

the anti-inflation program is now in place, can the Minister of Finance tell the House when the Canadian people may expect some relief from high rates of price increases, as exhibited by this month's quite substantial increase in the consumer price index?

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I note that in respect of many of the commodities which are controlled under the program there has been no increase in these particular figures. Indeed, from the Statistics Canada report, among other things, the return to the 7 per cent Ontario sales tax as well as higher utility costs were most responsible for the increase. As the hon. member knows, there are certain aspects of this including government taxation which are not subject to the direct control of the Anti-Inflation Board.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the fact that the consumer price index today reflected a decrease in the price of food, which was a direct consequence of the self-imposed freeze by the major supermarket chains, and bearing in mind the fact that we can anticipate further increases in food prices as reflected in statements by the vice-chairman of the Anti-Inflation Board and the president of one of the major supermarket chains, does the minister have any plans on behalf of the government and the Anti-Inflation Board to protect Canadians against the effects of uncontrolled food prices, having regard to the fact that this will call into question the whole credibility of the government's anti-inflation program?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's term "uncontrolled food prices" is scarcely justified in view of the fact that the operations of the major chains are subject to scrutiny by the Anti-Inflation Board, as indeed are the operations of marketing boards where they are protected in particular from import competition. In that sense I feel the controls will be effective, although we recognize the fact that particularly at this season of the year in relation to imported commodities, with the variation in prices of other commodities, there will be a variation in the food index.

ANTI-INFLATION PROGRAM—REQUEST FOR TABLING OF ANALYSES OF IMPACT OF CONTROLS ON PRICES

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, my final supplementary is prompted by a statement attributed to the Prime Minister in which he said the following in respect of the impact of prices:

We are very satisfied with the analyses we make from time to time on the effects of the program.

May I ask the minister if he is prepared to lay on the table of the House those analyses and any evidence the board may have on the impact of the program to control prices, especially food prices.

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I must say I think what the hon. member is asking for is a continuous report in the House day after day on the activities of the board day after day. I think that would be rather difficult to do. Of course, the law does provide for reports to the House and there will be opportunities to examine the members of the board when the estimates come before Parliament.

Oral Questions

URBAN AFFAIRS

GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS WITH REGARD TO CONTROLLING COST OF HOUSES AND LAND

Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a supplementary to the Minister of State for Urban Affairs. Despite the decline in the food component of the consumer price index, the increase in the cost of home ownership excluding land costs remains at an unacceptable 13.8 per cent year over year. What concrete measures has the minister in mind to curtail the rising costs of home ownership?

Hon. Barney Danson (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the measures that were passed just before Christmas will go a long way toward reducing housing costs and making housing more available for people of moderate income. It will speed the production of land and serviced land. It will assist the municipalities in providing additional services which should reduce the cost. It will make it possible for moderate income people, and all people indeed, to buy modest housing at low carrying costs. It will do many of these things and many more, as well as stimulate the activities in the construction industry on a four-year sustained high volume basis which should help achieve economies of scale. If in the process this helps bring down inflation and reduces inflation even more the cost will be reduced even further.

Mr. Darling: Mr. Speaker, in view of this rapid increase in home ownership costs, and considering that the Minister of Finance has declared that land costs are even more culpable in contributing to aggregate housing costs, can the minister inform the House which area has higher priority insofar as curbing increases go?

Mr. Danson: Mr. Speaker, I do not quite understand which area. Of course, I have indicated several areas where we are taking specific action. I indicated yesterday in the House we are making efforts, in co-operation with the provinces where the jurisdiction lies and the municipalities to speed up the processing of land which I think, with the exception of interest rates, is perhaps the one most troublesome area in keeping costs high. If we can be successful in bringing down the land costs and speeding its processing and getting it on the market I think we will make a great deal of progress indeed.

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ANTI-INFLATION BOARD

ALLEGED LACK OF RESOURCES TO CONTROL PRICES

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Finance. Considering the fact that the Anti-Inflation Board has not ordered a single roll-back in price increases since the program began, will the minister confirm the board has at its disposal resources to monitor only 350 corporations in Canada and that the real reason for the board's not making its pricing decisions public is not alleged reason of confidentiality but the fact that because of its scarcity of resources to act in monitoring prices, public revelation of this fact would reveal its total incapacity to control prices.