

controversy, this move of independence or this little crisis of the Quebec finance minister is motivated only by separatist sentiments and not at all by good intentions towards the population that the provincial government should serve.

If the Quebec government wants to abolish entirely the sales tax on clothes, fair enough, we have no objection. On the contrary, we will congratulate it for this action. As a matter of fact, one of my colleagues reminds me that in the first budget after its victory the Parti Québécois itself increased the sales tax on footwear and children clothing. If they realize now it was not such a good measure, let them remove it and we will congratulate them for it. But they should not do it with the Canadian government's money, they should not do it by trying to jeopardize the free common market that we enjoy in this country, they should not do it either to enhance their separatist option, because they have been elected not to bring Quebec to independence, but to give the people of Quebec a good administration. I think that this mini-crisis has been provoked exclusively by the Quebec government and by Mr. Parizeau. The Canadian government is not to blame if we are in this situation; the blame rests squarely on Mr. Parizeau. In my opinion, this small crisis will disappear in a few weeks.

I am basing myself on an experience we had some months ago. Mr. Speaker, you will remember that a few months ago, following a conference of energy ministers, namely the Canadian Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie) and the ten provincial ministers, it was agreed that the two levels of governments, federal and provincial, would strive to conserve energy in Canada and to introduce at both levels a series of measures designed to make the people aware if the need to conserve energy, to consider energy as a valuable asset that should not be wasted. Now, you will remember that following this federal-provincial conference where the federal Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and the ten provincial energy ministers had agreed on a series of measures at the federal and provincial levels, the home insulation program also caused a minor identity crisis in the province of Quebec. You will remember that the Quebec government had reneged on the commitment made at the federal-provincial conference by his energy minister and was no longer ready to co-operate with the Canadian government in setting up a Canadian home insulation program throughout the country.

Of course, because of the step forward and the two steps backwards taken by the Quebec government, this program was not implemented within the province of Quebec at the same time as in the other provinces, and on that occasion, Quebec found a rather special allied in the province of Alberta which had special problems it wanted to solve before joining the national energy conservation program. So, for some months, we had a home insulation program offered by the Canadian government to all citizens of all provinces, a program which was quickly and heartily endorsed by almost all the provinces, but was turned down by the PQ government in Quebec

The Budget—Mr. Ouellet

because it felt once again that the Canadian government was forcing its hand in a field which it nevertheless acknowledged as being very important. Now, it took federal officials a few weeks, a great deal of patience and goodwill in order to reach positive conclusions and finally an agreement with the Quebec government, so that the people in Quebec could benefit from this program just as all other Canadian citizens.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the same thing will happen in the case of the sales tax which now is a ticklish problem in Quebec. In a few weeks from now, a solution will be found by the officials sent by the Quebec Minister of Finance in co-operation with the Canadian government officials, which will enable the minister, Mr. Parizeau, to save face, just like it was possible, a few weeks ago to enable the Quebec Minister of Energy, Mr. Joron, to save face because he had turned down a program that was capital for all Canadians, whatever their province of residence. I believe it is essential, in the course of my contribution to this debate on the budget, that I refer briefly to the programs and measures the Canadian government has undertaken in the last few months, I would even say the last few years, in order to provide all Canadians with adequate housing at reasonable prices.

● (1622)

I think that objectively we can recognize that opportunities for Canadians to find comfortable housing at a reasonable price are better today than ever before. Through a series of government programs in 1976 we offered on the market a great many new housing units. In fact we have built in Canada some 265,000 housing units. It represents a significant number of homes that are offered to the Canadian people and that meet the needs of the majority of Canadians. And this housing production is not made at random but within a program launched two years ago by the Government of Canada to build one million new housing units for the Canadian people over the next four years. If we consider our performance we realize now that we have even exceeded our objectives and we will certainly reach that target of one million new housing units in Canada.

Obviously I do not think that a high number of housing starts is in itself the magic answer to our housing problems. However we must produce annually more housing in Canada if we want to meet the needs of the Canadian people and particularly a group of citizens, the senior citizens and low wage corners. It is absolutely necessary for the Canadian government and provincial governments to do better and more in that field. In fact, in 1976 we have financed only 12,000 units under federal-provincial shared cost public housing programs. I think that 12,000 units is not enough. The target I submitted to my provincial colleagues is 30,000 housing units a year over the next five years and the reason I submitted—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. minister but I wish to inform him that his