not hesitate to say in order to set things in order, we had better start at the top and set an example.

Not a member in the House has not received a call from an old age pensioner who has said: "I do not know how I will make it. I have had another cutback and I cannot make it". I really doubt there is one member in the House that has never received a call like that. I cannot understand how any member can receive these call and say: We are doing all we can and in time things will change.

If we give ourselves pensions like these and then talk to an elderly person on the phone about what they are doing and what they are getting, we are being hypocritical. Talk about being hypocritical. Talk about being two faced. For heaven's sake, if you have a caring attitude then go to these communities, stand in front of the people on your own two feet and do what you were sent here to do. Look after the people of this country. They are expecting you to do that.

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I am sure this consultant would say give up your pensions, it would be the smart thing to do. The consultant would probably say sell the aeroplanes, that would be the right thing to do. Do not go to Europe, Asia and Africa, do not need to; you can do without that. Feed the hungry; help the elderly; do your job". That is the attitude demonstrated over there of which Canadians are sick. I hope they would call an election tomorrow to demonstrate that same attitude.

I was the mayor of the town of Sundre back in the seventies. The council and I decided we would engage a group of citizens to determine what our remuneration should be. We left it in their hands. We were pleased with their decision and the community as a whole decided that is what we should receive.

I challenge the government. I challenge the Bloc Quebecois Party, the Liberal Party—I know the Reformers will be more than pleased to participate—to find a group of citizens to come to this place to determine what our salaries, our pensions and a few other things should be. After all, in case they have forgotten we work for them, let them decide.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

BREAST CANCER

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should provide core funding to ensure that all women diagnosed with breast cancer have access, through survivor led support groups, to information on the various treatments available in their community and local counselling services provided by peer support groups and survivors.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present the motion today in the House of Commons because I know that all Canadians are concerned about this very serious health issue. However concern is not enough. It is necessary to put action and to put funds behind our desire for increased health resources for women. In particular, around the issue of breast cancer, the statistics are very clear on what is needed.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, you may know that two of my colleagues from the previous parliament, the former members for New Westminster and Mission—Coquitlam, worked tirelessly to have this House put research on breast cancer and support services for women with breast cancer on the top of its list of priorities.

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They helped convince this House to embark on an important study regarding the issue in 1992. The same year, the Sub-committee on the Status of Women published its conclusions and a list of recommendations in a report entitled "Breast Cancer: Unanswered Questions". I have a copy of that report with me.

Unfortunately, I have to conclude that most of the questions raised at the time have remained unanswered. The members of the sub-committee made 49 recommendations, and I think it is important to revisit a few today. The sub-committee recommended that the federal government work with the provinces and territories to give the cancer research centres already in place in each region of the country the designation of centres of excellence.

[English]

The centres of excellence would be a sort of one-stop treatment and information centre for women diagnosed with breast cancer.

I cannot tell the House how many women I have spoken with who say they have lacked proper information on treatment and on treatment options. There is confusion even on things such as breast self-examination and the options generally available to women.

We need to concentrate our efforts and to pool our knowledge. The regional centres idea originally proposed by the committee would go a long way in centralizing and co-ordinating information.

The committee of 1992 also recommended that the federal government establish a 1-800 line to provide information to women on various self-examination techniques and on new research and treatment options. Nothing concrete has been done about the plan. I suggest it is worth reviewing and should be seriously considered.

The Ontario Breast Cancer Support and Research Centre currently has an application before the federal Minister of Health requesting that such a pilot for a 1-800 number be established in Ontario. I hope the pilot, proposed to be jointly funded through private funds and public funds, would be seriously considered by the minister. It would be an attempt to work on the recommendations that took a lot of time of parliamentarians and were very clearly thought out. The committee heard a number of witnesses as well.

There is also an outstanding recommendation for a national registry to keep a record of devices implanted in the body. This issue is very strongly linked to the motion we are discussing today since many women have in the past decided on breast reconstruction using silicone implants after they have undergone a mastectomy to remove a breast cancer.

(1735)

It is also an issue for women who have not had breast cancer. It remains an extremely serious and outstanding issue that breast implants have not been thoroughly researched or thoroughly regulated by the federal government. It is an absolutely crucial area in which work must be done.

I might add there are a number of self-support groups that are trying to work with the government on the issue but receive no financial support. There are a number of civil suits pending against the manufacturers of silicone gel implants. I urge the federal government to play a strong role in support of these women.

In March 1995 I met with a number of women who had experience with their implants. I can assure everyone in the House that their problems are real. These problems, in addition to causing endless pain and suffering and disrupting family life, are a huge cost to the Canada health care system.

We are very fond of saying we have to do something to cut health care costs. By regulation by the Canadian government in the area and by information being available to women about the medical devices we could do much to address that health care cost with a very minimum of support from the federal government.

One of the most important recommendations in the standing committee's report on breast cancer asked that the federal government provide some direct funding for survivor led women's support groups. We cannot underestimate the importance of the recommendation. That is why my motion today deals specifically with it.

