

*Supply*

Let me say that while there can be legitimate controversy here and elsewhere over whether or not we should have pursued other deficit reduction measures in the form of tax increases or stronger reductions in other programs, I think any person who honestly looks at the situation will have to admit that other options would not achieve the turnaround for which all of us are looking.

What gives us the greatest encouragement is that investor confidence is up in Canada. We have seen somewhat of a reduction in interest rates. We have seen a dramatic increase in the number of Canadians who are employed. We have not heard opposition Members say anything positive about that. If they have, I am willing to retract those words, but I do not recall hearing anything of the sort. In fact, if opposition Members were to look at the figures, they might argue that the jobs created are short-term ones. They might even concede that there are more people working, but only in the short term. I was looking for that concession, but we did not even receive that.

If opposition Members were to look at the figures more closely, they would find that not only are more Canadians working, but that those who were unemployed for the long term, many of whom were women, have found work. However, that has not been lauded. I am not asking opposition Members to laud the Government. I am saying to them that if they want to use their criticism, let them do so, but they said the very same thing after the November 8 economic statement. Opposition Members have a different philosophy. Their philosophy is that wealth is created by taking it from those who earn it and allowing Government to filter it through its fingers. They feel that somehow that creates more wealth. They were wrong then and they are wrong now.

In 1982, opposition Members said that there was a legitimate national goal and the legitimate national goal was to reduce inflation. They said that inflation was eating away at the incomes and purchasing power of Canadians. No greater emphasis was placed on any group than on Canada's senior citizens. That was a correct evaluation of the system and opposition Members then took action. However, if that was a legitimate national goal at that time, surely reducing the cost of the debt and its effect on programs and people is worthy of being the national goal of the Government and the people of Canada today. Opposition Members might not like that, but that is the reality and that is the truth.

Opposition Members have asked me to give examples of groups and individuals that approve of the Budget. I have received such letters from senior citizens but—

**Mr. Marchi:** Name them.

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** I am not going to name them and I will tell you why.

**Mr. Marchi:** Why?

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** I am not going to put those letters on the public record—

**Mr. Marchi:** Why not?

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** Let me answer. Give me that respect and I will do the same for you.

**Mr. Marchi:** I am always giving you respect.

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** I will not put a letter on the Table indicating that these senior citizens support me. No, I am responsible, I am the Minister and I am going to take both the acceptance and criticism of the program. That is my responsibility and I am going to do it just that way.

We can argue about how best to deal with the situation, but let us first recognize that if the situation is not addressed today, people who are now 60 years of age and will retire five years from now will have to look at pensions that have been eroded. People who are now 55 years of age who will retire in 10 years will face an even further erosion of their pensions. That is the reality and those—

**Mr. Marchi:** How about those who are 65 today?

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** If the Hon. Member were to go back to the very statements made by myself, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) in the Budget, he will find that it is for those who are 65 now that we will monitor the situation and adjust it as needed.

● (1650)

**Mr. Marchi:** I heard with some interest, Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Minister and it seemed to me that he certainly could have passed for a Minister of Finance. I think we should remind the Minister that he is the Minister of National Health and Welfare and that as part of his responsibility he must be an advocate, speaker and vehicle for those seniors. However, I heard him simply talking in numbers and facts about those things which had to do with the economy of this country. Notwithstanding the fact that that is very important, surely to goodness he could have rose in his place and talked a little more passionately about his constituents and his clientele.

He made a number of comments. If we accept those comments at face value—which I certainly do not, but let us assume they are true—all those factors and figures he espoused for the last 15 or 20 minutes were certainly well known to him, to his leader and to his Party last summer. Given the fact that those figures and facts were known—if we accept them at face value—then why were they prepared at that time to go from one coast to another and tell the senior citizens they would not touch the indexation of their pensions?

They said, "Elect us, and that will be a sacred trust". If that was said, how can the Minister stand in his place today and justify the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) or the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Miss Carney) giving multimillions of dollars away to the multinationals? Why is he doing their dirty work? Why can he not stand up and talk to the senior citizens and maintain the promise he made to them last summer?