

approach to regional development change. Why that is the case is quite simple. It is simply because the approach that was being taken toward regional development in Atlantic Canada was not working.

We were seeing ourselves slip further and further behind the rest of Canada in terms of earned income and the ability of people to support themselves. If there is one thing that Atlantic Canadians want to be, it is to be self-sufficient in as many ways as possible. Of course, as a Member on the government side, I was anxious, along with my colleagues, to put a new program in place which would be made in Atlantic Canada to serve the needs of Atlantic Canadians.

Of course, we began to consult with people in Atlantic Canada, and Mr. Savoie, who has been mentioned at various times during this debate, was engaged to talk to leaders in the business community and within government circles and to any other interested parties to begin to put together the elements of a program that would work for Atlantic Canada.

What we see in this legislation is something quite different from anything we have had since the years of Prime Minister Diefenbaker who established the Atlantic Development Board and began to put major funding into infrastructure developments in Atlantic Canada. At that time, we saw a great expansion in facilities such as wharfs and highways. There was a tremendous improvement in the transportation system in Atlantic Canada.

Unfortunately, since the years of Mr. Diefenbaker, what we have had for regional development has basically been a national program which was modified a bit for the region. The process was such that if a person had an idea, it had to fit into the national performance criteria. It could not be an idea for a program that would fit Atlantic Canada itself. We saw that perhaps nine out of 10 or even 99 out of 100 people who had good ideas for development in Atlantic Canada would submit applications to DRIE or to DREE, as it then was, and would find that those applications were being turned down because they did not fit the national criteria for the programs. That was especially apparent during the latter years of DRIE, after the DREE programs were changed to give a different direction to the program. We got into tiers of support. If you were in one area of Atlantic Canada you got a little more than somewhere else, but everyone right across the country received some support under the national program.

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Our approach was that development should start from the ground up and that if a person in Atlantic Canada had a good idea for development it should be encouraged locally and considered by people in the region who would judge the application on its merits and determine whether or not it would fly. That is exactly the way in which the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency has been structured.

As has been pointed out, the head office of the corporation is in Moncton. There are independent offices in each province

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with a fantastic amount of local decision-making authority. In fact, there is a vice-president in each of the four Atlantic provinces. For example, the vice-president of the agency in Charlottetown can make decisions on all applications which come into his office up to \$1 million. Those applications need not go before a screening process in Moncton, Ottawa, or elsewhere. They are considered on their own merits in terms of their contribution to Prince Edward Island. That is the kind of process which we wanted with this new agency.

If an individual has a good idea for a business which is going to create something new through manufacturing or processing, whether agriculture or fisheries products, it will be encouraged rather than discouraged. In the past, when an application was made the approach was to say that it would never work, that the idea made no sense. The new approach of the agency is to sit down with the applicant and flesh out his idea. If it is determined that it would not work initially, a little more research may be done on it, in which case we will fund up to 75 per cent of the research cost. If the research concludes that the idea is good, the person can get on with receiving government assistance through the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency in order that the idea can proceed.

To ensure that the program is going in the right direction the Minister responsible, Senator Murray, has established a local board within the Atlantic area to advise on the general policy direction. That board is made up of Atlantic Canadians. These are not people sent out from Upper Canada, western Canada, or elsewhere to advise Atlantic Canadians on how to do their business. These are local business people who have been successful and can provide advice to the Minister in terms of how the program should be run. They can provide advice to the local vice-president on how best to carry out the program.

The approach is different. The decisions are being made locally. Those ventures which are sound will receive support. I was surprised when some of the Hon. Members opposite suggested that the agency would be very cumbersome and awkward in terms of reviewing projects and that it would take a long time to get approvals. In the last couple of weeks a project based in my constituency was approved by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency in a matter of days.

This was a project to expand the shipyard in the town of Georgetown. The shipyard saw an opportunity to do some computer-assisted design and manufacturing and to expand into the manufacture of aluminum vessels. With that opportunity identified an application went into the agency and within a very few days the decision was made that it should proceed.

That is a radical departure from the past. Under the programs which the former administration had in place, applications would often take three months, six months, nine months, or maybe a year before they received a "no". We are trying to change that process. If the answer is going to be no, the individual will know in a very short period of time.