

Veterans Affairs

In the name of national unity, and in the name of the federal government making itself available to Canadians in all parts of the country, and not just in central Canada, I think it is important that we oppose the withdrawal of agencies such as Canadian National from regions like mine. By the same token, we should be enthusiastic about legitimate efforts to decentralize and get away from the principle that bigness, by definition, is necessarily good or is always the best way to proceed.

All too often we have fallen into the trap of believing that governments and corporations in the private sector have to be big and impersonal; the result is that they become insensitive to the public they are designed to serve.

I maintain that government and business alike can be effective, efficient and, in the case of businesses, even profitable, without going hell-bent in the direction of consolidation and bigness.

Traditionally, we in Canada have prided ourselves on our diversity, our linguistic diversity, our economic diversity and our geographic diversity. Why then, all of a sudden, do we in government elevate to a high level of importance the principle that government must be monolithic, must be huge, must be concentrated only in centres such as Montreal and Toronto? Why can we not recognize, consistent with the principle of diversity, that a lot can be gained by appreciating the value of small communities in our country, of small provinces like Prince Edward Island, and of regions like Atlantic Canada that may not have the wealth of central Canada but, nevertheless, have the same attachment to the country as a whole and are, therefore, as deserving as other regions of a piece of the federal government pie?

By all means let us be rational, efficient and effective in government organizations, but let it not be at the expense of withdrawing the presence of the federal government from communities such as Charlottetown.

This government claims to be the champion of national unity. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) constantly wraps himself in the Canadian flag and present himself as the great Canadian patriot—perhaps the only Canadian patriot! I do not wish to digress from my subject or get into the constitutional debate, because I shall be speaking about the Constitution next week. I must say, though, I find it very strange indeed that the Prime Minister, who claims to be a great patriot, goes over the heads of the people of Canada, and of Parliament, to London to have passed there a package of so-called constitutional reform—a package for which he cannot get approval from the Canadian people. He is not a great Canadian patriot he is “the wild colonial boy.”

Consistent with the principle that we should do things in Canada in a Canadian way, I think one of the traditions we should honour is an appreciation for the small communities that comprise the country. Consistent with that theme, I urge all members of the House of Commons to express outrage at any motion or any suggestion that departments of the federal government should not be located, when it is possible to do so, in communities outside central Canada, especially Ottawa.

I am a firm believer that the country as a whole, not just my own province, will be well served by having the Department of Veterans Affairs in Charlottetown, rather than in Ottawa. I regret very much, however, that this has been carried out in a very poor administrative fashion. I believe in the principle of decentralization and I commend the government, to the extent that it had anything to do with it, for proceeding with the relocation. But it should be recognized that it was the Clark government which did more in seven or eight months to bring about this relocation than the present government and the government before the Clark government did in some three years.

The principle of relocation is vital to Canada. I commend the government for recognizing that fact, to the extent that it has. But it has handled the administrative details of the relocation very badly. The community of Charlottetown, the province of Prince Edward Island and, I think, any reasonable person who knows anything about the subject, all recognize that the building that is to be the headquarters for the Department of Veterans Affairs should be located on the waterfront in Charlottetown.

I do not want to get into this in any great detail because I think the battle has probably been lost. The fact is, though, that the city of Charlottetown, the province of Prince Edward Island and the people of Prince Edward Island have long favoured locating the national headquarters on the waterfront in the city of Charlottetown. In that location it would complement a major urban development in the city, while not aggravating parking and traffic problems in the capital city of Prince Edward Island.

● (1740)

In a bullheaded and stubborn fashion, however, this government bucked community opinion, bucked the official representations of the city of Charlottetown, and bucked the same type of representations from the province of Prince Edward Island. Rather than locating the national headquarters on the waterfront, which made a lot of sense, the government has decided to plunk a huge federal government complex in the very heart of the city of Charlottetown, which will disrupt traffic and worsen the parking problems there. Also it will devour a very valuable part of the city of Charlottetown which could be better used for commercial purposes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I indicated previously that it was the intention of the Chair to interrupt the proceedings at 5.40 p.m. and at that point deem that the time provided under Standing Order 48(2) for consideration of this motion had expired.

Mr. Collette: Mr. Speaker, I would like some clarification. There was some confusion earlier as the result of lack of notice on debating this item. That has been disposed of. You ruled it was not a point of order. However, I would submit that since the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville (Mr. Cossitt) did not have the right to speak twice on his own motion, except as provided for under Standing Order 48 for five minutes in reply