

Opportunities for Youth Program

informed of decisions reached, a process which will continue to mid-May so that all projects may be fairly and equally assessed. Some persons have doubted the students ability to respond in time to the Prime Minister's challenge. The number of applications belies that suggestion. I wish to assure all those who have taken up the challenge that the government on its side will respond to their requests in good time.

[Translation]

Finally, one thing is certain, Mr. Speaker. Because of the very nature of the program, what government support is enabling young people to accomplish will not reduce the level of employment in other sectors of the labour market.

[English]

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State, in concluding his remarks dealing with the Opportunities for Youth program, said that some persons have doubted the students ability to respond. I think he might well have indicated that one of the chief persons who seemed to express doubt, though perhaps in a subtle way, was the Prime Minister himself in the remarks he made on March 16. Perhaps the minister himself has also been surprised by the degree to which young people from all across the country have responded. But I can say for members on this side of the House that we have never doubted the capacity, interest or ability of youth to respond.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): With the kind of response that the Secretary of State has indicated this afternoon, I believe we have been fully justified in that faith. The question that will be asked today and in succeeding days as this program is implemented is whether the faith of the young people in their government will be justified.

I am afraid that in the remarks of the Secretary of State this afternoon little has been said to relieve the growing fears and apprehensions that many, if not most, of the young people who willingly accepted that the government was acting in good faith when this program was announced will soon be receiving their pink, red or green slips in the mail telling them that their projects will not be accepted.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): For days and weeks members on this side of the House have been asking for a clear statement of the criteria and objectives to be used with regard to this program. One would have expected, in fact, that the Secretary of State, who is a reasonable and intelligent individual—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):—would not risk the public embarrassment that he has obviously brought upon himself this afternoon by making this kind of presentation without in effect saying to the young people of the country: Here is the basis on which we plan to deal with the

[Mr. Pelletier.]

Opportunities for Youth program. Instead, what has he given us? He has given us three negative criteria. I will not repeat them; they are in the minister's statement. But he said nothing to answer the essential questions related to the growing problem of unemployment and student unemployment across the country, nothing related to the criteria of regional need, nothing related to the problems of the individual financial need of students, nothing related to the whole question of initiative which was referred to earlier by the minister in charge of housing, nothing with regard to the format of organizations that might be submitting projects, and nothing with regard to the size of projects, the amount of money to be expended and the size of salaries. The list goes on and on. In effect the Secretary of State this afternoon has offered no direction and no understanding to the young people of this country. One is led to believe that in the final analysis the decisions that will be made will not be made on the basis of any kind of criteria but will be made mostly on the basis of influence and accident. That is not good enough for this kind of program.

We have heard far too many reports, since a special staff was assigned to look after this program, of pure and simple administrative chaos. Members who have had the opportunity to visit the staff working on this program and who have perhaps been in the unfortunate position of trying to contact them by telephone, which I am told is almost an impossible exercise, know that there is extreme disorder in the administration of this plan which was brought in far too late to be implemented with any kind of effectiveness. In addition, seemingly the government has taken positions that make absolutely no sense in light of the large number of students who desperately need work this summer. The decision that none of the money awarded through this program can in any way be related to gainful employment or to profit seems totally stupid when one realizes that if the \$15 million allocated for the Opportunities for Youth program had been used in many instances as seed money, as it could well have been because we have heard of some projects submitted on that basis, it could have a ripple effect that would have provided \$50 million or even \$70 million worth of employment for students this summer.

● (2:20 p.m.)

The Secretary of State told us that the requests submitted amount to some \$150 million in terms of forecast expenditures, but he has not answered the basic question of just how much beyond the original allocated amount of \$15 million the government is prepared to go. A few days ago the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said in the House that there might be some possibility of using money from other programs in the \$57 million allocation, but anyone who thinks about that answer must realize we will only know if that money is available at the end of the summer, not now when money must be available if projects are to be implemented.

I believe we are faced with a most serious situation in this country and it will become increasingly serious as we realize how little the government is prepared to