

The Address

We moved quickly to sign framework agreements with the provinces and we shall move quickly to approve projects after we have appropriately evaluated them. Already federal and provincial officials in each province are working to refine the criteria and the guidelines which apply in each province. Local governments are being consulted. I expect to receive recommendations for the first proposals in the coming weeks and to see some projects approved in time for work to start in the spring of this year.

• (1020)

I know members of this House will take a close interest in the projects in their constituencies. For this reason we shall invite comments from each member of Parliament on projects recommended for his or her riding so that we can ensure that any information a member wishes to bring to our attention is available before a decision is taken.

I look forward to members honouring the spirit of this consultation which will need to be done quickly and with full respect of our local and provincial partners if it is to be effective. For my part I shall listen to the views of all members with great interest. I look forward to the chance to discuss the program with individual members as well.

The infrastructure program has received wide support across Canada not only from local governments but also from provincial governments, of very different political persuasions I might add. I hope members of this House will be responsive to this wide support and work as co-operatively as they can to ensure the success of the program.

The Prime Minister in his remarks in the debate on the speech from the throne emphasized that the long-term future of our country lies in forming a new partnership, a partnership where the municipalities and the provinces work in genuine co-operation with a national government which has the vision of what can be, not what used to be.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by congratulating the minister on his infrastructure program which is to be launched very soon, witness the announcement concerning construction of the convention centre in Quebec City.

I represent the riding of Chicoutimi, which includes the municipalities of Rivière-Éternité, Petit-Saguenay, L'Anse-Saint-Jean, Saint-Félix-d'Otis, Ferland-et-Boileau, Ville La Baie and Chicoutimi. The unemployment situation in all these municipalities is very bad. In the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean area, the unemployment rate is an unacceptable 16 per cent, and there is nothing in the throne speech to indicate that this percentage will go down.

This government's infrastructures program will certainly not be enough to turn around the economy, either in the riding, Quebec or Canada. We must break the vicious circle of unemployment insurance which means that people work four months a year on a government project and then are unemployed for the rest of the year. If they are lucky, after using up their unemployment insurance benefits they might qualify for another government project, but that is it, and then they end up on welfare, which makes it even harder to get back to work.

Economic recovery must be achieved through regional development by giving the regions all the infrastructures they need, not just the road networks covered by your program but infrastructures for water and air transportation which provide links between the regions and give them access to major urban centres.

• (1025)

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the infrastructures program, could the minister confirm there have been cabinet-level discussions on other programs aimed at a sustainable reduction of the unemployment rate, which the government will be tabling very shortly?

[English]

Mr. Eggleton: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and also for enlightening me with respect to the conditions in his constituency of Chicoutimi and other municipalities.

I hope this infrastructure program will be of benefit to them. I hope certainly that the municipal leaders are encouraged by the member to put forward projects that can be of benefit to the communities and economy of the region.

As I indicated in my remarks, the government has put this forward as one of its programs and projects that it wants to use to help rebuild the economy and get Canadians back to work.

There are discussions going on on many other types of programs. One has to only look in the red book to see the many different things for young people, for people right across this country, for small business.

We want to promote and help ensure that Canadians can get back to work. What we need badly in this country is a more balanced approach to economic planning. That is what the Liberal government has committed itself to do. It committed itself in the throne speech to give the highest priority to getting Canadians back to work.

[Translation]

Mr. Gaston Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, clearly this infrastructure project has created tremendous expectations and this was obvious from the general reaction of the municipalities. In his speech, the minister outlined ten or so conditions that will have to be met by all provinces in order for the program to be successful. He spoke of the need for cost