One reason survivor led support groups can play such an important role is that women who volunteer their time have been through the process. They are able to empathize with other women, to talk about how they have handled the issue, and to deal with confusion and fear first hand. It is important for a woman diagnosed with breast cancer to have that kind of support. For a very minimal cost we could be saving health care costs down the line in a substantial way.

There is a lot of research to suggest that a positive attitude and a strong support network can actually help people fight diseases. The support groups we now have in Canada have had a tremendously positive effect on the lives of women.

This is important in light of the fact that scientific research has failed to come up with strong links between the causes of breast cancer and the onset of the disease. Despite years of research we still do not know the cause of the majority of breast cancers. Scientists have identified links like a genetic marker, age and a woman's estrogen level, but in 60 per cent to 70 per cent of all cases none of the identified risk factors is at play. It is incredibly important to look at some of the ways we can help women when they are diagnosed.

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There is a huge library of research. I have many bibliographies in my own office that I would be happy to share with members of the House which point to the link between self-help groups and improved quality of life in the face of illness. Clearly with a minimum of assistance to help co-ordinate volunteers and disseminate information we can have a positive health outcome. I would suggest it is an economic saving as well.

Recently American researchers, as an example, released their findings from a study of 7,000 people in California. They had monitored the people for nine years to see if there was a link between strong social and family support networks and improved mortality. In every health category people with stronger social ties, people with stronger friendships, for example, had a lower incidence of illness. When they did get sick they stood a better chance of recovery.

When we talk about health care costs and health programs we tend to think of them generally speaking in a very narrow framework. We have to begin to think about how we can enhance existing links that provide support for people in these traumatic instances. In addition, as the research indicates they also work.

(1740)

Canadian studies have made the same links in breast cancer. There was a study in British Columbia indicating that for women with breast cancer, women's friendships, social network and employment status had a positive impact on survival chances. The link is somewhat stronger for women who have had some form of outside support.

Over 5,400 Canadian women will die of breast cancer this year. An estimated 17,000 Canadian women will be newly diagnosed with the disease. That is one in nine Canadian women. We have made some advances. I know of many people who have successfully fought the disease and have gone on to raise their families and to live happy and productive lives.

Statistics show it is still a very major health issue. Breast cancer is the second most frequently occurring cancer in the country. More shocking still—and I have not really seen research on why it is—Canada's rate of breast cancer is the second highest in the world, second only to the United States. There is much we need to do in the area.

The obvious question is where do we get the money? It is a legitimate one. There are avenues through the health promotion and contribution program at Health Canada which has funded some projects to help breast cancer support groups communicate with one another. As in so many other areas, by assisting groups with a small amount of money we can have a huge benefit. By spending the funds we have well we enhance the links that exist in the community.

Federal support for survivor led support groups could assume a model, for example the one set up for the AIDS secretariat. It is a very good model in terms of looking at how the federal government can co-ordinate funding in an appropriate way. That model of secretariat does two things. It indicates a commitment on the part of government to a serious health issue and provides a central source for promotion of dealing with the issue both within government departments and throughout the country.

As much as anyone, certainly the New Democratic Party knows there is not a lot of money and revenues are tight. It is a question of priorities. It is a question of what we wish to see for the population of the country.

There are some who would refer to spending \$60 million on the Senate. I would say save national medicare and sacrifice the Senate. There is still not a single support group in Ontario that has had help from the Canadian government. I might be wrong and could be corrected, but I do not know of any other support group in a province or territory that is assisted by the government.

There is also a related issue which I think is very real because again we are talking about priorities, reduced funding and choices. The social assistance and health transfer proposed under Bill C-76 is now undergoing discussion in committee. Seven billion dollars in cuts will only make it more difficult in this area of health.

As we are looking at priorities in Canada, what it means to be a citizen of Canada, a comprehensive system of national health care must be foremost. Many groups and individuals are very concerned that the bill will simply result in less co-ordination and reduce funding in both provinces and territories for the kind of groups that are needed and the kind of research that is needed.

(1745)

In the same recently even the United Nations has expressed strong concern about the health and social service transfers, saying they could strip disadvantaged groups of their fundamental rights.

Health Canada is currently funding five pilot projects to improve communication between small support groups. I commend that. It is a good start on the things that need to be done. Funding for these networking groups ends in 1996. I hope by then we can say we have been able to extend a helping hand to many grassroot support groups working with sufferers of breast cancer.

I am not talking about a lot of funding, simply an amount that will help groups co-ordinate and do their work. One group I have become familiar with is the Burlington breast cancer support services. This group was the first survivor directed support organization in Canada. It started out with assistance

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from the government but today it does not receive any funding from the government. It is making it on memberships and private donations and was fortunate enough to have office space donated. It was that little bit of funding that got it started that made the difference in the group's being able to continue and establish itself.

