

The most important feature of ACOA is that, for the first time, decisions are being made in Atlantic Canada by Atlantic Canadians and not in Ottawa. The financing comes from the centre, but the creative energy and the entrepreneurial spirit that drive the program come from right here in Atlantic Canada.

ACOA has already out-performed all previous regional economic development schemes and then some. To date, Agency officials have fielded more than 68,000 inquiries, received 13,000 applications, approved 6,100 projects, committed \$600 million and leveraged \$1.7 billion in investment from the private sector.

ACOA-aided projects have created 15,000 new jobs and saved 18,000 others. Some 800 new enterprises have been opened, half of those by first-time entrepreneurs. But, despite all this, Ottawa's commitment to regional development is still questioned in some quarters.

Let me put it to you directly. This government has confidence in Atlantic Canada and we are backing up that confidence with unprecedented sums of money. Here are the facts.

Federal regional development spending in Atlantic Canada between 1979 and 1984 averaged \$185 million a year. From 1984 to 1989, that annual expenditure went up by better than 50 percent, averaging \$282 million a year. More importantly, from now to 1994, the annual federal expenditure for regional development will go up again by better than 50 percent - averaging \$425 million a year.

Now before we go any further, I know spending for this year is in the \$500 million range. And I acknowledge that for reasons of budgetary restraint, the funding period was extended from five years to just under seven.

Short term constraints on regional agency budgets will influence the extent to which new funding commitments can be entered into over the next year or so. And, these funding provisions may fall short of expectations in the short term.

But the fact remains that this government has not only maintained but has significantly increased regional development funding over the next five years. We are proud of this. And, we make no apologies for asking regional development programs to bear some of the burden of getting our deficit and national debt under control. The reason is simple.

If we fail in our attempt to control the federal deficit and if the federal government becomes more constrained by huge interest payments to service the debt, then there will have to be far less money for regional development and for the social programs so vital to our collective well being.