

Government Orders

Some changes that the legislation brings in to assist businesses include increasing the size of business from \$2 million to \$5 million in annual revenue. A million dollars sounds like a lot of money but I think in terms of the economic activity of a lot of businesses over the course of the year—if the gross revenue of even the smallest business was tallied—it could reach a million dollars quite easily. Obviously the raising of this sum will assist and broaden the number of businesses that are eligible. Also, the increase in the loan size from \$100,000 to \$250,000 is obviously a plus and will assist as well.

One comment has been made consistently on the legislation and I think it is appropriate. The committee could hear some valuable evidence from the banks and others who have had experience with this. This program, with the loan assurances of the government, will not work unless of course the banking community makes an effort to let their business customers and clients know about the program. The credit union movement is now involved.

I think it is fair to say that a lot of businesses in the past have felt that it would be easier to get some money from a bank if one were a bankrupt Third World dictator than an entrepreneur trying to get a little business going in this country. Over the past number of years, we have seen that a lot of loans to countries that have not been able to repay have had to be written off. Perhaps there will be progress in that particular field.

We have all had businesses contact our offices when they needed assistance when for whatever reason the banks will not lend them funds. Then they get bumped to the next lender, the FBDB, and if the FBDB will not help them, they get bumped again.

There is an innovative program that offers a real opportunity and a real chance to act as a vehicle to inform entrepreneurs and businesses about this program. It is the Community Futures Program. I have been successful in getting the Community Futures Program to cover virtually all of my riding, including most recently the western end, the Houston, Burns Lake, Vanderhoof and Fort St. James area for example. We have just had that designated.

Obviously getting the information out to the organizations, such as the Community Futures Groups, is important. In many cases, MPs' offices act like traffic cops in directing people to the right agency that can assist them the most.

I repeat my suggestion to the minister that promotional material should be available to our offices so that we can use it in our householders and other mailings so that the business community is well aware of the program.

With regard to the banks, perhaps we should again recruit Anne Murray to try to promote this program. At one time the singer was in some of the ads for the Bank of Commerce. It is important that we all make an effort to get information about this particular program out to the business community.

There are a couple of other areas, not related to this particular legislation, that I want to put on the record as being of concern to businesses in my riding. First is the goods and services tax and the ongoing debate over that particular tax. I do not think we could have a debate about assistance to small businesses—particularly the small business community—without talking about some of the damage that has been done to those businesses by the goods and services tax. Second, Canada Post is not the subject of this bill, but many of the businesses in our constituencies rely to a great degree on the service provided by Canada Post.

• (1300)

I am currently conducting a survey of businesses in the downtown Prince George area because there are of course the usual rumours from Canada Post that it will be closing the main post office in Prince George, a community of 70,000 people, that serves the downtown business community.

I think those are clearly issues that when discussing programs related to small businesses have to be put on the agenda as well.

I will get back to the legislation. I have already mentioned the size of businesses. I have talked a bit about the funds that will be provided to businesses that will go from \$100,000 to \$250,000.