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way to recreate what we have lost while providing jobs for people living in Atlantic Canada.

Also, I am happy that this debate took place and that I could contribute to it together with my colleagues from New Brunswick and the other Atlantic regions, no matter their political affiliation. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, if we can achieve something here tonight, make the Government face up to its responsibilities and react promptly to this situation, we will have done a lot. If I think we can do something here tonight, I tell myself that we will be ready to launch another debate of great importance to New Brunswick, a debate on the Moncton CN shops which provide work for 1,200 residents of the southeastern region. I feel confident that my New Brunswick colleagues will then rise again to defend the interests of our province.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, this is a time for action and the Government has several options. With sound planning and especially financial assistance, one is justified in believing that everything is not lost by any means. What is needed is political will, the kind of political will which so far has not been particularly obvious, almost missing in fact.

If the interest of the Atlantic provinces is a priority of this Government, Mr. Speaker, now is the time to prove it.

● (2040)

[English]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will recognize the Hon. Associate Minister of National Defence (Mr. Andre).

Mr. Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The precedent of this House is that on any type of debate each of the three Parties is allowed one speaker at the very beginning. After that you may recognize the Members as you prefer. However, there has not yet been one speaker from the New Democratic Party. The Hon. Member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton) was definitely on his feet seeking recognition.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is no order of precedence for speakers in this House, as the Hon. Member knows. It is entirely within the discretion of the Chair which tries to balance the list of speakers according to the issue and the numbers present in the House from each political Party. It is the intention of the Chair to recognize the Associate Minister of National Defence and then the Hon. Member for Skeena.

Hon. Harvie Andre (Associate Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, the very serious and, in many ways, tragic events of the last few days in Atlantic Canada, particularly in New Brunswick and Newfoundland, are of grave concern to the Government and members of this Party. It is significant that, given his unbelievably heavy schedule, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) alone amongst the Party Leaders, has viewed this as serious enough to be in the House this evening to participate in this debate.

Mr. Fulton: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. One thing I am aware of that pursuant to the rules of this House, regardless of your previous ruling, it is inappropriate for Members of this House, Ministers or otherwise, to comment on the absence or otherwise of Members of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Member, of course, is correct. The Associate Minister of National Defence has the floor on debate.

Mr. Andre: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is right. I hope he will remind himself and members of his caucus of that during Question Period when he frequently has reason to make those kinds of observations. I think it is significant to note the presence of the Prime Minister and his concern about this very important natural tragedy which has occurred in Atlantic Canada.

With the exception of federal lands such as the Northwest Territories, forest fire control is a provincial responsibility. However, our experience over the past decade has taught us that forest fires are a national problem. Furthermore, the Government has recognized that the need for a sustained wood supply and improved forest management are matters of national concern.

We and the provincial governments, as well as the forest industry, are spending large sums on forest management. Over the next several years through joint federal-provincial Forest Resource Development Agreements we will spend about \$1.1 billion on forest management across Canada. This is a major investment and if we are to realize our present and future forest production goals we must significantly reduce our forest fire losses.

Accordingly, the federal Government has provided substantial assistance for provincial forestry programs such as the Forest Resource Development Agreements, the purchase of water bombers, and support for the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre which is headquartered in Winnipeg to share information and resources to better fight forest fires. The provinces contribute two-thirds of the agency's cost and the federal Government contributes the remaining third. During fire emergencies in one province the agency arranges fire fighting aid from other provinces. During last week's Gagetown fire in southern New Brunswick, for example, two CL 215 water bombers from Quebec were involved in the aerial assault on the fire.

Incidentally, there is also a formal agreement between Canada and the United States which allows individual provincial and federal agencies to deal directly with American federal agencies as the need arises without going through complicated channels of approval every time. That led to the State of Maine providing water bomber assistance to New Brunswick. The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre coordinates these across-the-border exchanges of resources.

We are also strengthening our aerial fire-fighting capability through a co-operative program with the provinces which will