The group in Burlington receives 155 calls for support each month; 57 people drop in to its office each month and in 1994, 111 people volunteered over 15,000 hours to provide peer support and keep the organization running. This is a very clear example of how a little assistance can have a very beneficial result for people suffering from this disease.

Every parliamentarian should have the chance to speak to the women who volunteer in these kinds of activities, women who have suffered breast cancer or to their families. Obviously in this instance it affects many more people than the person who has the illness. Parliamentarians would then see the level of commitment and dedication and support they give which is absolutely crucial to others.

Today I presented some of the 2,000 petitions I received from men and women across the country, from every province and territory, asking parliamentarians for the support I have discussed here. I have received over 30,000 signatures, the largest number I have received on any petition. Many women have called and written to me asking for more petitions. Others have written to tell me of their own experiences with breast cancer, suggesting new areas where parliamentarians can help.

The other day I received a completed petition from the member for Calgary Southeast, and I thank her. I believe this is a non-partisan issue. I look forward to hearing the views of my colleagues in the House on this issue. I hope it will not simply be addressed here and then forgotten.

The subcommittee of 1992 has not had a lot of action on the recommendations. I encourage all parliamentarians, both men and women, to become involved in supporting the issue and making it a new national priority.

The other day I spoke with members of the Canadian heritage committee, responsible for the status of women, and was told the committee does not have plans to discuss this issue. I believe we should look at this again. I also think we should act on it. Most women will say: "Do not do another study. We have had a lot of studies. Give us action. We have given you the ideas".

Core funding for survivor led breast cancer services is one of the most important, most cost effective ways to address the issue.

One of Ontario's breast cancer activists said recently we cannot ignore the needs of women living with the disease while we are searching for the cure.

Ms. Jean Augustine (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member for Yukon for bringing this important issue to the House.

We assure her we will co-operate with her and with all her colleagues both male and female to find a solution to the problem of breast cancer.

(1750)

I want to speak to the federal initiatives in the area of breast cancer. The Minister of Health, the secretary of state with responsibility for women's issues and the Liberal women's caucus have all lately addressed the issue of breast cancer, talking about wellness, promotion and education, ensuring we support our community in the search for the necessary awareness and cure.

For too long breast cancer has been one of the most silent killers in Canadian households. Breast cancer, as the member said, is a leading cause of cancer deaths among women. It is estimated that breast cancer accounts for 28 per cent of newly diagnosed cancer cases in women and for 20 per cent of all deaths due to cancer.

Members of the House should be aware the chances of acquiring breast cancer increase with age. In spite of progress in cancer research and improved methods of early detection, Canadian cancer statistics 1995 show the incidence of breast cancer has been increasing at about 1 per cent annually since 1983.

Mortality, on the other hand, has not increased. Rather, it has marginally decreased. About one in nine women will develop breast cancer over their lifetime, and this rate has remained unchanged. Breast cancer will strike 17,700 in 1995 and kill 5,400 this year alone.

For those affected the disease is often disfiguring and requires months of treatment and years of adjustment. I recently experienced an exhibition called "Survivors" where most poignantly those facts were brought out.

On June 12, 1992 the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and the Status of Women tabled a report entitled "Breast Cancer: Unanswered Questions". In its response to the report the federal government at the time recognized the devastating effects of breast cancer to society as a whole and to Canadian women in particular and commended the standing committee for bringing to its attention the need for a concerted national effort to address this important women's health issue.

The federal government supported the overall direction of the standing committee's recommendations and sought, through a number of initiatives, to bridge the gaps in knowledge in the areas of prevention, screening, treatment and care. The government's response recognized and identified the need for

increased collaboration to address the health issue and serve as a framework to seek effective ways of responding to this national concern.

Twenty-five million dollars over five years was allocated for to establish a breast cancer research challenge fund, to develop five breast cancer information exchange projects, to convene a national forum, to support an co-ordinate provincial breast cancer screening activities, to support actions to foster uniformly high standards of care for breast cancer, and to support activities to enhance continuing education and training of health professionals in the area of breast cancer.

In exercising leadership in the area of research the federal government committed \$20 million to the breast cancer research challenge fund and issued a challenge to individuals, communities and the corporate sector to match if not exceed these funds. The National Cancer Institute of Canada agreed to manage the funds accumulated through this challenge. This is accomplished through the management committee for the Canadian breast cancer research initiative, a partnership between Health Canada, the Medical Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Cancer Society and the National Institute of Canada.

In the spring of 1993 the federal government issued a request for proposals in order to fund existing cancer centres and other health care institutions across Canada for the development of breast cancer information exchange pilot projects.

(1755)

These projects are now a reality and we are very proud of the work taking place. They are funded with \$2.7 million over five years and located in five regions of Canada. They are developing specific expertise to disseminate state of the art, user friendly information on various aspects of breast cancer. These projects have a strong evaluation component and will serve as a model which can be used by other cancer centres or health care institutions to disseminate information on breast cancer to women, their families and health practitioners.

