

pricing regime for some time. As hon. members must appreciate, in order to implement its objectives, the government, as set out in its budget presented on October 28, had to establish the parameters of that pricing regime. The budget and energy programs are intended to provide Canadians with both economic and energy security in the years ahead. It is obvious that this could not be done without first establishing a pricing schedule so that economic activity might continue in an atmosphere of relative stability. Members of the previous government well know the pitfalls of this exercise. Despite their contention of an agreement between themselves and the producing provinces, it is abundantly clear that such an agreement was never actually realized.

**Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I can understand if ministers and other members on the other side of the House refuse to accept, at least publicly, the existence of the agreement to which the minister referred, but I think the minister should be very careful about her assertions with respect to that, because a statement was made on public television by the minister of energy for Alberta within the last week and a half indicating that such an agreement was in place. I understand the political motivation, but I think one must be very careful about asserting certain things which are not true, when it involves statements made by ministers of the provinces from whichever they come.

**Mr. Cullen:** Was the agreement signed? Do you have it in writing?

**Mr. Nielsen:** Yes.

**Mrs. Erola:** The agreement might have been reached tentatively, but was it signed? According to our information no formal agreement was reached.

**Mr. Cullen:** Right on.

**Mrs. Erola:** The government is still very anxious to negotiate an agreement with the provinces, as the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) stated in the House this week. These negotiations will begin again shortly at the official level, as the government of the province of Alberta indicated to us that they are not interested in meeting at the ministerial level. These measures instituted under the terms of the Petroleum Administration Act, whereby the national government established the domestic price of oil, are not meant to be self-perpetuating. They are a short-term interim solution and will be abandoned when an agreement is struck with the producing provinces. I am sure that an agreement will be struck.

The debate on these proclamations has been riddled with misrepresentations, unrealistic alternatives and distortions, and I was gravely disturbed at the tone of some members' comments.

After meeting the separatist challenge in the province of Quebec, if one listens to certain members opposite one would believe that we are now faced with a new threat to our national unity—western separatism. Just recently I returned from western Canada, and I can tell the House and Canadians that the

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westerners with whom I spoke—the people, the workers, the drivers, the swampers, the farmers and the small town businessmen—are Canadians. It is true that they are upset with the national government and that they feel a sense of alienation from the decision-making process here in Ottawa, but they are not separatists. They are Canadians; they love this country which they have worked so hard to build.

I should like to remind members opposite that alienation is not a state of mind which is relegated only to the west. I am from northern Ontario and I can recall many times the feelings of frustration and alienation which could be expressed by my friends and myself.

Canada is a vast country, and I am not sure Canadians really appreciate the immensity of it. On this point I should like to inform hon. members that alienation does not only occur in relation to the federal government. It also occurs within such a small area as the province of Alberta, that is, an alienation between the developed and underdeveloped regions. Indeed, in this regard I think it is time that we dispelled the myth of Alberta's vast wealth, a myth which has been held largely by easterners. Certainly Albertans per capita are by far the richest Canadians, but only those who have a large share of the wealth.

● (1440)

What of those other Albertans—and I met a great many of them—who must pay very high housing costs, food costs, and costs which are generally associated with large scale development? During my recent visit to western Canada I had an opportunity to visit those on the periphery. They want what others have. They are Albertans, yet they have not personally shared in the wealth. In those small communities streets remain unpaved. They want theatres and swimming pools. I share their dreams and goals.

Mr. Speaker, I have brought back their concerns. When we are examining the priorities for the western initiatives I will strongly urge my colleagues to consider assistance to those small towns first. I would like to add that I was very well received in these areas of western Canada. The people were genuinely interested in hearing the details of our policies and our energy package. We are working for all Canadians with the energy strategy which has precipitated this debate.

It has been quite a debate. I would like to comment briefly on some of the things which have been said in this House. We heard the hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty) pontificate on clause after clause of the Petroleum Administration Act. He spoke ominously of the veiled threat he perceives lurking in the hands of the faceless bureaucrats. I can assure him that Canada has a civil service which rivals the best in the world. I would like to point out to him that not to set up the necessary mechanisms such as the Petroleum Administration Act, would be a grave abdication of responsibility on the part of the national government. If the tools are available, and if they are well tuned, then the time between the perception of possible crises and the needed response is short, indeed.