

think we are doing it right. It does not mean it cannot be improved but we have started in the right direction.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have a brief question, one that needs to be answered very honestly.

He said the total budgetary requirement for the government is some \$164 billion this year, an increase of \$2 billion over last year. We need to commend the government for spending less than it could have, possibly less than governments of previous years would have spent. However, while we are experiencing all the cuts in the estimates we are debating today, we are spending more because of our huge interest payments. Those interest payments are growing every year because we are still borrowing.

I ask the member whether he acknowledges at all and if so to what degree that there is urgency in balancing the budget so hopefully we do not totally go down the tube. As has already been mentioned, the three year budgetary plan of the government adds \$100 billion to the present \$550 billion debt.

Mr. Duhamel: Mr. Speaker, in my enthusiasm in responding to the previous questioner I made a reference to the debt being \$179 million and it should have been \$179 billion. I apologize if that slipped out the wrong way. I do know the difference. There are 1,000 millions in a billion. I know my colleague will be happy to know that.

With regard to his question, it is a very serious problem. That is why we have reduced as much as we have. We recognize more could have been done but we also recognize that if we do it too dramatically we can destabilize society.

What is important is we made a commitment in our red book before the election and during the election that we would reach a 3 per cent of GDP target and we will do that. Once we have done that we will start attacking the debt. It is accumulating. We wish we could wish it away. There are no panaceas here. There are no magical solutions. There are no simple answers. That is what is sometimes offensive.

There is a suggestion that we could sort of wish it away. It cannot be wished away. It will take planning. It will take hard work. It will take the decisions that have been made, continuing in that direction.

Mr. Harris: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I fail to see a quorum in the House. I am wondering whether it is because Liberal members are not interested in this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: I will ask the clerk to count the members present.

• (1705)

And there being fewer than 20 members present:

Supply

The Deputy Speaker: I am told by the Table there is not a quorum. Call in the members.

[Translation]

And the bells having stopped:

The Deputy Speaker: Since there is now a quorum, we resume debate. The hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to discuss the motion on Vote 10, dealing with human resources development, and also ask the Minister of Human Resources Development to reflect on a consequence of the current budget, namely the major restrictions imposed to the Canada employment centres.

Let us do a bit of history. For several years now, there have been two manpower networks in Quebec: one managed by the provincial government, and the other by the federal government. The Quebec government already has jurisdiction over all the issues related to the labour market, including the Labour Code, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Labour Standards Act and the Collective Agreement Decrees Act.

As well, the federal government developed a network which was originally designed to maintain UI services and related programs.

Over the years, we realized that we did not have the means to afford two networks, and that we had to find a way to integrate them. In Quebec, a consensus was reached by all the stakeholders. The consensus was such that even the Quebec Liberal Party, a federalist party which was in office for several years, asked for an administrative agreement under which Quebec would manage the UI program over its territory.

That Liberal government created an organization called the Société québécoise de la main-d'oeuvre, which had the necessary structures, powers and programs to provide all the services related to manpower.

This year, given the budget constraints, the federal government had the option of saying: Yes, we will let the Quebec government assume full responsibility for manpower; this will allow us to make significant savings.

However, this is not the option chosen by the Department of Human Resources Development. Instead, it chose to reduce the number of its employees in the Canada employment centres across the country, so as to spread the cuts and make the process look like a reform or an administrative reorganization which will result in the creation of Canadian human resources centres. Some 20 to 30, if not 35 to 50 such centres would be established in Quebec. They would be like information booths or banking machines.

The fact is that, with this reform, this downsizing of every employment centre, under colour of seemingly commendable objectives, they will actually create appalling situations. For