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THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

IN CANADIAN URBAN AFFAIRS

A speech by the Honourable Pat Mahoney, Minister of State (Finance), to the Sixty-sixth Annual International Conference on Public Finance of the Municipal Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada, Denver, May 29, 1972.

...Canadian federal policy reflects a recognition of the difficult and challenging responsibilities of municipal governments; it recognizes also the vast size of our country, and the differences in culture, attitudes and expectations, from Newfoundland to Quebec, and from Ontario to British Columbia. In other words, it is not a policy based on strong central power which seeks to impose its will on other levels of government. Rather, it is one that acknowledges the important role of provincial and municipal government, that accepts that each level of government has different responsibilities, that these responsibilities at times overlap, and that sound public policy will be developed only if all levels of government are conscious of, and respond to, both these facts.

Canada - An Urban Society

Two overriding facts about Canada are apparent. The first is the sheer size of the Canadian land-mass; the second is the relative thinness of population. In our almost four million square miles there live only 22 million people, barely one-tenth of the U.S. population.

Our largest cities are inevitably much smaller than America's largest cities. The metropolitan areas of Montreal and Toronto have populations of around two-and-a-half million; Vancouver has perhaps one million inhabitants. The populations of Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, Hamilton, Quebec City and Ottawa vary from about 400,000 to 600,000.

And yet, and this is the first point I wish to stress, Canada is becoming progressively and rapidly more and more an urban society. One hundred years ago eight of ten Canadians were directly or indirectly engaged in agricultural pursuits. At the turn of the century fewer than four of ten Canadians lived in urban centres. During the first third of the century,