

*Oral Questions***EMPLOYMENT**

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, I would like to return to the question of jobs for people in this economy.

Tonight President Bill Clinton is going to announce between \$25 billion and \$30 billion worth of new infrastructure improvements this year to revive the United States' economic base and make his country more competitive.

Here in Canada, the government has refused to follow the suggestions of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and launch a major improvement plan for our roads, our sewers, our water systems and our railroads.

Does the government not realize that this failure to move Canada ahead significantly in this area is going to leave us at a massive disadvantage in competing with Americans in the future. Why will the government not forget the new helicopters and use that money to rebuild Canada and put people back to work?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that we took a number of positive initiatives in the December statement. It outlined very specifically proposals to invest in people, to invest in R and D, to invest in infrastructure, to invest in training, to invest in small business.

Quite frankly, the infrastructure program, which is strategically based, will help improve the productivity and the competitiveness of the Canadian economy and is something that will take place right across the country. The negotiations with the provinces are close to being completed.

There will be a number of announcements made with regard to the improvement of roads, the improvement of bridges, the construction of the electronic highway, the MLS system, a whole series of initiatives. In addition to that, there is a tax break of \$1.8 billion.

We have put together a \$2 billion infrastructure program, plus a \$1.8 billion reduction in taxes. Providing the provinces do not take it up, it is perhaps more than equivalent to what my hon. friend is suggesting the Clinton administration is going to come out with.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, the amount of money which was actually put into that budget by the minister was far smaller than anything that has been suggested by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities or anybody else in this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, the Japanese government has increased its spending on infrastructure, but the Canadian government continues to reject suggestions from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to do the same. Even the Minister of the Environment said that \$10 billion was needed to improve sewage systems in Canada. Why does the government not act on these suggestions?

[*English*]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member believes that only the public sector can invest and create jobs. We do not share that view in its entirety. We believe that the private sector has a role to play, and in constructing the infrastructure program, a lot of the investment will take place by the private sector. That in turn will create jobs and economic activity and improve our competitiveness.

The hon. member talks a great line about containing the deficit, but he also talks about spending money, and he never really outlines how he would pay for this huge, magnificent, infrastructure program that he talks about.

The infrastructure program we outlined was advanced in a responsible fiscal manner. It is strategically based so that it will improve the highway system, particularly in the Atlantic region. It will remove bottlenecks. It will improve the road system in our national parks. It will provide for the improvement in airports. It will provide for the improvement in grade separations. All of these things will have a positive impact on the economic fortunes of the country. More important, it will create jobs and economic activity and I am sure my hon. friend will welcome that.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, of course we accept the suggestion that the private sector should be involved in these things but the key point is that this government is not taking leadership to get work done in this country and get people back to work.