The national forum on breast cancer was held in Montreal on November 14 to 16, 1993 to determine priorities and directions in the areas of breast cancer prevention, screening, treatment, care, research as well as address issues relevant to survivors support, advocacy and networking. Throughout the event a number of common principles emerged, the need for better communication, collaboration, co-ordination at all levels and for greater consumer involvement.

The federal government has also committed \$1.05 million over five years to the continued support and co-ordination of provincial breast cancer screening activities. To that effect

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Health Canada continues to assist with the activities of the Canadian breast cancer screening initiative.

Representation from the provincial and territorial ministries of health, existing provincial organized screening programs, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, the Canadian Breast Cancer Network, the Canadian Cancer Society, the National Cancer Institute of Canada and Statistics Canada are all involved in the screening initiative.

In order to support activities to foster uniformly high standards of care a steering committee for the development of care and treatment guidelines has been established. It is composed of women living with breast cancer as well as representatives from organizations and groups responsible for delivering and implementing guidelines.

The Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Nurses Association, provincial health ministries, the National Cancer Institute of Canada, representatives of provincial cancer agencies or their equivalent, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the Federation of Medical Licensing and Authorities of Canada and Health Canada are participating on the steering committee.

Ten specific topics related to the care and treatment of women with breast cancer have been selected as the starting point for their activities.

The point I am making here is that there are many individuals, groups and organizations involved in looking for responses and answers to the issue of breast cancer. In order to improve the scope and content of the professional-patient relationship a co-ordinating committee on professional education has been established. The committee has brought together professional associations and representatives. Survivors of breast cancer are a key to any work that has to take place and to all the components of the federal breast cancer initiative.

Survivors' views and perspectives drive the products being undertaken. Each component of the initiative has survivor representatives as well as women at risk.

It is important to note that survivor driven organizations form a key characteristic of the breast cancer information exchange pilot projects' overall information dissemination strategy. This strategy is built on the concept of collaboration with key partners, chief among whom are women at risk, survivors and health care providers.

I think I speak for everyone on this side of the House in addressing this issue and in affirming we want to work with all members, especially with the member for Yukon, to eradicate this problem in our midst. This issue will not be ignored.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak in today's debate on Motion M-376, presented by the hon. member for Yukon. The motion proposes that the government should provide core funding that would be used to offer women diagnosed with breast cancer information on the various treatments available and on services provided by support groups.

The motion draws our attention to a major health problem for women in Quebec and Canada. Breast cancer, the incidence of which is certainly not declining, kills many women every year.

(1800)

Despite the interest in improving the status of women in Canada and legislation and policies aimed at correcting the inequities women experience, it is a fact that the status of women still leaves much to be desired, compared with the status of men and that which remains to be done before women enjoy the same advantages as men.

I am very aware of and concerned about health care. I think it is important to remind the federal government that we urgently need a health care system that is adapted to women's needs. The latest studies on women's health have made us realize that as far as health care is concerned, women's needs differ greatly from men's.

Financial resources dedicated to research on women's health are inadequate. There is a lack of resources for breast cancer research, gynaecology and obstetrics, research on chronic and degenerative diseases, mental health, violence, professional illnesses, the special needs of immigrant women, women of ethnic origin, native women, teenagers, elderly women, and the list goes on.

At the beginning of this session the Minister of Health told us how she intended to promote women's health. She described the programs her government intended to implement to remedy the inadequacies of the health care system in the treatment of women.

Unfortunately, that is not what happened. Since this government came to power, funding for health care has dropped steadily. This government has maintained a freeze on transfer payments to the provinces, which has meant a reduction in resources for the health care systems operated by the provinces.

In its latest budget, the government went even further by cutting \$70 million from the budget of its own Department of Health, which has seen its general envelope shrink by 3.8 per cent.

The motion moved by the leader of the New Democratic Party reminds the government of the importance of supporting action taken to fight breast cancer.

Breast cancer is frightening. This disease kills women at a rate of one every 12 minutes in North America. During the past 30 years, this type of cancer has spread like a particularly nasty plague, and the only effective remedy remains prevention and early detection of the disease.

In Canada, the situation is not very encouraging. Canada has the highest rate of breast cancer in the world. Every year, 15,000 new cases of breast cancer are detected. Five thousand women will die of breast cancer this year. This is one death every two hours. In Quebec alone, nearly 1,500 women will succumb to this terrible disease. Every woman in Canada and Quebec has one chance out of ten of contracting breast cancer in the course of a lifetime. Earlier, my government colleague said one chance in nine. There may have been a decline, but it is still too high.

The results of a nationwide poll released last Thursday revealed that 41 per cent of women in Canada and Quebec saw breast cancer as the main threat to their lives.

It is high time effective steps were taken to conquer this disease. We need a cancer detection strategy that considers both genetic and environmental factors. In fact, that is what transpired from the final report of the National Forum on Breast Cancer tabled last fall. The report recommended immediately introducing national guidelines for medical practitioners, to inform physicians and encourage upgrading of their skills. So far, nothing has been done.

