

beached whale. He flops helplessly, and there is nothing he can do.

● (2340)

An hon. Member: Don't insult the whales.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I am sorry. I do not think that is deepening the understanding of Canadians. This government is here to do a few things. What is the role of government? What has the Liberal party said about the role of government?

An hon. Member: Stay in office!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Aside from that, the role of government has always been in the Liberal party's philosophy to create an atmosphere where Canadians could realize their aspirations. If they wanted to venture, they could, with some hope of success. The Liberal party was never passive, it was an activist party. It could do something. That was the rhetoric. But those days are gone. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), when he was leader of the opposition and resigned, said it would be good for the Liberal party if it had a period out of office. I think it would have been good for Canada if the Liberals had had a period out of office; it would have had a chance to regenerate itself and go back to its roots. Because the party of St. Laurent, of Pearson and of Laurier was a caring party. It really cared about people. It cared about people more than it cared about power. This party today only cares about power. If we are talking about the concern of Canadians, you bet they are concerned tonight. They are asking themselves where did my government let me down? Why didn't the government respond? When will the government respond and what will its response be? The Minister of Finance earlier tonight said he was going to stand pat and not move. He was going to stay beached and flop there helplessly and use the lame excuse that it is the fault of the Americans, or the Martians, or the weather but it is not the government. If the government is going to claim credit for its programs, it must share the blame when this country is in economic chaos, as it is now. We must not let the minister of state just gloss over this problem and say there is nothing wrong, or say that we will get out of it. There are some things the government could do if it really cared.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) said that in reference to the members opposite, who asked us to consider the shelter grants—and we were doing it—ought now to consider such a policy themselves. This is especially so at a time when not just the drivers of automobiles but senior citizens and everyone else who consume oil are 'laced' by higher energy prices. Surely the government can think of some kind of energy tax credit—call it what you will—for those who cannot bear that burden much longer. The Minister of Finance told me, as he told the House earlier, that the government has programs designed to help lower-income Canadians and that these programs are indexed. Of course, that is so. But even with full indexation, our senior citizens are falling further and

further behind as a result of inflation. Indexation is not working to keep them up to date.

Mr. Evans: That is nonsense.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): My friend from Ottawa Centre who was so vociferous in opposition is now silent because he sits in government. He is taking the Queen's shilling as a parliamentary secretary. I commend to him a speech made by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) in Vancouver. This is what she said about senior citizens in Canada:

—1.2 million of our 2.3 million Old Age Security pensioners received the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

That is the item to which they added the \$35. The minister went on to say:

This means that 53 per cent of Canada's pensioners have incomes low enough to qualify for this extra assistance. Can you imagine if 53 per cent of the total population of Canada under age 65 had to rely on government welfare payments to survive?

So despite indexing, that is the situation. I hear my friend saying something. He will have a chance to make his speech. It will be a rare occasion and I look forward to hearing him. I hope he will let me finish mine.

Mr. MacEachen: You would not do that for me earlier. I noticed your leader left an hour and a half ago.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): The Minister of Finance talks about my leader, I wonder where his is.

An hon. Member: Probably in his swimming pool.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): The Minister of National Health and Welfare continued:

What is even more disturbing is the fact that a full 16 per cent of pensioners receive the maximum supplement.

That is with the \$35. She went on to say:

This means that, for the most part, these 360,000 senior citizens do not have one red cent to their names besides the Old Age Security pension and Supplement.

Mr. Evans: Who put it in?

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I am not arguing about who put it in. The government proposed it, Parliament disposed of it and passed it. That is a fact. But that is not an answer, my friend, to the argument put forward by the Minister of Finance in the face of the kind of inflation we have that few people who benefit from all of the allowances, veterans and otherwise, provided by the people of Canada can look to those allowances, even fully indexed, as appropriate. That is why I wonder and ask where is the Liberal party, this party of concern and sharing? Where is the Minister of Finance who has been asked direct questions and has now gained the reputation of the fluffy answer, that is no answer to direct questions being put to him as to what the government intends to do? A government cannot lie down helplessly on the beach. A government cannot hide behind the skirts of another country. A government has a responsibility to create an atmosphere or to recreate one. That is what this government said it was