

Supply

conscience on this side of the House. I believe it still exists among certain members on the benches opposite.

After hearing what the member told me earlier I am convinced a number of the members will recognize the efforts made by the government to decrease the deficit and to make sure that we eliminate the deficit by some time at the beginning of the turn of the century.

It will be a long term process. This is what we have to prove to outside investors and Canadian investors. Canadians are expecting us to make sure that we come out with a reasonable budget, given the situation we are faced with, so that we can look at the future with hope and encouragement, thanks to the first steps taken by the Minister of Finance. In the next few weeks the course will be set.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Speaker, first of all, further to the remarks made by the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, of course Canadians as well as Quebecers are aware of the fact that the national debt has grown to \$600 billion, with debt charges totalling about \$115 million per day.

• (1615)

We all know that, just to pay the interest on this debt, the Canadian government now has to borrow money. We are also aware of the need to paid off this debt someday, or at least to reduce the deficit. The last budget the Minister of Finance tabled in this House was passed with a deficit of approximately \$52 billion, this being the biggest deficit ever approved by this House.

Naturally, this budget was passed by the Liberal majority who had approved in this House the biggest deficit ever in Canadian history. Today, it is suggested to create a deficit to solve the deficit problem.

The people are prepared to tighten their belts and make sacrifices. What they will not accept is the shameless government overspending. They have a problem with expenditures like the \$475,000 spent just recently on the installation of the Governor General. They find it difficult to accept that members of Parliament be entitled to a pension for life after serving for just six years.

And this causes concern and social insecurity from coast to coast. The concern caused by such things as the Minister of Finance contemplating tax hikes, contemplating replacing the GST with a tax hidden in product prices so as to be able to tax everything that is presently tax-free, such as food, prescription drugs and health care, is not making seniors feel any safer, because there is even talk of taxing RRSPs.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Human Resources Development is considering making cuts in education programs, loans and

scholarships for students, who represent our future. The minister is considering making cuts in the UI program, which should not be used for government administration purposes since it is an insurance for those who lose their jobs. The minister is also considering making cuts in the government support to seniors and to low income families. When I think of low income families, I am reminded of all the cuts made by the previous Conservative government, including the subsidies to provinces for social housing.

The minister is also considering making cuts in the subsidies to women's organizations which promote employment and equal pay. Then, there is the Minister of Finance who is also considering cuts in airport and airline services, or even privatizing these services. If the equipment is transferred to the provinces, it is like shifting the burden onto their shoulders.

So, I ask the hon. member: Is it possible that, this year, the government will manage to reduce its deficit without targeting the poor and, if so, how will it do that?

Mr. Gagnon: Madam Speaker, I can assure you it was never the intention of the Liberals to introduce budget cuts at the expense of the most vulnerable in our society, and I said as much in my speech.

As the member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, and like the hon. member from the North Shore, I represent a riding that has to live with financial, economic and social problems.

However, in his comments he referred to the fact that people needed security, and I also heard him say that people thought we spent too much money on the installation of the new Governor General of Canada and all the activities that were organized around this event. I would like to remind the hon. member opposite that the Premier of Quebec is going to spend, not two million, as he promised, but more than five million on the commissions going around Quebec that want to discuss only one topic: Quebec's independence. There is nothing that makes my constituents feel more insecure, and I hear people say this. I hear this from people in Quebec's remote areas, when they see a provincial government that is intent on only one thing: the break-up and, in fact, the end of the best country in the world.

• (1620)

The only way we can survive is by introducing a new fiscal policy, making certain cuts and reallocating our spending priorities. Reallocation is necessary to ensure that we can become leaders in important fields.

However, we must stay together, because dividing Quebec and dividing Canada and making all kinds of statements, as the opposition sometimes does, is not the answer. I am not necessarily referring to members opposite, but it was the Quebec finance minister who said recently that he felt Quebec was not necessarily obliged to meet Canada's international commitments in terms of paying off loans and servicing the debt.