

● (1220)

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Speaker, it seems like old times now that we are getting questions about the policy of the Government. Let me try to reply very quickly to the Hon. Member.

First, I remind him that what we went through during the early part of the 1980s was something that was a world-wide phenomenon. He may have had his head in the sand during that period. Most of us were dealing with the fact that unemployment and high interest rates were effective in Europe, the United States, Great Britain, Canada and Japan. Every single industrial country was faced with the same problem. One cannot point to one Government and say it was the sole cause.

During that period of time, we were trying to get at the sources of the problem. We did achieve a substantial reduction in the inflation rate. The fact that we now have a 3.8 per cent inflation rate has nothing to do with the Conservative Government of the last two months. It is because of the six and five program that was introduced 18 months ago. We brought that inflation rate down. You are fortunate enough to be the beneficiaries of it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We shall now resume debate.

Hon. G. S. Gerry Merrithew (Minister of State (Forestry)): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to make my inaugural address in this House on the occasion of the debate on the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. This is particularly so because I have the honour to hold a new portfolio, that of Minister of State for Forestry, which was created by our Government and our Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in recognition of the enormous importance of the forestry sector in our economy.

It is just as important to me, however, to be here fulfilling my more immediate responsibilities as a Member of Parliament for Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada's most dynamic port city. I want at this time to thank the citizens who supported me in Saint John for the confidence they have placed in me over six elections in the last 13 years, one municipal, four provincial, and, most recently, for a convincing win on September 4.

The City of Saint John is one of eastern Canada's major industrial centres, boasting a population of over 100,000 people, mainly of British, Irish, Scottish and French descent. Our city was the first incorporated city in Canada. Next year we will be celebrating our 200th anniversary. A meeting, by way of coincidence, will be held this week to commemorate the first provincial Cabinet meeting which was held in Saint John on November 22, 1784. To mark that particular event, the Government of New Brunswick's present executive council will meet in our city on Thursday of this week to commemorate this important date in our nation's history.

Saint John is, first and foremost, a port city. It is also an important industrial city with major industries such as Saint John Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Co. Ltd., a large brush and broom factory, one of the largest in the British Common-

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wealth, an oil refinery, two pulp and paper mills, and a growing number of small and medium-sized businesses.

The people of Saint John are also very proud of our city's efforts to modernize the downtown core. This venerable city recently initiated a major facelift built around the now famous Market Square complex, which includes a new trade and industry centre, an office complex and a library and, of course, very attractive common areas. Those people who have not chosen to have a convention there are certainly welcome to come and experience our Saint John hospitality.

Despite its age, the city and its people are modern and forward-looking. The people of Saint John are by tradition entrepreneurs, willing to accept the challenge of the marketplace, looking for opportunities to create and to prosper. It is a community that was, of course, positioned to feel very directly the hardships of the recent recession. Dependent on the marketplace, vulnerable to the disasters affecting international trade, the people of Saint John suffered through all of the economy's failures over the past five years.

They also suffered through the paralysis of federalism which prevented national solutions to national problems. As a provincial Minister of Commerce and Development for six years and later as Minister of Natural Resources of the Province, I was forced to witness the long, bitter battles of businessmen faced with crippling interest rates and sagging markets.

Believe me, I saw firsthand the impact of bankruptcy and unemployment on Canadians as they realized that their dreams for the future would have to be postponed or forgotten. Like every Canadian, especially those of us with children, I worry about the effects that economic uncertainty and unemployment might have on the next generation. As Minister, I turned around to find only slogans and arrogance at the federal level. There was no sense of national crisis, only jealous protection of what they called their turf.

Like every Canadian, I recognize the human waste behind the statistics of alcoholism, crime and suicide. I know that the first duty of any government must be to restore a sense of purpose and hope to individual Canadians. I am proud that our Government has signalled in its Throne Speech its intention to rebuild that confidence and to balance major programs. On the one hand, the Government will give Canadians the freedom to invest and to build. On the other hand, the disadvantaged will be protected through our social programs.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, the themes of the Throne Speech are as welcome as birds in spring, especially when we hear the words reconciliation, consensus, economic renewal and social justice. These are themes that were forgotten by an entire generation of Canadians, and will now provide the key to a new era of government.

[English]

The Fathers of Confederation knew very well what they were doing when they designed our country. They built a state which functions only when Canadians work together. When they fight each other, as they have for the past decade, it