Also a public awareness and information campaign would be needed to inform and support breast cancer sufferers. This was in fact suggested by the hon. member for Yukon in her motion.

The best way to beat breast cancer is to invest in research. At the National Forum on Breast Cancer, the government promised to spend \$20 million over five years. We hope it will keep its promise.

Although we realize that breast cancer is a scourge that has been ignored to a shocking extent by politicians and the medical community, the Bloc Québécois must remind the government that health care is an exclusively provincial jurisdiction.

(1805)

If the federal government decides to support the war against breast cancer in some way or other, we remind the government that it must do so in consultation with its provincial partners.

Many provinces have already introduced effective measures. In British Columbia, Ontario and now Quebec, provincial governments have launched extensive breast cancer detection programs. The Quebec government's plan aims to reduce the mortality rate by 25 per cent over seven years.

Private Members' Business

As long as there are places where a woman's life is valued less than a man's, women's health problems will tend to be ignored, to the detriment of their own lives, the well-being of their families and the development of their country. Throughout history, women have shown this extraordinary capacity for getting together and hammering out a consensus. Our present day societies, which seem to be marching only to the drum of economic and cultural globalization, need more than ever before what women have to offer.

For the sake of soaring profits, society is pushing an increasing number of people out to its margins and providing a breeding ground for many forms of fundamentalism. Women, because they are aware of the problem and of their strengths, will have to stand together to fight effectively against poverty and extremism.

If it is to develop harmoniously, society cannot afford to ignore women and the issues and problems they are facing. Women's health is one of the factors that has a direct impact on the evolution of women's place in our society. I maintain that we must take action where it will do the most good, in other words, we must invest in medical research now to find a cure for breast cancer.

We should act now by raising the federal government's financial support to the level of the commitments it made to the provinces when the Canada Health Act was passed. Women's health cannot but improve as a result.

[English]

Mr. Harold Culbert (Carleton—Charlotte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member for Yukon on her initiative regarding this most worthwhile matter contained in Motion No. 376.

This morning the standing committee on health discussed this very matter, not in any great depth but with seriousness due to the subject matter. It was discussed from the perspective of what was being done in research in order to overcome breast cancer. We had before the standing committee this morning Dr. Henry Friesen, who is president of the Medical Research Council of Canada. Dr. Friesen commented that there has not been a cure found for this most dreaded affliction, which has indeed touched many families right across the country.

Perhaps the work being done by the standing committee on health can act as a coordinator to assist in carrying this forward so that the information will flow in the future.

Quite obviously, suffering from any illness brings an undue burden on anyone. Compounding it with the problem of lack of information is indeed unfair and unnecessary in this day and age. The hon. member's motion would ensure that women

suffering from breast cancer are provided with all the information they may need and the counselling they may require. I suggest again that in this day in age that is only humane. When suffering from any illness, information regarding all types of treatment should be readily available and accessible to all. It should certainly be the patient's right to obtain any and all information and have immediate access to the same.

(1810)

It is quite obvious in this case, as in many circumstances, that to have a support group, those who may have suffered or family members who have suffered in a similar fashion, can comfort, assist and indicate what might be expected in future days, weeks, and months, and can be a tremendous comfort to anyone suffering in this case.

Quite obviously a person cannot be expected to make such an important medical decision without having weighed all those possible alternatives that may be available. We are told that Canadians have the second highest rate of breast cancer in the world. It has hit, as I have mentioned before, almost every family in Canada in recent years, and that suffering continues today, day in and day out, from this dreaded disease.

The survivor led breast cancer support group would provide sufferers with an opportunity for the needed information and the support they so often lack. There is no question that this type of support group can be most helpful through their own personal experiences. It is time to realize that we must take action to help women with breast cancer in the best possible way while we wait for that cure to be discovered.

For this reason I am very happy to support the hon. member's motion this evening and I certainly to encourage my government to adopt a platform that will ensure that women diagnosed with breast cancer are provided with the information they deserve and need. We wait and hope for our ultimate goal of discovery of a cure to eliminate this dreaded suffering so that we need not have a group nor the suffering in the future. To quote from the Medical Research Council: "It is to promote, assist, and undertake basic applied clinical research in Canada in the health sciences and to advise the minister in respect of such matters relating to such research as the minister may refer to the council for its consideration".

We are certainly hopeful that through the research council and the work done through universities and other labs and tests here in Canada a cure for this dreaded disease will be found as soon as is feasibly possible. In the meantime, we certainly encourage all in the House to support the hon. member's endeavour in this particular motion to assist those suffering and to provide the assistance and expertise of support groups at the earliest possible date.

Private Members' Business

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I too am pleased to rise to speak to this motion today.

In its simplicity, this motion on breast cancer funding can be looked upon as an opportunity to address a topic of specific interest and importance to women and of general interest and importance to everyone. I agree with my hon. colleague from Yukon that we need to address breast cancer as a new national priority.

