

tommyrot, and he knows it. I would like him to stand up and at least admit that the price and the general economic conditions—well, let us put it another way—that the National Energy Program has exacerbated the problems the oil and gas industry is experiencing. At least, let us get that on the record.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bussières: Mr. Chairman, considering the aggregate of possible causes, I would like to ask the hon. member whether he has had a look recently at the statistics on natural gas sales, and whether he could not find another explanation here for some of the slowdowns in exploration and development. I repeat that this would be oversimplifying and even distorting the situation. Since he is so well acquainted with the National Energy Program, he will agree that it would be entirely false to say that the program discourages investment and that it has reduced exploration and development activity, when in fact it contains very generous provisions for stimulating oil and gas exploration and development.

[*English*]

Mr. Thomson: Has the Minister of State for Finance had the opportunity to look at the number of Canadian companies whose bond ratings have deteriorated in the last eight months, particularly companies involved in the Canadian oil and gas industry?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bussières: Mr. Chairman, I think that if the hon. member wants us to sit down and analyse specific cases, we can always take the time to do this. However, I feel that if the hon. member wants to proceed with an exhaustive analysis of this bill, we will not have enough time this afternoon to examine the financial statements of companies involved in oil and gas exploration and development.

[*English*]

Mr. Thomson: What I was trying to determine was whether the Minister of State for Finance knows of the very significant deterioration in the financial position of major Canadian and foreign companies engaged in the Canadian oil and gas industry. Anyone who had any appreciation whatsoever of the industry would surely want to take a look at the macro impact of the National Energy Program on the bond ratings of those companies engaged in our Canadian industry today. I will say that if the minister does not know the answer, I will tell him the answer. The bond ratings of many Canadian companies and foreign companies have deteriorated very significantly because no one wants to invest in Canada any more. That attests to the fallacy and the disastrous consequences of the National Energy Program.

Let me move on to one further question. Does the government feel that it has been honest with the Canadian public in revealing the cost of its policies of Canadianization? Day in and day out we hear that the government is fully supported by the Canadian people in its Canadianization program. Does the minister know whether the Canadian people are really aware

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of the effect this policy has had on their mortgage interest rates, on the value of the Canadian dollar and on investor confidence? Can the minister say that the Canadian public is aware of those conditions and costs? Is the minister confident that Canadians are aware of the cost to them of the Canadianization program?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bussières: Mr. Chairman, I am convinced that Canadians are well aware of the benefits of the National Energy Program and also of Canadianizing a major sector of our industry which concerns mostly the oil and gas sectors. However, Canadians see economic developments much more as a whole than the hon. member, and they consider them as interrelated elements instead of trying simplistically to blame a single cause for our present problems. The indicting statement just made by the hon. member would have us believe that Canadians see the National Energy Program as the cause of the high level of our interest rates. Furthermore, we would have to conclude that the Canadian people consider the National Energy Program as the only cause of the extremely difficult and painful unemployment rates which prevail at this time.

Well, I would like to point out to him that the many Canadians with whom I have had an opportunity to discuss the matter have a much more complex view of the situation. On the one hand, they see the benefits of the National Energy Program. They also know that we must pay the price if we want to achieve a certain rate of Canadian ownership in our industry. They also realize that the government is showing good judgment when it comes to the pressure which must be brought to bear for this Canadianization to take place, but they also know that, like all other industrialized countries, Canada is facing an extremely difficult and severe economic crisis which forces us now to live with high interest rates, high inflation and also high unemployment. Canadians also recognize, with the government, that to create again a climate of confidence conducive to capital investments in oil and natural gas prospecting and development, we must establish an economic climate capable of restoring the investors' confidence and encouraging them to make the wheels of the economy turn once again, which will also bring down interest rates and unemployment. However, the fundamental cause of these problems is the climate of uncertainty resulting from a high level of inflation. This is the general picture of the economy which Canadians have. They support the government in its ongoing fight against inflation, and most importantly, they avoid blaming a single cause, namely the National Energy Program, for everything that is going wrong in this country.

[*English*]

Mr. Thomson: I do not know who the Minister of State for Finance is talking to. He cannot be talking to the same Canadians that I am talking to. I am not trying to imply that