

Oral Questions

Mr. Edwards: Herbie, you are leading with your chin again.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if it is entirely accurate that it can be done in five years as the Minister of National Defence says, or in four years as the Minister of the Environment says. I do know that after 25 years of Liberal government it cannot be done by any of them in a quarter of a century. That we know.

My hon. friend knows full well that when this government took office the deficit was \$38.5 billion. It is now down to \$32 billion. As a percentage of GDP it has gone from 8.7 per cent to roughly 4.7 per cent or been cut approximately in half. The deficit as a percentage of GDP is the only internationally accepted criterion for evaluating the impact of deficits. It has been cut in half. It is 5.1 as a result of the recession and scheduled to go back down again to under 4.5. I did not say it was zero, I said it has been cut in half as a percentage of GDP.

I certainly agree with the objectives set out by my hon. friend and my other hon. friend, both of whom will do a much better job running the public finances of Canada than the former President of the Treasury Board who was worse, second only to that President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the Prime Minister, in boasting about his record, did not boast about how in only nine years he doubled the public debt to \$450 billion, more than happened in all the years since Confederation.

• (1425)

I am surprised that record is not on his mind. Also he has not told us what he thinks of the words of his Minister of Finance who said only last December: "If you shut the whole government operation down, you would not balance the deficit. You would save \$15 billion or \$16 billion and the senior citizens of this great country and the veterans would not be receiving their cheques".

I ask the Prime Minister this. In the new budget of the Minister of Finance, is he now targeting the old age pensioners and the veterans in terms of cuts in their benefits? If that is the case, why is that a priority rather than cancelling his farewell trips and saving the country millions of dollars?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I am offended by my hon. friend. I am making a

farewell trip to Windsor to say goodbye to him personally.

My hon. friend from Windsor is deeply troubled, as he should be, by a national debt that has doubled. He is quite right.

Mr. Boudria: Tripled.

Mr. Mulroney: My hon. friend sitting behind is wrong. The hon. member from Windsor is right. It has doubled. The argument that it has doubled exclusively as a result of compound interest on the debt that we inherited is there—

An hon. member: Every penny.

Mr. Mulroney:—every nickel of it, but I will not invoke that argument today.

I would like to know this. Given his indignation in regard to a government that has doubled the debt, what does he have to say about a government that caused the national debt to increase 11 times as the Liberals did when last they were in office?

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

Listening to the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister both arguing over who has done the worst job, there is only one alternative and that is my party.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Ms. McLaughlin: Last week the government released a document called "Changing the Economic Course in a World of Change".

What this has really meant for Canadians is double digit unemployment, doubling the debt and having the greatest number of bankruptcies ever in the history of Canada. Nowhere in this document does it address the issue of unemployment. Nowhere in this document does it address the cost of unemployment. Nowhere in this document is there the cost of the loss of tax dollars because of unemployment.

I want to ask the Prime Minister this. He has one final chance to bring a real change of course with the next budget. Will he do that? Will he bring in a budget based on a full employment policy?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend is fighting for the title of which party can do the worst job. She will have to fight pretty hard with her colleagues in Ontario because they are doing a pretty good job.