

*Supply*

cial government would put a third and the municipal government a third toward infrastructure.

I call on the minister to go back to that report and to encourage his colleagues in caucus in order to make sure that an infrastructure program is put in place so we can attack this problem in the short term.

I would like to hear a comment from the hon. member, telling me whether he supports such an initiative that deals with infrastructure proposals.

**Mr. Thompson:** Mr. Speaker, I do not totally disagree with the suggestion of putting massive amounts of money into infrastructure. I do not think anyone, even on this side of the House, would totally disagree with it. The difficulty obviously is how much is enough, and where do you find the money? That is the problem that I guess we as a government face. It is a tough one.

We use the old term ourselves, even though sometimes we hate to hear it, kick-start the economy. Going back to what I had previously mentioned, that would be fine if our debt load were not as high as it presently is. There is no problem with that. The problem is when you step through all the engines of the economy, if you wish, the private sector—that is the engine—the corporate sector, and you might say the individual sector, all of those things have to be working to make the economy work.

You know there is a very, very high debt level, and that is the problem. How much do you use? In a sense, when you say how much do you use, you are asking how much do you borrow to make it happen.

Here is an interesting statistic. We talk about the time that we took office and what we have for an accumulated debt today. Let us forget about whose fault it is. We will continually blame each other, no matter how long this House sits. Anyway, we all agree that today it is somewhere in the vicinity of \$400 billion, give or take a few billion. But let us say it is \$400 billion, which it is. Today it consumes about 31 per cent of all revenue, just paying interest on that debt load of \$400 billion.

If we had followed on the old course with the spending habits of the previous government, and with due respect not too many of us in this House were in that old government, none of us on this side at least, statistically we would have a debt load now of \$900 billion, close to

one trillion. There are so many zeros on the end of that one you need a half-ton truck to carry them around with you. We would have a debt load of about \$900 billion. This is the important part to remember because it would not be consuming 31 per cent of revenues to service the interest on the debt, it would be taking over 60 per cent of those revenues. Then you have lost control. The International Monetary Fund moves in and governs Canada, if you wish. That is the difficulty.

That goes back to the premise of the member's question. How much do we borrow to throw into the economy to kick-start it? The honest to goodness truth is that I am not sure we can afford to borrow any more. I think we have got to find the money somehow. Personally, I see the solution to the problem as simply this: The international world and the corporate sector do have a fairly high degree of confidence in Canada. The difficulty now is that we do not have confidence in ourselves at the consumer level.

What I see happening in Canada today, and you can blame it on a number of things including, if you wish, our tax structure, is that consumers in Canada are not spending and retail tax revenues are going to be down. My guess is, based on what I see happening, they are going to be down by about 13 per cent. Therefore, the best thing that could happen in Canada would be if consumers started spending. It would generate enough revenue that the government then would have enough movement to do something without borrowing more money.

I think part of the solution to the problem rests with ourselves. When that confidence reaches a certain point and Canadians start spending, I think we will be on the road to recovery because the other fundamentals are there. That is happening south of the border, it is starting to happen here and we hope that it continues to proceed along that way.

**Mr. Bob Kilger (Stormont—Dundas):** Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the previous speaker from the government side. I want to say respectfully to the member from New Brunswick who spoke to the issue of infrastructure that I am sure the people in his region and his province are waiting anxiously for some announcement in the area of infrastructure to address the highways of New Brunswick and equally so across all other provinces of the country. I think that there is some