

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Macquarrie:—but these people will be well treated. Those who join the department from Prince Edward Island will include many fine people who will maintain the quality of service which is provided. This is a department dedicated to looking after a select group of Canadians, those who bore hardship and endured the struggle at times of national peril. While I think it is wise to have all the information before us, nobody concerned should consider that they were taken by surprise. Sooner or later, decentralization was bound to strike Prince Edward Island. Surely somewhere along the line, if Camrose, Alberta, or whatever it is called up in the north, which the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Horner) is presently representing, can get the Farm Credit Corporation, Prince Edward Island is entitled to something.

I am firmly convinced that the decentralization of bureaucracy is a good thing. The more we can get the Canadian people to look upon this great structure of government as being their own, the better. We saw the cabinet moving about the west—

Mr. Gilbert: At public expense!

Mr. Macquarrie: The hon. member says “at public expense”.

An hon. Member: In the public interest!

Mr. Gilbert: It was a political propaganda event.

● (1752)

Mr. Macquarrie: Perhaps I can say what I am going to say. I appreciate the help from all sides, but I would just as soon utter my own thoughts. I was going to say that I think it is an excellent thing for members of the government to be moving across the country. That makes me a very good Canadian citizen. But as a good Progressive Conservative I say it is an excellent thing that the present government move across the country so that people can see them at close range. If they get to know them as well as we know them here, there will be a great future, not only for my party but also for the country.

Mr. Gilbert: Yes, great changes will take place.

Mr. Macquarrie: I look forward to welcoming the people from the Department of Veterans Affairs in Charlottetown. I am voluntarily withdrawing. I do not know what will happen to my colleague, the hon. member for Cardigan, but he will have his memorial there. I am looking forward to my memorial, which is the Charlottetown airport. The last time I was there I saw a beautiful replica right in the foyer. It is pretty crowded there, but that is one thing I welcome. I think we may each leave something tangible—surely there are many intangibles—but I welcome and salute the fact that, as the people on the Island say, “the honourable Danny Dan” has done well.

Mr. Donald Wood (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, I should like to applaud most of the comments made by the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie), but with regard to the comments made by the hon. member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert),

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

I should like to say no wonder we have regional disparity in our country when we hear centralized comments such as those that he expressed. I was surprised and disappointed to have heard a member of the House speak in this manner.

I am particularly happy to have this opportunity to speak for just a few moments about the planned relocation of the Department of Veterans Affairs from Ottawa to Charlottetown, a move of real importance and magnitude which will be completed in about three years.

We all know the government is committed to the policy of decentralizing some of its operations and the associated relocating of selected agencies, branches and divisions of certain departments outside the national capital region. When one thinks and speaks of decentralization, certainly DREE is a shining example of success. In 1974 DREE made the move to decentralize, and today the Atlantic provinces have 281 people in the four provincial offices and in the regional office in Moncton, as compared to 77 prior to decentralization. But, perhaps even more important, the decentralization of DREE has resulted in over 70 per cent of the senior executive positions being located now outside of Ottawa. This means that 90 per cent of the incentive grant decisions under RDIA are made right in Atlantic Canada.

The relocation of the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is the fifth largest federal department, is seen as an important instrument for attaining such priority national objectives as, first, bringing government operations closer to the people, second, reducing regional economic disparities, and third, promoting a more balanced urban development.

Officials of the Department of Veterans Affairs have worked with the Treasury Board secretariat task force on decentralization for more than a year to determine which units and functions can be relocated. They also developed details of operation, cost and other factors which would permit cabinet to decide which units can best be relocated.

In preparation for relocation, the Department of Veterans Affairs, in conjunction with the Department of Regional Economic Expansion and the Department of Urban Affairs, together with representatives of the province of Prince Edward Island and of the city of Charlottetown, have formed a trilevel committee to address itself to all aspects involved in the relocation. The provincial and municipal representatives of the co-ordinating committee are: Dr. Tom Connor, deputy minister of development, and Mr. John Butler, city manager for Charlottetown. Also included in the advance planning team is Dr. John Glendenning, president of Holland college in Charlottetown, with whom the department might soon be working to develop curricula to provide islanders with skill training for possible recruitment to the Department of Veterans Affairs. It is also important to note that there are more federal officials on this co-ordinating committee than provincial and municipal officials because there is a lot of work to be done by the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, the Department of Urban Affairs and, of course, the Department of Veterans Affairs.