

New Brunswick headed this country last year in the number of new businesses created. I am sure that my colleagues opposite and on this side of the House will applaud those statistics.

Nova Scotia business surveys indicate that a third of the businesses interviewed said that they intend to increase their capital investment in hiring this year. More than half of them were optimistic about economic prospects in the future.

Furthermore, unlike what members opposite would like us to believe, as I mentioned to my colleagues opposite, this recent Gallup poll reveals that Atlantic Canadians are the most optimistic of all Canadians about economic prospects for their region. Obviously there is a high degree of approval for what ACOA has been doing.

I could list a great many of the positive things that ACOA has been doing. I do not intend in so doing to say that ACOA is perfect, that it is a panacea for what we need in Atlantic Canada.

Recently in Prince Edward Island I noted in the announcements of two large potato plants the optimism and the enthusiasm that is permeating the economy there. I also attended the recent official opening of the P.E.I. Food Technology Centre which will place Prince Edward Island at the forefront of food science and technology in the country. I saw a lot of happy people on this occasion who realize that this government, working with their government, is doing a great deal through ACOA, through regional development, to give Prince Edward Island a leading place in technology.

Like most Atlantic Canadians I am also optimistic about the future. However the size and strength of the private sector in that part of the country are smaller, as my colleague opposite has pointed out. That means that the national government in the name of national equality must provide some special support to areas like ours. There are regions in this country that need special attention. Putting a monolithic economic development policy in place with all the attendant encumbrances and bureaucratic delays has been tried by the Liberals. It just did not work. The results are there.

It was a recognition of precisely this sort of fact which led our government to establish the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency with a mandate to assist small and medium sized businesses. Since its creation less than

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three years ago this agency has approved over 8,500 projects. It is approving them at a rate 10 times more efficiently and quickly than DRIE did, this central agency that was run out of Ottawa by the bureaucrats.

Over \$600 million has flowed into Atlantic Canada through the action side of ACOA and leveraged nearly \$2 billion worth of investment from the private sector. Projects assisted by ACOA have created nearly 20,000 jobs and maintained another 20,000. Some 800 new businesses have been started, and half of these have been by first time entrepreneurs.

ACOA has made a decent and reasonable impact on the problems of Atlantic Canada. It is not perfect, but it is doing an awful lot better than its predecessor did, which was the brain child of my colleagues opposite. It is not a panacea for this region, but what would the opposition parties do? Many of them would dismantle ACOA. What are they going to do with it? It is like the GST. They are against it, but what are they going to put in its place? Is it back to the future, back to old DRIE and DREE, or will we have a new one called DRIFT? That is what Atlantic Canada was doing under the Liberals; it was drifting and drifting badly.

I wanted to put some of these numbers on the record because I am getting weary of the small minds and big mouths of political opponents with nothing but bad things to say about what is going on in Atlantic Canada. Nothing could be further from the truth than this resolution that our government does not care about the regions of this country. Nothing could be further from the truth.

When we came to office federal spending in regional development was averaging only \$185 million a year in Atlantic Canada through DRIE. Our government has increased that to a current average of \$400 million and more per year.

**Mr. Mills:** How about special recovery programs?

**Mr. MacKay:** That was SCRAP, a Liberal program, and it was scrapped all right. It became a great big boondoggle. Let me tell you about one of the Liberal initiatives that I remember very well, and my colleague from Halifax will remember it even better.

It was called MAGI, Metropolitan Area Growth Investments. It was touted as a great example of Liberal ingenuity—seed money.