

the agreement in the future. This is appalling in view of the fact that our forestry resource is so vital to the future of Canada. It is a part of the resource base that we have in Canada, particularly in my riding of Cape Breton Highlands—Canso.

I wish to stress the importance of the debate and to encourage our Members who will participate in it to stress that we should not simply be considering the advisability of increasing regional development, we should be demonstrating our commitment to it through higher funding levels earmarked for that purpose.

Mr. Walter Van De Walle (St. Albert): Madam Speaker, the study of the political history of regional development in Canada will reveal that successive federal Governments have for the most part failed miserably in their attempts to equalize economic opportunity and development across Canada. Such a study would show that since Confederation Canadians representing various and diverse regions of the country have regularly come to Ottawa to present their specific problems and to enlist Ottawa's assistance to resolve them.

Ottawa's response, while usually sympathetic, was never adequate, and the resultant regional disparity among Canadians has been perpetuated and in most cases aggravated. This is because Ottawa was never able to develop a comprehensive regional development philosophy. The result was a scattered shotgun approach to helping regional problems. There was also a tendency in Ottawa to believe that all policies should be implemented nationally. That is to say, what is good for one region of the country must be good for the other part of the country. That approach ignored regional needs because a deaf ear was turned to regional input. Economic sensitivity on Ottawa's part was virtually non-existent. While successive federal governments received the regions and heard their problems, these same federal governments would not really listen.

I am proud to say that I belong to a federal government that has changed this outdated Ottawa approach. Five years ago, in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) made 52 specific commitments to western Canadians. All of these commitments, plus many more, have been fulfilled. These promises recognized the unique problems and needs of western Canadians.

Regional Development

The western diversification initiative is an integral part of these commitments to western Canada. It is structured to provide westerners with direct access to and participation in those federal decisions and the decision-making process that impact directly on their economy and social well-being.

The Prime Minister has said that from now on decisions affecting western Canada will be made not thousands of miles away but down the street, where they should be made. This is the heart of the Government's approach to regional economic development. It has three essential ingredients. They are policy influenced by regions, programs designed by region, and program delivery by region.

The regional realities of Canada have demanded that the Government create specialized institutions designed to fit specialized regional needs. This means that these institutions must be driven by the region rather than by Ottawa. In order to effect that purpose they need the resources to match.

In keeping with that philosophy the Government has established a special Northern Ontario Development Fund. It has established the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, which delivers federal assistance to Atlantic Canada. On August 4, 1987 the Prime Minister announced the creation of the western diversification initiative and the establishment of the Department of Western Economic Diversification to be headquartered in Edmonton with regional offices in Vancouver, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, and a liaison office in Ottawa. The volume of requests for information and the number of submissions made to the various diversification offices far exceed any expectations the Government had for a program of this nature.

• (1740)

My colleague, the Hon. Minister of National Defence (Mr. McKnight) did a remarkable job in launching the Western Diversification Program. He has said that decision making about the West is decision making by the West. That philosophy was in effect reflected in the legislation brought down. The Bill itself reflects this Government's innovative approach to regional development.