

I would suggest that perhaps Canadians might want to increase theirs from 10 per cent to 12 per cent on the evaluation of Canadian bids for contracts of companies or large companies bidding on contracts in which they subcontract out to smaller Canadian subcontractors.

Also, in the spirit of ensuring that value-added production is encouraged across Canada, Canadian companies that intend to use value-added products in agriculture, forestry and mining industries should be further favoured.

Added to that, I would suggest that in the Department of Supply and Services Canada, while it has certain programs set out to ensure that its booklets get out to members of Parliament—many of us have tried to ensure that our producers are made aware of these contracts—perhaps a more aggressive program could be undertaken to ensure that the local MPs are made aware of the type of over-all projects that are on the go. They should be assisted by the Department of Supply and Services to identify small businesses within their area so that they can get on the mailing lists and be kept informed by Supply and Services Canada.

Further, sometimes the bond security is somewhat onerous for small business and this should be reviewed, particularly in the regions in ensuring that small business within the regions can competitively bid on service jobs for the federal government as opposed to having them come in now from across the border in some cases.

Finally, it appears from what I have been able to dig up that the free trade agreement is not helping us. It is hurting our small business community and I would suggest that the free trade agreement should be abrogated to ensure that Canadian preference be given in all procurement of Canadian businesses.

**Hon. Paul Dick (Minister of Supply and Services):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the wonderful opportunity he has presented to the House and to members of Parliament to talk about small business in this country.

I do not think that it is fully understood how aggressively the Canadian government moves toward trying to help small businesses in this country and how much has actually been done and enhanced in the last number of years.

### *Private Members' Business*

I could start by saying the small business tax in this country happens to be the lowest small business tax any place in the world. For small businesses, there is a benefit there.

I must admit that I am a little confused. I have not been regularly called in front of the committee. As a matter of fact, I have only been called in front of the committee one day in the last two years and no New Democratic Party member attended that meeting. One came and registered and left two minutes after.

**Mr. Whittaker:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. While I hesitate to interrupt the member, you have pointed many times that it is improper to point out the absence of any member from the House or committee. I would suggest the cabinet minister is well aware of that rule.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski):** That is a point of debate.

**Mr. Dick:** Mr. Speaker, what we have tried to do at Supply and Services is to make the system much more friendly to Canadian corporations.

In the old system to get on the Supply and Services source list you had to go and make an application. It took a long time and there were a lot of details. We have tried to simplify that by getting rid of the source list over at Supply and Services and move toward a computerized electronic bulletin board known as the procurement opportunities board. As of June 1 that will change to the open bidding service.

A number of new companies that have opened within weeks can now, through a telephone number and connection, get access to the open bidding service, or the procurement opportunities board if you like, and they can see what opportunities are there for government buys and they can bid immediately. They do not have to be pre-cleared. We have dispensed with all that.

I have been in touch with every major business and industrial organizations and associations. I talked to them to see what we can do at Supply and Services to make our bidding more attractive to them and to their various industry members.

They have been working with us, by and large to make this a much more friendly system. I am very proud to say we have come a long way in changing this.