

Petroleum and Gas

that this caused the Canadian economy. The dollars that were spent on Petrofina left Canada. This contributed to the high interest rates. People then said there was no way they wanted the Government to buy another oil company in this manner. It did not do anything for us. It did not create any jobs, find any more oil, or add to the production levels of oil in the country. All it did was to take over something that was in place. The Government has gotten that message clearly. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) indicated that the Government is going to use that Canadian ownership charge to help Canada reach oil self sufficiency. That could mean anything. We will have to wait and see.

Hon. George Hees (Northumberland): Mr. Speaker, in 1980 the federal Government introduced the Canadian ownership charge on gasoline at the pumps for the purpose of raising the money needed to pay for the takeover of Petrofina, which then became Petro-Canada. Nine months ago the takeover was completed. The four cents a gallon which had been added to the price of gasoline at the pumps to finance the takeover was no longer justified and should have been cancelled. The Government did not cancel the ownership charge. It continued to collect \$65 million a month from Canadian car and truck owners, for a total of \$600 million today. If this money had been left in the hands of the car and truck owners, it would have greatly increased retail sales in this country and many thousands of Canadian workers would have ceased to be unemployed. They would have had jobs producing the extra products which the additional \$600 million would have financed.

If the money had been used to reduce the cost of gasoline at the pumps, it would have made Canada a far more attractive place for tourists to visit. Eighty-five per cent of our dollars from foreign tourists comes from Americans visiting Canada. Of these, 74 per cent travel by automobile. Tourism Canada has identified that the growth in Canada's travel trade deficit is directly attributed to the decline of automotive travel from the United States.

In a brief prepared for the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) by the Canadian Automobile Association this month, figures supplied by Tourism Canada were documented which clearly should be given careful consideration. They report that had Canada maintained the share of the world tourism pie in 1981 which it had enjoyed 10 years previously, Canada would have enjoyed the following. First, an additional \$2.2 billion Canadian in receipts; second, 154,000 new jobs created; third, the elimination of the \$1.1 billion travel deficit; fourth, the realization of personal income of \$3.9 billion; fifth, the collection of an additional \$1 billion in taxes; and sixth, \$350 billion more in potential reinvestment income would have been available.

It is essential, Mr. Speaker, that immediate action to increase automobile tourism be taken to ensure positive economic recovery for Canada. No matter what legislation is before the House in Bill C-14, the fact remains that in taxation the Government has received an amount of \$600 million without a specified purpose.

I have a suggestion to make to the Government regarding where this \$600 million should be spent. There is a very important group of people in this country who are in dire financial straits and to whom the Government has a very direct responsibility. These are the people who were born without benefit of maternity grants and grew up without child care allowances. They were fed, clothed and educated without benefit of government grants. They were doctored without health care.

These Canadians have probably contributed more to Canada through minor and two great wars, in peace, and in the 1929 Depression, than any other Canadians in the history of our country. They were not the cause of inflation, nor are they responsible for the national debt. They are the victims. They are no longer able to speak forcefully for themselves and few speak for them. Their below-the-poverty-line incomes are the most vulnerable and first in the line of attack in hard times.

Many of these people retired before 1966 when the Canada Pension Plan was introduced and therefore have no entitlement to either the Canada Pension now or death benefits later. I have written to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) repeatedly about the needs of elderly constituents, many of whom are existing on sums which are clearly inadequate for their needs. The Minister replied to me on October 6, 1983 and said:

Since single guaranteed income supplement recipients are not yet guaranteed an income adequate to meet their basic needs, the Government intends to increase their benefits as soon as resources permit.

The Government promised to help this particular group of Canadians in the Throne Speech of December 7. In the speech it said:

Legislation will be introduced to increase the supplement for single pensioners providing additional assistance to more than 700,000 Canadians.

It is now almost two months since the Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker. Other legislation has been brought forward but the Government obviously lacks the commitment to these elderly people to produce the required legislation on a priority basis.

● (1650)

What does the Minister mean when she says "when resources permit"? Sixty-five million dollars a month has been coming to the Government for the past nine months with no identified purpose, for a total of \$600 million in the Government's cash box. This \$600 million should be immediately used for the purpose of bringing the guaranteed income of these needy senior citizens up to and preferably above the poverty level as defined by the National Council on Welfare. The Minister should bring in legislation on a priority basis, as she has promised to do so often and which was again promised in the Throne Speech, so that increases can continue after the fund runs out.

This completely unauthorized tax should be discontinued immediately so that the four cents per gallon can remain in the pockets of car and truck drivers, where it so rightfully belongs. This \$65 million in circulation each month will greatly