

Government Orders

Therefore, an information centre—

[English]

Madam Speaker, I called it in my small business task force report a one-stop shopping centre for small business. You have everything in one place.

I had the pleasure and the honour of travelling across Canada. For example, I went to British Columbia and spoke to small chambers of commerce. For them that program would have been beautiful, just a small PC computer. They could have been hooked up very easily and it would not have been expensive. It is not an expensive program. The chamber of commerce would have contributed to the development of small business and the economic development of the region they serve.

Even though the FBDB started the program AIM, a pilot project which I said from the beginning was not the answer, but at least that was going in the right direction. The program went down the drain because of lack of funds.

Small businesses need information and commercialization. Today, we see a minimal number of small businesses involved with exporting to other countries. It is a sector that creates a lot of jobs. It is a sector that is easy to adjust. It can change very easily because it is small. It does not make boardroom decisions. Usually you make decisions on the spot. It can adjust easily and be competitive in the market.

In order to export products, we need good marketing. We have offices all over the world, in our embassies and so on. But no one looks after small business. Therefore, that sector is missing a big part of the action. We need programs to help.

There again, we do not have to create new things. We have embassies and consulates. We should have people who just look after small business, people who understand the problems of small business. Small business cannot have just one product with big orders. We have to service products and have different small business groups to try to compete in a foreign market. Any Canadian embassy or consulate can talk to big business. When it comes to small businesses, they are lost because they have nothing.

• (1620)

I understand that it is easy to deal with a big contract worth millions of dollars. It looks good in the books and the annual report. Perhaps we should take more time for

small businesses. The big million dollar amount will not be there in the beginning, but in the long run it will be.

Think about how many jobs we would create if we encouraged the small business sector to export service and goods. We do not have to take lessons from anyone when it comes to products. We have good Canadian products. We need some marketing. We should help our Canadian small businesses in marketing, giving assistance, help and information on the foreign markets. If we had such a program specifically for small business, I think we could create more businesses by young people coming out of university with new ideas. They would create new products and services and be there to challenge the new markets of tomorrow.

Year after year, the government has cut those vital programs, those few programs that exist. The government might think that small business has a lot of help but really the only federal program is the Small Businesses Loans Act. It has been reduced by 50 per cent in the past five years. There is nothing left. The budget of the FBDB has been cut practically every year and the orientation is moving toward medium sized business. What do we do for small business? Imagine when January 1 comes and the government applies this madness of the GST. What will happen to them? Already John Bulloch has predicted that 50 per cent of small business in the food sector is at risk of closing because of the complexity of the GST.

The government has in small business loans a maximum of \$100,000. Today, if you want to open a store, what do you do? Just think of the fact that \$100,000 is the maximum allowed, and one has to put up 20 per cent. The rule is that the government will finance a small business for 80 per cent. In certain cases, it is 90 per cent, but they are very few. The majority is 80 per cent. In order to get \$100,000, one has to have a project worth \$120,000. That is the maximum. Where can you go with that? Most people have nowhere to go.

Small business is asking that instead of having changing monthly payments which fluctuate with the interest rate, why not have an option? It might cost a little extra because it has to have a fixed interest rate and, therefore, the fluctuation might be different. The small business may be ready to pay that little extra in its cash flow planning. Sometimes they do not know how to manage their cash flow, but we are not helping them to manage their cash flow with this program. They do not have the option of saying: "Look, this is my loan. I started with \$600 a month and I want to finish with \$600.