

better and that all we should do is to be patient? Manitobans, for too long, have been too patient with the Government.

It is surely incumbent on the Government to give clear indications of procurement policy whereby there will be a better, more fair and equitable distribution for moneys spent. It should be kept in mind that the moneys spent are taxpayers moneys. The Government has received those moneys, to be used wisely and properly, from all sectors of the country and from every citizen. Therefore, the Government should be very careful to encourage, through its purchasing program, fairness in distribution.

Another factor that must be kept in mind is that the Government will state that it does not have the distributors at certain points. Very often one of the reasons distributors are not available is because of the Government's procurement policy to begin with. Through centralisation, too often businesses which could have been established in other regions of the country have not received the same consideration as those in central Canada. It is hard for me to understand, as a person coming from the Prairies, that in Atlantic Canada where we have matters relating to the offshore, the coastline, search and rescue and the Armed Forces only 7 per cent of the total purchases of the Department of Supply and Services would come from that region.

Mr. Crosby: That figures.

Mr. Epp: I am saying that as one who does not come from that region. It just simply boggles my mind to think that there are no more than 7 per cent of entrepreneurs in Atlantic Canada who could have supplied those goods and services for the Government of Canada. Nor am I saying for a minute that the Government would go to those regions for purposes of regionalism only and that competitiveness should not apply. I have no doubt in my mind that those people, given an opportunity, would be as competitive as those in any other part of Canada. The same applies in the West.

The Minister of Supply and Services said that on the Prairies, specifically in Winnipeg, we have been involved in the aeronautical industry. I pointed out to him CAE. CAE has closed down. If that is an example of success, we can do without that success.

● (2315)

I am saying to the Parliamentary Secretary not to promise us better figures but to show us; show us by a very clear pattern how those figures will be changed in order that our business people in the regions will have the same consideration for competitive contracts as those in the two central Provinces. We are asking for tangible results, not promises or hope. Give us some tangible results. The Government has had enough time.

We hear much about regional disparity. We hear much about divisiveness in the country. Surely this would be one very straightforward means by which we could put action to the

sentiments expressed by a Government that surely should have national policies in mind rather than regional considerations.

Mr. Jim Schroder (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in response to the Hon. Member's question on federal Government purchases in the Province of Manitoba. It is, of course, too early in the year to give an accurate estimate of purchases that will be made in this current fiscal year in Manitoba.

The figure of 3.7 per cent referred to by the questioner reflects the current figure of 1,247 contract documents issued in Manitoba for the first two months of this financial year by both our regional and headquarters offices, for a total dollar value of \$13.3 million. Last year some 13,000 documents were issued for a total value of \$151 million. On that scale these first few months auger well for the future of contracting in Manitoba. In fact, the amount of regional purchases in the Province of Manitoba has increased by 15 per cent per year over the past three fiscal years. In actual dollars, the total of contracts issued regionally in Manitoba has climbed from \$34.2 million in 1980-81 to \$47.3 million in 1982-83.

I am also pleased to say that there are contracts before Treasury Board at this moment that will be of significant benefit to Manitoba in the aerospace field. On this subject there will be further significant sums going to the Manitoba aerospace industry as part of the CF-18 offset program. The growth of our regional purchases in Manitoba is further confirmed by our recent opening of an extra sub-office in Shilo, reflecting DSS activity in Manitoba.

We are, as the Hon. Member may know, decentralized inasmuch as we operate a network of supply centres across the country. These centres are there to respond to the needs of the federal Government departments that are located in those regions. The number of contracts issued in any particular region depends, therefore, to a large degree on the program requirements of our customers in those areas.

In order to spread the economic advantages of federal procurement to as many of these regions as possible, we also arrange for regional purchasing of the majority of the goods and services that are requisitioned at headquarters here in Ottawa where this is practical in terms of achieving the best value for every dollar spent.

It follows therefore that in terms of percentages of contracts issued across the country, one must take into consideration the industrial base of the Provinces concerned. Obviously, a broad, highly industrialized economic base would naturally succeed in competing for and winning a higher percentage of contracts than one whose base is mainly agricultural. We can, after all, only expect contracts to be let to those companies that win them in open competition.

The Hon. Member must acknowledge that in this free enterprise country, open competition is the only way we can ensure fair and equal treatment to all potential suppliers. The fact that at any particular period one province may be more