

other on some of the well known slogans and shibboleths that have been fired back and forth over the ages. What I am suggesting is a thoroughgoing process that would involve all levels of government—and in that I include major municipalities—as well as substantial input from the private sector.

From time to time reference has been made by a variety of governments to the participation of the people. Far too often this has been more a kind of rhetorical slogan than an actualization. I believe we will not lose substantially to alter the present regions, whether they be groups of provinces, as is the case in eastern Canada, or parts of Canada, as is the case in western and central Canada, unless there can be a public commitment to both the kind of process and the cost of the process necessary to close the gaps that exist in this country.

I could quote again this evening, Mr. Speaker—I will not because I do not have the time—the considerable social difficulties that exist among people living in the four eastern provinces. We face the fact that, regardless of the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been spent in the last ten years to correct the situation, the standard of living in the maritimes has been adjusted only marginally in relationship to that of the nation generally. I could also indicate that the unemployment figure for the Atlantic provinces has consistently over the last 20 years been double that of the province of Ontario, and sometimes almost double that of the whole country. But these are statistics that are well known and perhaps do not represent the realities of hardship and loss of opportunity and potential that confront the hundreds of thousands of people who make up this country.

What we need, therefore, is a kind of national awareness, followed by a national commitment, followed by a national strategy. But having said that, we must envisage a way in which this can be carried out. We have had, in the person both of the previous minister of regional economic expansion and the present minister, men of powerful persuasion. But their persuasion seems to have been, quite frankly, limited.

In the early period there was great talk about how this department was going to co-ordinate the impact of the activities of other departments with respect to regional economic development. But we know that in general this has not been the case. We know that interdepartmental committees or interdepartmental activity, where it has been established, has basically not functioned effectively. Therefore, any concept of carrying out an effective regional development policy will have to include the new concept of ministry, the concept of support, and one that has been put on the table for consideration today, the concept of a supervising ministry. By that I mean a ministry which, very frankly, would be supervisory in relation to the general activities of the federal government in a variety of economic fields. It would also provide a level of involvement—co-ordination, if you like—not only of other federal departments but other levels of government that often make basic decisions within their own province or region.

Without an effective vehicle for co-ordination we will simply repeat the numerous errors that have become altogether too obvious over the past few years, where a

The Address—Mr. J. P. Guay

grant or a program is established to promote development while at the same time a major decision is taken by another federal department which totally undercuts the effectiveness that it is hoped to achieve.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that we have to deal in specific terms with a number of the opportunities that lie before us. One of the tragedies for those who live in regions that are regarded as slow-growth or underdeveloped is that many, if not most, of these regions, objectively speaking, should be not at the bottom but at the top of the list. The Atlantic provinces, parts of western Canada and the north have tremendous potential.

We consider transportation in the Atlantic provinces to be a problem. Yet in fact we are sitting on the doorstep of two of the greatest markets in the world, that of Europe and the eastern seaboard of the United States. Why have we not exploited in our national policies, both regarding transportation as well as marketing, the opportunity that this proximity offers? Deep-water port development and improved highway and rail transit would be an obvious avenue here. But without the commitment of the department that is specifically involved, no amount of grants, no amount of shoring-up inefficient industries will achieve this kind of effectiveness.

We must develop, as well, the entrepreneurial skills existing in our region. But again we have had a kind of passive approach to the fact that in many cases there is need to develop institutions that will give us these skills.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but the time allotted to him has expired. Does he have unanimous consent to conclude his remarks?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I shall not intrude too long upon the time of the House; I know it has been customary in this debate to maintain the 30-minute time limit. There were a number of other items that I would have liked to discuss with respect both to long-range planning and the integration of industry, but these are matters that I am sure I will be able to return to at another time.

May I say in conclusion that I hope the government will realize that there is no necessity to freeze, on a continuing basis, the kind of pattern of disparity that is all too well known in this country. We have the potential, we have the resources, and I believe we have the opportunity. All we really need is both the will and the commitment.

● (2140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joseph-Philippe Guay (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to address this House and bring into the open the concerns of the voters of St. Boniface constituency.

May I add that the member for St. Boniface, no matter who he is, is always interested in all of Western Canada. It is a well known fact that, generally, it is believed that the most representative elements of Canadian reality are found in the province of Manitoba, and more specifically in the riding of St. Boniface.