

*Government Organization Act, Atlantic Canada, 1987*

Constitution dealt with equality of opportunity for all Canadians, something which, rather sadly, is rarely referred to in this Chamber. There are those of us in the Chamber, as evidenced by the previous Speaker, who believe it to be the most important issue facing Canada today.

When we talk about regional disparities and the inequalities that exist within regions, what we are really talking about in a fundamental way is nation-building. For Governments to be effective in serving the people they represent, there must be an underlying political will to resolve and to address those situations.

Unfortunately, I have noted, not with partisanship but with regret, that what was said in July, 1984 has conveniently been forgotten for quite some time. In July, 1984 and in August, 1984 the Canadian people, particularly in my region of Atlantic Canada, felt that the panacea for the elimination of those disparities was to vote for the Conservative Party of Canada. We have seen the evidence of that falsehood. It has taken almost four years for the Government of the day to put a program before the Parliament of Canada.

It was once said that time is of the essence. But if the problem is so serious, as evidenced by Members opposite, if the problem is all-encompassing, as they have stated, surely it is not unreasonable for the Canadian people in Atlantic Canada to ask, "Why have you not moved with some sense of dispatch in this most serious situation?"

• (1610)

Consultations took place in committee. The committee travelled across the region but did not consult broadly within the region itself. It went to some areas but refused to go to others. The package of programs it drafted, if looked at in isolation, may be seen as if it really going to do something. However, on closer examination I think you will find the opposite to be true.

Attitude and political will are important ingredients in developing good public policy. We have had Ministers of the Crown say to the people of Atlantic Canada that this is their last opportunity. The implication is that if this is not successful, there will be no more. However, I suggest that that attitude is a tragedy for our efforts to build a better nation.

The Government developed this Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, gave it a relatively small amount of money, and tried to promote it as the new Cadillac of economic development in Atlantic Canada. The fact is that this agency, with some goals and objectives I concur with, as I have said before, is not and will not be the vehicle by which disparities in my region are eliminated.

We had some consultation, although it was not broad consultation. We had a four-year lapse of time. We have an allocation of some \$200 million over five years. We now have an agency with a board of advisers, I guess you would call them, who are going to try to advise on the public policy that

the agency will be implementing. However, it breaches a number of fundamentals. We were led to believe that the decision-making would be in the Atlantic provinces. Decision-making will not lie with that board and executive. The decisions will be made here in Ottawa.

On page 63 of Donald Savoie's report he said that above all the agency will require clout. It must be in a position to influence policy as it is being created. It will thus require direct access to central agency processes and cabinet level decision-making. However, the Act incorporating the agency merely makes passing reference to other Departments of the Government of Canada.

Some years ago I had an opportunity to speak with a former Minister of the Crown, a tremendously astute politician in the person of Donald Jamieson. He said at a policy conference that I attended that we must be cognizant of the fact that if Governments try to place in the hands of one single agency the complete role of regional economic development, it will not work. What has the Government done? It is clear that it is putting all its eggs in one basket. Yes, the Bill says in Clause 5(2):

The Minister shall co-ordinate the policies and programs of the Government of Canada in relation to opportunity for economic development in Atlantic Canada.

As a bare minimum the Government ought to provide clear, concise objectives regarding employment, transport and the various agencies of Government. That has not been done nor is it being worked on. All this Minister of the Crown and this agency will be able to do is to shuffle papers off to another Department in the hope that somewhere along the line some consideration may be given to regional economic development.

Another shortcoming is the A-base budgeting, \$200 million. You know what other Departments of the Government will be saying to that particular agency? There is \$200 million allotted, if you want projects out of Transport you go over to ACOA. This will happen even if they are somewhat, shall we say, in co-operation with the private sector. This agency will become the single tool of regional economic development. What an unmitigated disaster for nation-building. We are leaving to one small agency the responsibility of addressing the concerns of the people of Atlantic Canada.

It is important, when we talk about public policy regarding regional economic development, that we not think merely of one or two items. There are many. Tax reform is one. What is the Government's position regarding tax reform and how it will benefit Atlantic Canadians and spur our economy? Procurement is another one. The procurement policies of the Government are not working. It requires political will by a Government of some 211 Members of Parliament to put forward a legislative package which will say that a percentage must go to Atlantic Canada. This cannot be discretionary. That could help trigger thousands of new jobs, as has been done in other countries. The U.S. has been able to lever procurement policies with private sector moneys to create the