

Government Orders

others \$16,500. It all depends of course on the time of day, seeing that the debt grows by the minute.

For the sake of argument, let us say for the time being that each and every one of us, all 30 million of us in Quebec and across Canada, owes \$16,384.22, but this figure grows as we speak.

We also know that, given the current interest rates, the debt doubles every six or seven years. So, unless we act now, unless we start paying off the interest on the debt if not the capital, six or seven years from now, the public debt will have doubled and each of us will owe anywhere from \$32,000 to \$33,000 on it.

If an individual goes to his or her bank or credit union and says to the manager: "Look, I have debts, about \$16,000 worth of debts, and I would like to consolidate all that", the bank manager will frown, of course, but he or she will more than likely answer: "Let us sit down together and see what we could do about your lifestyle. Let us try and work something out".

But six or seven years from now, if you go to your bank manager with a debt of approximately \$32,000, I have a feeling that his or her immediate reaction will be: "File for bankruptcy". Sometimes I wonder if we should not file for bankruptcy and just start over under a new name. I can see certain members have understood what I am getting at.

• (1610)

During the holiday season I volunteered to work with the Red Nose organization in my riding. English-Canadian communities probably have similar organizations where, during the holiday season, volunteers offer rides to people who have had a little too much to drink. These people make it home safely without having to drive their cars. It has become an institution in Quebec and in many other countries. The Red Nose organization allows people aware of the dangers associated with drinking and driving to act responsibly.

That being said, I offered to drive people asking for a ride home, and one of my constituents said during the ride, "Why not simply raise taxes to pay off the deficit so that we can get rid of it quickly?" I asked her by how much she thought her taxes would go up and she said, "By a small amount of money". When she understood that we were talking of \$16,000 for the interest alone, she realized we had a real problem on our hands.

We are indeed in a dilemma. You see, if we increase income or consumption taxes, everyone will have less available income and, as a result, less money to spend on goods and services.

Mr. Speaker, you are indicating to me that I have only three minutes left so I will be quick. If we raise taxes, consumers will have less money in their pockets to buy things with; if they consume less, businesses will eventually sell less; if businesses

sell less, they will lay off workers. And we will just have increased the deficit. However, if we cut spending, again people will be laid off. These people will stop contributing to tax revenues, and again we are in trouble.

We must redirect federal expenditures wisely, cut where it will hurt the least, and ensure that displaced workers can find new jobs. We have our work cut out for us; it will not happen as if by magic.

In conclusion, I must quote the Minister of Finance not because I like his comments, but because they scare me. The Minister of Finance said, "We clearly showed, in the first phase of our budget, that we would bring the deficit down to 3 per cent of GDP within three years. It will be the first time—he used the future—in 15 or 20 years that this goal has been achieved". I hope so, but he should have said—it would have been more accurate in my opinion—"it would be the first time". He could also have stated that it was not, unfortunately, the first time such promises were made to Canadian and Quebec voters. Although I sincerely hope that this budget will fulfil the promises made to us, I am afraid that it is just another illusion.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Portneuf for his speech.

[*English*]

That is as much as I can get out at this time, but it is going to come.

I would like to thank the member for his remarks. I am glad to see that he is concerned as many of us are with the size of not only the deficit but the size of the debt. The debt we all realize is driving this deficit problem that many of us at least on this side of the House seem to be quite concerned about.

• (1615)

I am also very pleased that he used the example of a national highway from sea to sea as an example of the size of the national debt. It is perhaps a symbolic gesture on his part of that continuity from ocean to ocean. I am glad he was willing to use that.

I know the previous speaker gave some detailed examples of what he thought should happen in order to address the size of the debt and the deficit, specifically the year to year deficit. Other than some duplication of services which I know can be streamlined, with the size of the debt surely the hon. member has some specific ideas for saving significant amounts of dollars in order to bring this deficit more in line.

[*Translation*]

Mr. de Savoye: Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the Bloc Quebecois proposed a specific plan for reducing government spending and attacking the deficit.