

Canadians. The total cost of this social housing program in Canada is \$2 billion per year. This is a net amount incorporating received rents as well as the cost.

I looked at the statistics to find out the number of current housing starts. Because this question came from the Bloc I tried to zero in on why the Bloc would be particularly interested in this question.

I found that in Ontario this year there are some 7,200 starts on the go and in Quebec there are some 900 starts on the go. I imagined, if I were in Quebec I would look at those figures and ask whether somehow that was fair. This probably was the reason the Bloc brought this issue to the House. I will not comment on whether or not those figures are fair. As a member from Alberta I looked down the ledger to see how many housing starts there are in Alberta this year. I came to the conclusion that there are zero housing starts in Alberta this year under this program.

I will not go into great detail on whether the statistics tell me anything, but I asked myself whether this amount was sufficient for social housing in Canada. I am not sure I have the answer to that but I pose that as a question for us all.

I reflect on a comment made to me not many days ago. I met a New Zealand diplomat and said to him: "I am pretty close to Canada's debt situation. I am pretty close to the circumstances in our country. Could you make a comment for me, as someone from outside who should be unbiased about our situation in this country? Could you compare Canada to New Zealand for me?" He did that. As he compared Canada's situation today with that of New Zealand not so very many years ago, he said he did not think he saw the political will in our country to deal with the debt situation we have. I do not think he said that there is the political will among the population of Canada to stop over-spending.

• (1645)

I looked him in the eye and asked—he had gone through this in his country—whether he could tell me what is necessary in Canada for us to realize the seriousness of our situation. He replied that he thought the International Monetary Fund would have to come in and shut us down.

I thought about his comments very carefully as I sat on this side of the House, trying to say to the Canadian public that our debt situation is serious. I am trying to say not directly to the Bloc but to every member in this House that our debt situation is extremely serious.

I wish somehow this message could get out before the IMF does have to shut us down because if it has to shut us down we will lose not just social housing, but we will lose every single social program that we value. If that happens this debate to me becomes somewhat inadequate.

Supply

I tried to prioritize what I think are the social programs that should be highest on the ladder and prioritize them so the House could hear what I think is important. Number one is health care. Number two is welfare for those in need. Number three is the old age supplement for the needy. Number four is unemployment insurance for short term unexpected job loss. I would put as number five such things as social housing.

If I put a different priority on those social programs than members opposite I am very willing to listen to their reasons where they would change the priorities. I would ask them to convince the members of the House that we could in fact change those priorities.

If the programs are not distributed fairly I would say that the Bloc has every reason to complain on the basis of fair distribution of the funds. I would support them in doing that very thing.

I would like to draw an analogy which members may think curious, but I have a hobby of racing cars. I have always wanted to go to the most famous endurance race in France, Les 24 heures du Mans. This is 24 hours of racing on a circuit in France. I do not think I will ever have the opportunity to go there to participate in that race but I did have an opportunity three years ago to race in the 24 heures du Daytona. This is the North American equivalent. It is a second equivalent but it is the equivalent of that race.

I found myself at Daytona in international circumstances in a race car that would go about 175 miles an hour. The banking at Daytona is so steep that if you get out of the car you can hardly walk. It is very steep. The car I was in was fast enough to go in the middle lane at Daytona and the really fast cars were on the top lane at Daytona. They would travel over 200 miles an hour.

It was interesting as I sat in the car at the fastest I had ever gone with the landscape blurring around me. The cars going by in the top lane would go by so fast that they would move my car down a couple of feet on the banking. On one lap as I went around the corner I looked ahead and I could see a rain cloud. The track is big enough so that we were a long way from the rain cloud but I was sure that the rain was falling on the track.

As I approached the rain I slowed down. A car went by me so much faster than I who had not seen the rain and he spun out on the track in front of me, smashed into the wall, tore off the front of the car and the motor came down. I slid through and luckily avoided him.

The analogy I am trying to draw is that our country is at 300 miles an hour on the banking heading for disaster in terms of our debt and our deficit.

• (1650)

I heard the minister say that he is seized with the issue of social housing. I say to the minister and to the other members of this House. Do not be seized with a narrow issue that is only your own issue. The other issue for the country that is seizing us