

Private Members' Business

favour the new program, the new contract allocation policy has found in my own area, in my own riding of Richmond—Wolfe.

Many Chambers of Commerce are intensely involved in favouring the granting of such contracts in their area. I think particularly of the Eastern Townships, and I could also mention Richmond—Wolfe. If already 90 per cent of contracts are awarded to the small business sector, I fail to see how this motion should get our approval. While being virtuous per se, 100 per cent is nothing but wishful thinking.

I now come to the last feature, and I will quote if I may the rest of the hon. member's motion:

—targeting more federal contracts to the small-business sector and establishing a more aggressive "Buy Canada" program.

Here perhaps could we take most exception to this motion, beyond the virtue it commends. There are obstacles to boosting a Buy Canada program. For instance, we live in an international market framework: there is the free trade with the United States and soon with Mexico, and it is ages since we are exporting and importing outside of those two markets. Canada is already known as an exporting country and its whole economy is largely reliant on export.

What happens? If we introduce what I would call a restrictive policy based directly on the Buy Canada principle, you can easily imagine how our international partners would react to such a policy, as commendable as it may be. The Buy Canada principle obviously has its merits. It is a goal that can be achieved through awareness programs and publicity. It is not hard to figure out that a strict governmental policy to that effect would soon be under attack.

In that regard, the last element may be the most difficult to achieve, whereas the other two that I mentioned earlier are already under way.

Of course, we can use the Canadian content to encourage people to buy Canadian. That is precisely where the policy of this government has played a role. Instead of imposing a restrictive, disciplinary not to say dictatorial policy, we chose other ways to encourage our people to buy Canadian, mainly by insisting more and more on a Canadian content for all our products. It can

be done. There were up to nine policies before whereas we have only one today. We have managed to simplify the whole system relating to federal contracts.

That brings me, Mr. Speaker, to tell you this. I understand very well the good faith of my colleague from Okanagan and the validity of this motion. But I am not sure that it has a place here in the circumstances that we know, especially with its wording that causes some problems.

• (1740)

To sum up, as far as I am concerned, we have followed much tighter policies in order to establish and develop a healthier small business sector, and we have made good progress so far. You only have to think about the last tax decreases, incentives to businesses and loans in some cases, all aimed at making credit more easily available. So, I think we have made progress on the first element.

About the second one, as I mentioned earlier, more contracts is exactly what we have achieved with the new policy put forward by the minister these last three years. All businesses have access to government contracts and all managers, presidents or purchasing officers can bid through their own computer. What more can you ask for when you can practically access this information from your own home?

I do not think this second element can be discarded, quite the opposite. It is under way and things are going very well indeed. It is the last element I worry about, and that is why I am dead against this motion, because this third objective seems unrealistic and unachievable.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleague to reword his motion. Of course, the motion is now before us, before the House, but you will understand why I, among others, will have to stand against the motion on behalf of small businesses, given the achievements of our government.

[English]

Mrs. Beryl Gaffney (Nepean): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to stand in this House today to speak to the motion which simply calls upon the government to consider the advisability of developing a healthy small business sector in Canada by targeting more federal contracts to the small business sector and establishing a more aggressive Buy Canada program.