The Deputy Speaker: Before recognizing the next speaker, I want to apologize to the hon. member for not warning him that his time was almost up.

Mr. André Caron (Jonquière): Mr. Speaker, I want to discuss the privatization of Pearson Airport, in Toronto, from the perspective of a resident of Saguenay—Lac Saint-Jean. What does a resident of Jonquière or Saint-Félicien see when he watches TV and hears about this project? He sees that the privatization of Pearson Airport was quickly and hastily decided during the last election campaign. Pearson Airport is not a lame duck; it is not a venture in deficit. It is profitable airport; in fact, it is one of the most profitable airports in Canada. Some civil servants in Ontario claimed that this privatization would cost somewhere between $140 million and $240 million annually.

The resident of Saguenay—Lac Saint-Jean who is watching sees hundreds of millions go by. However, behind the scenes he also sees lobbyists who are friends of the government. He sees Conservatives, Liberals, former deputy ministers and senior civil servants hired by lobbies, and businesspeople used to getting lucrative government contracts and attending Conservative and Liberal fund raising dinners at $1,000 a plate.

The resident of Saguenay—Lac Saint-Jean then compares this situation to the needs of his region, which are important needs. The history of our region goes back 150 years. It is a region with a glorious industrial past. Our region's development was based on natural resources: our forests provided paper, while lumber and hydro-electricity were used for primary aluminum.

In my riding, Alcan's Arvida plant was at one time the world's largest aluminum plant. Back in 1943, the Shipshaw hydro station in my riding generated the most hydroelectric power in the world. That is what I mean when I refer to our glorious past.

• (1250)

As for the present, the region is still fairing relatively well. It is home to seven pulp and paper plants and to four primary aluminium plants. However, it is also experiencing major economic problems. In the past few months, the official unemployment rate—not the unofficial, but the official rate—in the greater Chicoutimi-Jonquière region was the highest in Canada. The rate is unbelievably high. For a region that lived through the golden age of industry, this situation raises a number of questions.

We all know the reasons for this situation and we have analyzed them on different occasions in the region. One reason cited is technological conversion, the fact that our major industries have modernized their operations. That is quite normal. Another reason is globalization. A company like Alcan is investing around the world. Finally, the region's economic woes can also be attributed to the fact that more money is flowing out of, instead of into, the region. The Health and Social Services Board produced a study which found that our region experienced an annual shortfall of more than $100 million. Imagine what could be accomplished with an extra $100 million in a region such as the Saguenay—Lac-Saint Jean, considering its needs and its population of roughly 300,000 people.

Regional development policies have also been ill-conceived. Both the federal and the provincial governments have resorted to the old trick of divide and conquer. Year after year, the region is given several million dollars and left to decide how to allocate the funds. It is somewhat like throwing a bone to a pack of dogs and watching them fight over it.

Meanwhile, no new regional development policies specifically geared to a region such as ours have been formulated. This too raises some questions.

Despite everything, the region's future still seems bright. I can say this because residents are resisting the exodus of young people, the loss of jobs in our major industries and the rise in unemployment. At the Abitibi-Price and Alcan plants, the unions have taken steps, in co-operation with the different companies, to increase production and performance levels. Their actions are supported by the politicians.

At the Vaudreuil plant, in Arvida, a plant providing employment to about 1,200 people, the union asked Alcan to make investments in order to make that plant even more profitable than it is now. The 54 Bloc Quebecois even supported in a petition the Vaudreuil plant workers who are asking for investments.

Politicians then, particularly in the sphere of influence of both the Bloc Quebecois and the Parti Quebecois, are doing all they can to get new investments for the region.

As people from the region, we are also asking for multinationals to re-invest locally some of the profits they derive from the development of our natural resources. Natural resources have been leased to big companies, whether it be Alcan or Price. Since these companies have been granted access to our resources, people ask that more substantial spin-offs benefit the region.

• (1255)

This happened last year, when Alcan sold to Hydro-Quebec tens of millions of dollars in surplus electricity. This money was probably invested abroad or went to shareholders. If Alcan was allowed to develop our rivers, it is because it promoted job creation and not dividends to its shareholders.

We ask that these funds be reinvested in the region. I would even go so far, Mr. Speaker, as to ask that an investment funds be set up with the money generated from these surpluses in order to promote the development of small and medium-sized business in that area.