(1815)

In the address I will give looking at the whole issue of breast cancer, I bring to the forefront of the debate the extent and fit of government involvement. This is not simply a question of breast cancer funding but of government research funding as a whole. Who should regulate it, why and how?

Breast cancer is a disease that afflicts one out of nine Canadian women, placing Canada as the country with the second highest rate of breast cancer in the world. These statistics were already cited today but I am going to reiterate them. There are approximately 17,000 new cases diagnosed each year and over 5,000 deaths. Breast cancer is the second most frequently occurring form of cancer next only to lung cancer. These figures emphasize the scope and significance of this disease.

Although breast cancer is considered a women's disease it afflicts all Canadians in one form or another. We all have mothers, sisters, wives, girlfriends, if not ourselves who are very possibly at risk and one in nine will be diagnosed in her lifetime.

I have witnessed the physical and emotional devastation of breast cancer. As a teenager I watched a beloved aunt die slowly and painfully over a six-year period. Her cancer began in her breast and it was unstoppable.

Where does government belong in the battle against breast cancer? What would be the most effective use of scarce government resources targeted to breast cancer funding? I refer to the idea of creative productivity. Government does and should have a role in the fight against breast cancer. Let us not move too quickly to ask big brother to jump in to spend dwindling resources without thinking this through.

Government funded and operated initiatives have not always been the most efficient despite good intentions. We are all too familiar with the economic and bureaucratic nightmare of exploding costs that some government run programs can create. We need just to look at the current state of our health care system and its high degree of inefficiency.

Funding to breast cancer research has seen a surge over the past three years partly from government but more significantly from corporate funders and private individuals and programs. In

1990 less than \$500,000 was committed to breast cancer research. Since 1992 the federal government has committed \$20 million toward breast cancer research over five years. The Canadian Cancer Society has put up another \$10 million. Corporate donors are expected to provide another \$15 million.

In areas of medical research where what we are looking for are cures and preventative measures, government does indeed have a very important role to play. It already has a hand in regulation of scientific research but even here it is not the core funder. The private sector has been a much more impressive financial contributor to research into breast cancer. Certainly government's tardy involvement in breast cancer studies is further proof as to why we might want to look for a more collaborative effort between both public and private initiatives.

In 1986, unable to persuade the Canadian Cancer Society to change its policy on targeting funding, a group of Toronto women established the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation. Since its inception it has collected well in excess of \$1 million for research and education.

In 1990 the Canadian Cancer Society agreed to start accepting funds earmarked for specific cancer sites. All involved agree that it is largely due to survivor groups that the initiative came together.

Strength and courage are demonstrated by breast cancer survivors who, after being told that they have a disease that is almost surely disfiguring and far too often fatal, have had the initiative to organize themselves into impressive fundraising and information gathering organizations.

Pressured by women's organizations and survivor groups, the funding has grown to an estimated \$15 million annually, up from \$5 million in 1989. This funding is being put into research for not only cures but also causes.

Research into BRCA1 which is a gene believed to cause 2 to 4 per cent of breast cancers and studies examining the development of a vaccine to stop some kind of breast cancers in their attacks by activating the immune system are just two examples of current efforts to combat this deadly disease.

As of 1994 more than half of the financial resources of breast cancer research have come from non-government agencies and organizations. According to people I have spoken to within these organizations, they are not looking to government for financial support. Their argument is that financial support from government is all too often attached to government meddling. It is also perceived as unpredictable, particularly in light of current proposed cuts.

(1820)

We must continue to encourage and invite collaboration between public and private groups. We would also be wise to continue to promote the independence demonstrated by many support groups.

I believe the hon. member's motion may have missed an important step and presumes that more government involvement is necessarily better. Would funding not be put to better use if it remained in areas of prevention and cure development? Then organizations which are already set up to provide support, information and education, such as breast cancer survivor groups and the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, are prepared to fulfil their supportive roles.

The reality of Canada's debt makes us cautious about inviting government to spend more money we do not really have. Therefore we encourage more creative means of funding in some of these areas.

The government is already allocating funds toward cancer research. Should we not leave it to those who know where that money is best spent to decide where to put it, rather than having government make that decision for them? Who better to make funding allocation decisions than those who have spent the better part of their lives studying and examining the disease? That is not to say they should be given a free hand, but once the money has been earmarked, then it is up to the scientists and researchers to do with it what is most needed.

As it stands, decisions on who should get what funding is tenuous at best when we see that it is often not necessarily the most needy who are getting a fair share of government funding. When some diseases responsible for taking less than one-tenth the lives taken from breast cancer are getting almost eight times the funding, the source of this decision must be questioned, that source being the federal government.

In 1993 the national forum on breast cancer referred to a holistic approach to the treatment and care of breast cancer, one that explicitly acknowledges both the non-medical and medical experiences for women and their families. It concluded that breast cancer has a profound physical and emotional effect on not only women with the disease, but very directly on their community of family and friends.

