

year the minister reintroduced capital cost provisions to assist on the supply side of housing through the MURB provision. That step taken by the government, which was abandoned by the government of which the hon. member was part, increased housing starts this year by an additional 20,000 units. In addition to that we have addressed the needs side or the affordability side by increasing co-op and non-profit social starts, to which I referred, and I talked about one project in the hon. member's city. We do appreciate that there are difficulties for the industry, and we have taken steps.

Returning to the comments of the Prime Minister earlier this week in metropolitan Toronto, the objectives are, on the one hand, to introduce growth in the economy while, at the same time, being sensitive and sensible with our steps.

HOME OWNERS FACING SHARP INCREASES IN MORTGAGE PAYMENTS

Hon. Michael Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Madam Speaker, my question is also directed to the minister responsible for housing. It is supplementary to those of my colleague. I want to put to the minister a question which is on the minds of many Canadians today. Both he and the Prime Minister have stated that the budget will address the problems only of those people who are "in dire straits". Is the minister saying to those people who are not in dire straits, those who are facing sharp increases in mortgage payments over the next few years, that they will simply have to adjust their personal budgets to these very significant increases because of circumstances which are totally beyond their control?

Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of Public Works): Madam Speaker, it is difficult to respond to members of the official opposition when they raise questions pertaining to housing. For example, on September 20 on the CBC the hon. member for St. John's East indicated that, in response to what we all understand to be difficult times for the industry, he was promoting massive government intervention. I take it that is not the position of the hon. gentleman who has just raised this question. As a matter of fact, in debate with me last weekend his point was that we had to show restraint and that there had to be a tailor-made response to an individual problem. I must admit I find it difficult to answer members of the opposition because I do not think they have their act together.

Mr. Wilson: Madam Speaker, perhaps the minister will get it straight; I am not asking the question for myself; I am asking it for those people who are faced with this problem and see the very fabric of our society changing because of the problems created by the government of which this minister is part. These are problems respecting interest rates and mortgage rollovers. The minister should not be answering me but answering those people who are watching.

MINISTER'S POSITION ON POLICY

Hon. Michael Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Madam Speaker, the minister responsible for housing is the minister who has

Oral Questions

taken the full brunt of the problem of very substantial mortgage payment increases these home owners face. Will the minister explain to this House how he can continue to be part of a government headed by a Prime Minister who displays the height of cynicism by asking these very same people to tighten their belts while we still have government spending increasing at runaway rates?

• (1125)

Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of Public Works): Madam Speaker, I can best answer that by contrasting what this government has done with what the previous government did while the hon. member's party was in office and had responsibility for the same kind of problems. I urge that this government continue, for example, to address supply. We have reintroduced the capital cost allowance which the previous government dropped. This government will continue to address affordability and those people who are impacted the most because of these problems. We have increased social starts through co-ops and MURB. Those are two very good examples of how to tailor a sensitive and sensible response to the situation.

* * *

VIA RAIL

REPORTED SLOWDOWN IN RUNNING TIME SCHEDULES—EFFECT ON PASSENGERS

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Madam Speaker, I would like to address some questions to the Minister of Transport. Yesterday the minister said he will cut more trains unless more people use them. Will the minister tell us how he expects more people to use the trains after November 15 when he is slowing down schedules so that it will take 14 hours longer to go from Edmonton to Vancouver, including an overnight stay in a hotel, and with an average speed between Sydney and Saint John of 19 miles per hour? Will he explain to the House how that will encourage more people to ride the trains?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, this morning the CBC really made news of that matter. Yesterday I was asked what was going to happen in terms of the future of railway transportation. I said it would all depend on the use that people make of trains. I felt I was reciting a banality equal only to the comment of someone who has lost an election, such as I did in 1972, and, when asked why he lost, says it was because he had fewer votes than this opponent. I thought I was saying something extremely conventional.

This morning it became almost an announcement that there would be future cuts in the system. I want to emphasize very strongly that this is not so. In fact the 20 per cent reduction that we are making is to prevent that, and to strengthen the 80 per cent that remains. What my friend will see in the future is