Under Pressure

Being a Member of Parliament is often a difficult job. The hours can be long, the reading heavy, and the fear of losing your job in the next election is never far away. When an MP votes on an issue within the House of Commons it can be a complex decision which may please some but disappoint or even anger others. There are many different groups and people who try to influence or shape an MP’s vote. Rarely can an MP satisfy everyone.

Read the following fictitious example of the pressures and conflicts facing a member of parliament before an important party vote. Assume you are the rookie MP J.W. Martin who has struggled for weeks on how to vote on a proposal to close a military base in his constituency. Be prepared to note the likely results of your decision.

The Party’s View
The prime minister has introduced a bill to close old, obsolete military bases across Canada. This will save millions in taxpayers’ money and the party had pledged to trim their government spending. Martin is a newly-elected backbencher for the governing party, yet he is ambitious and would like to have the approval of the PM.

The Constituents’ View
However, one of the bases set to be closed sits in the middle of Martin’s constituency. Closing the base will result in the loss of jobs for civilians who work at the base. As well, local restaurants, shops, and businesses will suffer from the withdrawal of close to 2000 military personnel. They have demanded that Martin stand up for his community and fight against the closure of the base. This is a huge issue for his constituents and if he fails to support them, he may well be defeated in the next election. As well, supporters, friends, even family members want the base to remain open. Virtually no one in his riding approves of the closure of the base.

Martin’s Personal View
Martin is a former business owner who feels government taxes Canadians too much. He promised to fight for lower taxes and knows closing bases is one way to do it. Martin also knows that the election was won partly because of the assistance of the party and in particular the PM who visited the area twice during the recent election. Martin hopes to enter the Cabinet one day and knows that means loyalty to party and prime minister is critical. However, Martin also knows closing the base will weaken his community for years to come. What to do?

1. If you were Martin how would you vote? Why?

2. What do you think will be the result of your decision? Explain.