

national debt is \$12.3 billion, which works out to \$1,390 per taxpayer. The projected deficit is \$13.7 billion, and there appears to be no attempt to deal with it, though I detect an attempt to manage the increase. Despite the generation of such huge debts, the government does not seem to be doing as much for the people as was contemplated under the Crosbie budget. The immediate visible results are an increase in the bank rate. We see confusion in the stock market and an undoubted reluctance on the part of Canadian and United States exploration teams to look for further energy sources. This is coupled with a decline in the value of the dollar.

My criticisms and my constructive suggestions are intended to complement the remarks of my colleagues who have participated in this debate. While I have been critical of some areas, I have not been critical of the hon. gentleman who presented the budget, because I have for the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) nothing but respect.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Garant (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I feel quite privileged to have today the pleasure of closing the debate on the first budget introduced in this decade, a budget which, I am quite certain now, will help the Canadian people to make a giant stride towards their security in energy and economic matters. This conviction, Mr. Speaker, has come to me as a result of a serious consideration of the budget and the energy measures introduced last week. It came to me also as a result of a comparison, as unbiased as possible, with the measures introduced in the sadly remembered, the dead and gone, Progressive Conservative budget. It came to me finally as a result of the comments of the Canadian people and in particular those from the beautiful Bellechasse area which I am honoured to represent in this House.

Mr. Speaker, after weighing the pros and cons of a number of possibilities this government has followed the course of reason and common sense, a course which took into account our present limitations while leading us without any doubt on the path of this unlimited potential which fate seems to have bestowed upon us.

Although during the seventies we were faced with many problems which we overcame with less difficulty than the great majority of other industrialized nations, I know that the Canadian people are convinced that the eighties will provide extraordinary opportunities for them as long as their leaders have a better understanding of the depth and complexity of the problems which affect our economy and the world economy, and as long as those leaders suggest solutions in keeping with our Canadian tradition which has always been a tradition of sharing and which so far has allowed us to face the greatest challenges of our history.

I am happy to see that the hon. Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) decided to stay with that Canadian tradition which is to share our rich national heritage. I am also happy to notice that our problems are not just a matter of management

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of the demand but that they require a combination of structural, industrial and original policies with properly oriented monetary and fiscal policies. We are committed to implement those policies with all the determination we can muster, because they agree with that greater and therefore more realistic vision of the problems facing our Canadian economy.

On the other hand they are also in keeping with the best liberal tradition which is to avoid extreme positions and rather to resort to practical solutions which will serve our common interests while preserving our individual freedoms.

● (2130)

I can only approve the economic strategy of this government which is perfectly in line with our commitments to the Canadians at the last election and in the throne speech, commitments which have undoubtedly contributed to the re-election of the government. This economic strategy will, Mr. Speaker, I am sure enable inflation to decrease gradually and also give a gradual impetus to investment and productivity thus encouraging despite a sensible but unavoidable delay, the full employment which we are all anticipating. The history of every country in the world, especially those which are filthy rich, has made us realize that there is no unique and easy solution, but that patience and orderly and conscientious work give the best chance of success. It is the direction which we have courageously decided to follow.

All hon. members probably agree that the reduction of the federal deficit at a more moderate level is advisable if we wish to decrease the present rate of the debt charge. The government must be given again enough margin of operation to take up the challenges of the future and to stop inflation without increasing taxes accordingly. Moved, however, by this realistic attitude which has always been our party's most distinctive attribute and which has been the basis for the Canadian people's nearly uninterrupted support of our party over the past 20 years, we have opted for a reduction of the deficit consistent with the current economic growth. Which means that we will strive for a moderate reduction of the deficit during the forthcoming year, for, in view of the fairly slow economic growth which has been forecast, we would not want to increase the burden carried by Canadian taxpayers.

As soon as the economic situation improves, however—and there are already signs of a quick recovery—there will be changes in our budgetary policies as well as further deficit reductions, which will in turn allow us to meet our commitments in this area. We are not shying away from our commitments, however. We only want to fulfil our promises in an orderly and reasonable fashion, and it is the reason why the government has decided not to increase its expenses more quickly than the economic growth.

This will allow us to reduce the federal deficit to more moderate proportions without having to apportion ourselves a