

Adjournment Debate

Mr. Lee Richardson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): The Farm Credit Corporation is a key institution for Canada's agricultural sector.

Since its establishment in 1959, the corporation has been an important source of loans and financial services to farmers all across Canada. It plays an important role in assisting Canadians to establish and maintain viable and productive farms. At the end of the 1990-91 fiscal year, the Farm Credit Corporation had a loan portfolio outstanding of 61,475 loans totalling \$3.6 billion.

The relocation of FCC's head office from Ottawa to Regina will strengthen the presence of the Government of Canada in Saskatchewan and demonstrate the government's commitment to decentralizing its agencies and services throughout Canada. Relocating FCC's headquarters will greatly benefit the city of Regina and the province, adding up to 200 new positions in Regina.

FCC currently has about 185 field and regional staff in Saskatchewan of which about 75 are located in Regina. With the relocation of FCC's head office to Regina, over one-third of FCC's employees will be located in Regina and almost one-half in the province of Saskatchewan. This move also fits perfectly with the provincial government's plan to shift provincial government jobs to smaller communities.

The hon. member for Regina—Wascana tells me that the people of Saskatchewan and farmers in western Canada welcome FCC headquarters staff to the prairies. They hope that by FCC being located in a more rural oriented city that staff will be able to develop a closer relationship with its western clients. In 1990-91 and to date this year, some 45 per cent of FCC loans have been to prairie farmers.

The decision to move FCC's head office is strictly a federal decision and is not related to provincial elections. It is a decision which is consistent with this government's policy on decentralization and is similar to the government's decision last winter to move the National Energy Board to Calgary.

I can assure hon. members that the National Energy Board has successfully completed its move to Calgary. I know that, like the National Energy Board, FCC will greatly benefit from this move by being closer to western Canadians.

The corporation has recovered from its financial difficulties of the 1980s and in 1990-91 recorded its first operating surplus in nine years.

NATIONAL UNITY

Hon. Alan Redway (Don Valley East): Mr. Speaker, the government has now unveiled its constitutional proposals.

According to the media at least, there were some differences of opinion among ministers in arriving at those proposals. Finally the differences were resolved. They were resolved not openly and publicly but privately behind closed doors.

The proposals that have been put forward deal with most but not all of the concerns that Canadians expressed to the Spicer commission during its hearings. Now the proposals have been referred to this special all-party parliamentary joint committee for public hearing and also, as I understand it, a summary of the proposals are going to be sent out to each and every household in Canada.

Now it is an opportunity for all Canadians to finally discuss and debate these proposals in an open and public fashion. It seems to me that it is extremely important that the joint committee, our government and all of the provincial governments involved in this whole process must not only be willing to listen to the public. They must also be prepared to accept constructive amendments to the government's proposals that have been put forward and new constructive proposals that come directly from the public. They may have nothing to do with the proposals that the government has put forward itself, although perhaps some of these proposals might be ones that the government debated privately without the benefit of public input behind closed cabinet doors before unveiling the actual proposals themselves.

• (1810)

It seems to me that unless there is this openness and willingness to accept constructive proposals from the public on the part of governments, we are going to be right back in the position that we were at the beginning of this whole process as identified by the experience of the Spicer commission. It found that Canadians were very distrustful of our government process and of politicians themselves.

Of course, they expressed those concerns based on the belief that they had not been represented by the members of Parliament, that members of Parliament had not represented their views on such things as the debate