Let us not give exclusive invitations to government into our homes and personal lives. Government does have a role to perform in addressing breast cancer, but not at the expense of community based networks of support.

What we have advocated has been the need for Canadians to take charge of their lives and to some degree exclude government from the expectation of care. Family and community support must be encouraged, but this will not be done by making government responsible for providing those support groups. Women and families suffering from breast cancer and any

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debilitating disease need supports to give them strength together to survive and in a sense conquer these diseases, if not physically at least spiritually.

The national forum on breast cancer has also recommended a collaborative effort among government and corporate and private sectors. Acknowledging that government has neither the resources nor the ability to be the sole responsible actor in breast cancer initiatives empowers survivors and their families to beat this deadly foe.

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak briefly on the motion moved by the member for Yukon:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should provide core funding to ensure that all women diagnosed with breast cancer have access, through survivor led support groups, to information on the various treatments available in their community and local counselling services provided by peer support groups and survivors.

I commend the hon. member for this initiative because it is time that we acknowledged such a need.

Tomorrow a friend of the family is being buried. She died from cancer. Only the privacy of communication would preclude me from mentioning her name. This woman had contributed to the community, to the city of Winnipeg, to women's causes, to the university, and I would say to Canada and the world. In a sense learning of her death was timely in view of the debate on this motion.

(1825)

It is known that when a patient suffers from any illness the immediate problem is the patient is met with shock. To a woman suffering from cancer that shock is even greater. During shock one of the best sources of support comes from her peers. Let us not underestimate the importance this group of people contribute to patient care.

We need all the information available for that patient to be able to make the informed consent. We equally need the counselling that will come from her peers. Norman Cousins, in *The Healing Heart*, emphasized the powerful influence of psychological factors in the cure and the care of any patient with cancer or other illness. This is now a recognized medical phenomenon and this motion calls our attention to that very need. I wish Canada had such a centre to study and to focus on the role and the importance of psychological counselling in the care of any patient.

I am told Canada has the second highest rate of breast cancer in the world. Let us hope that one day Canada would be last on the list. Recently in *Macleans*' magazine I came across the news of a new discovery that we can help to diagnose or anticipate the high incidence of cancer among women. If one demonstrates the increased density through the particular use of a technology, density in the sense that the proportion of the fibrous tissue in

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relation to the fat and the glandular elements is more, then there is a high propensity for cancer.

Day in and day out we are developing technology that will allow us to make an early diagnosis, but when a diagnosis of cancer is made for any given woman, all resources must be provided. It is timely that core funding be given. The least we could do is help that individual woman with cancer.

The Deputy Speaker: There being no further members rising I wonder if the hon. member for Yukon wishes to rise to close the debate?

Ms. McLaughlin: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity. I thank members present today for their interventions.

Today's debate has shown this is not a partisan issue. A commitment to prevention and research for women suffering from breast cancer is something we must always bring forward. This is not just a women's issue as was pointed out by one of the speakers. This is an issue affecting all Canadians and all Canadian families, certainly my own family. I am sure that virtually everyone in the House has experienced something similar.

We must put action behind the words we have spoken today. There is a great need. We have all cited the statistics, but what will really address that need is to acknowledge that we must work with those who are sufferers of the disease, to help them—as I mentioned in my remarks, many people do recover—and to present a hopeful and a positive view. This is an issue that members of Parliament can seriously address.

To the member from the health committee, perhaps this is an issue they might wish to explore further in reviewing the recommendations of 1992 to see what has been accomplished and what yet remains to be accomplished. I thank all members for their comments.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hour provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired. Pursuant to Standing Order 96(1), the order is dropped from the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

(1830)

[*English*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago I directed a question to the Minister of Transport. At the same time I advanced the thesis that since the government wished to privatize the CNR part of the railway system in the country, he should give consideration to offering that railway to the farmers of western Canada to whom the government has offered \$1.6 billion as part of the Crow benefit buyout.

Since the value of the railway appears to be approximately that amount, it seemed to be a very good match. It would have saved the government a considerable amount in brokerage fees and so on. It would have left future prospects for the country much better off, given the users would be in control of at least one of the national railways and would therefore presumably operate it in a manner that permitted and encouraged the continued use and export of products over the rail lines.

I am aware the government is constrained by a report it had created internally by a subcommittee which was set up basically to respond to an offer by CPR to buy out a section of the CN track through northern Ontario.

The committee offered a solution called commercialization to which the minister referred in his response. I submit to the minister and to his department that the concept of commercialization, as proposed in the committee, is terribly out of date even though it is only six or eight months old because since that time the government has made its decision to give the payout of \$1.6 billion to prairie farmers. That payout may be considerably less than what was required and what should have been made under the circumstances of the long term, in perpetuity commitment that governments made with farmers almost 10 decades ago.

However, the parameters have changed. The amount of money on the table is equivalent to the value of CNR. It would save the government a considerable amount of dollars in brokerage fees to perform the switch. Farmers who are not interested due to retirement or proximity to the other railway in owning CN shares could take them to the market and get rid of them. Perhaps other resource users such as the potash, coal, sulphur and wood industries would use the opportunity to buy shares.

A system of control to the users makes sense, given the new paradigm of globalism that has emerged with the various trade agreements under GATT, et cetera. If we are to have viable industries and viable communities in Canada, this completes the all too necessary link of control from farm to port or from woods or mine to port that is required. The commercialization option that was proposed by the subcommittee of the Liberal caucus is out of date and no longer applicable. I urge the government to

abandon it and to look at up to date solutions that will have a much better chance of long term viability.

I give the minister and his government the example of prairie grain elevators during the teens when government elevators were purchased. They were all losers. They lost money. The government decided to privatize them. The farmers took them over as a co-operative. By having control of the elevators they have subsequently turned a series of losing operations into a winning proposition and now operate two of the largest world-wide co-operative grain companies.

That same economic ability would apply in the case of the railway. CN is now a losing operation. They could turn it around and make it useful to the whole of the country.

(1835)

Ms. Mary Clancy (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it sounds to me as if my hon. colleague from Saskatchewan is talking about privatization if necessary but not necessarily privatization.

We on this side do not think that the report chaired by the hon. member for Kenora—Rainy River which followed nationwide consultations was out of date. We think it was quite up to date. It supported full commercialization of CN including participation by employees.

A range of factors has been considered in the process of commercializing CN, not the least of which is that the greatest possible value for taxpayer should be generated in the process.

I think all members would agree that commercializing CN must not impose restrictions on the company that would reduce its value or its competitiveness. Ideally it should be placed on a level playing field with its competitors and positioned to remain a viable force in Canadian transportation, to the benefit of our shipping community.

As the minister said, the sale of the government's equity will constitute the largest share issue in Canadian history. Through a public share offering the government, in seeking to generate the greatest value for taxpayers and to provide all Canadians with an opportunity to participate in this unique opportunity, wants to ensure a broad shareholder distribution throughout the issue.

Farmers as well as all interested Canadians, perhaps even a few people who live by the ports, will have an equal opportunity to invest in CN.

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on May 3, I questioned the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration about the denial of visitors' visas to three Algerian actors, M'Hamed Benguettaf, Ziani-Chérif Ayad and Masrah El-Kalâa, by the Canadian embassy in Paris. They had been invited by the organizers of the Theatre Festival of the Americas, which will

be held in Montreal in two weeks. Their play deals with the rise of fundamentalism in Algeria.

The minister has refused to intervene in this matter. He did so, however, in the almost identical case of Hafsa Zinaï Koudil, the Algerian filmmaker, whose application was supported by the Bloc Québécois and by many organizations and personalities in Quebec.

One criticism I must make to the minister is that his policy and his decisions are often disjointed, inconsistent and unfair. Moreover, I find it unacceptable for immigration officials to demand Algerians provide written guarantee of their intention not to seek political asylum once inside Canada before issuing a simple visitor's visa.

I must point out that the vast majority of Algerians settle in Quebec and integrate well as a community, making a valuable contribution to Quebec society.

I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to pay tribute to Club 2/3 of Montreal, an organization for international co-operation, which recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. This organization has funded many projects to assist the poor in Africa, Asia and South America.

We must thank Club 2/3 for all of its work in this area and for its decisive contribution to heightening the awareness of young Quebecers to humanitarian aid and international solidarity.

A few Algerians have obtained refugee status in Canada. But the new immigration tax that the federal government imposed on February 28 prevented some of them from obtaining permanent residence, because they could not raise the required \$975. In addition, the Department of Immigration refused to lend them the money, despite the assurances of the minister that this would not happen.

In such a context, these people who have been recognized as refugees can neither become permanent residents nor bring their families over, and that is inhumane.

I invite the minister and his government to be more open and to be more sensitive to the tragedy in Algeria and to the situation of people from that country who are seeking Canada's protection and aid.

[English]

Ms. Mary Clancy (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are times when I weep for the lack of understanding on the other side.

As the hon. member knows, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration does not have the power or the authority under the Immigration Act to overturn a visitor visa application. These were individual visitor visa applications, judged on their individual merits and on the basis of the information provided by the applicants. It is the responsibility of the government to facilitate the entry of genuine visitors to Canada.

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A visa officer is required by regulation to refuse a visitor visa if he has reasonable grounds to believe the applicant will not leave Canada when the visa expires. A visa officer is bound to uphold Canadian law and to protect the interests of this country; and well my honourable friend knows this.

An applicant who is refused may make a new application and ask the visa officer to consider any new information they may wish to present. I would remind the hon. member that this is exactly what happened in the case involving the Algerian filmmaker, Ms. Koudil, who made a reapplication after she was invited to do so here in this House by both the minister and by

me. Lo and behold, when the new information came forward she was admitted and went to the film festival.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 38(5), the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.42 p.m.)

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