

Western Economic Diversification Act

western diversification to access the program is not through? His hands are virtually tied because we are being filibustered in this House by Liberals and New Democrats who are holding up this very vital legislation for western Canada.

The Minister can only access those programs already in place. How in God's name can the Member stand up and talk about the sense of confusion which exists because the legislation is not in place and at the same time attempt to filibuster this legislation to the detriment of western Canada? I would ask my friend, the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre to answer that question.

Mr. Cassidy: Mr. Speaker, I have been scratching my head to figure out the Conservative definition of a filibuster. I think I have established that a filibuster, in the eyes of the Hon. Member for Athabasca, is any debate which persists longer than four hours. I believe when I got up to speak this morning there had been approximately five hours of debate on third reading of Bill C-113. I am sure everyone in western Canada would agree that is not an unreasonable amount of time to give to debate on a flawed, but important regional initiative. If the Hon. Member thinks there should be no debate in the House of Commons, if his view is that the House of Commons should be stifled, let him take that view back to his constituents, but I think most Canadians believe this is a democracy and that the House of Commons plays an extremely important role in it.

Second, I would point out that the New Democratic Party is not responsible for the calling of legislation in this House, nor are we responsible for the calendar with which the legislation is put forward. That is the responsibility of the Government. My hon. friend informs me that in fact we were only up to four hours and 54 minutes of debate before I began my speech. If the Government felt that the operations of the Western Diversification Office would be impaired because of the lack of legislative authority, it could have brought this legislation to the floor a lot sooner than now.

As I recall, the Western Diversification Office was actually announced about a year and a half ago, in August of 1987. At that point the Government brought forward its legislation. The office has been making deals. It has been offering money. There was money voted for it in the 1987-88 Budget. If the Government had wanted this legislation through by Christmas, it had the power to do so. It is not the responsibility of the New Democratic Party that the Government chose to go forward with other pieces of legislation at that time.

The Hon. Member speaks of the Federation of Independent Business. I would remind him that the brief submitted to the Minister responsible for the Western Diversification Office, which came from the CFIB, was submitted after the Western Diversification Office had actually been in operation, even if it did not have legislative authority. The Member overlooks one important factor, and I checked this with my colleagues. The Federation stood by the concerns it had aired in its brief to the Minister. Those concerns are not entirely answered in the

legislation as it stands and, unfortunately, it has not been corrected since.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, not long ago we in the House debated the legislation regarding the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, a similar initiative to the Western Diversification Fund. The decision at that time was that the legislative committee should travel throughout Atlantic Canada and hold hearings. A number of people from Atlantic Canada made submissions at those hearings. I am interested in one of the submissions by the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council. The chairman of the Council indicated to the parliamentary committee that his organization had concerns about the creation of a new Department of Industry, Science and Technology because that new Department was going to be responsible for economic development in Ontario and Québec. The question the individual asked was if this would give some undue advantage in terms of a new major powerful Department of Government with all the bureaucracy in place, would central Canada be using that as its regional development? What does that mean in terms of the Atlantic Agency today, and we are talking about the Western Diversification Fund.

It seems we have different rules for different parts of Canada, at least that is what this individual was indicating. I wonder if the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy) would indicate how he sees this. With this new Department of Industry, Science and Technology being responsible for regional development in Ontario and Quebec, are we not setting up different systems for different parts of Canada? I am not suggesting any particular problem with that, but it does seem, as the person from Atlantic Canada indicated, that it perhaps provides the possibility of Ontario and Quebec having an additional advantage in terms of regional development, being aligned and receiving these development initiatives through this very powerful new Department of the Government.

Mr. Cassidy: Mr. Speaker, I did express some concern because I think that is a real problem. The Minister responsible for western Canada is going to be down at the bottom of the pecking order. When you have a cabinet of 40 people and you are the thirty-eighth person to speak, I am not sure you would carry the necessary clout, particularly if you are speaking for regional development interests and are up against the Minister of State for Science and Technology (Mr. Oberle) who will be number six or number seven in the pecking order after the great Department of Finance, Department of External Affairs and Department of Transport, and so on.

The Hon. Member for Kamloops Shuswap raises a very real problem and I do not think it is adequately answered. The answer, of course, which will come from the Government is that the Prime Minister himself is going to take responsibility for ensuring regional fairness across the country. The Minister responsible for Industry, Science and Technology will report to the Prime Minister, as does the Minister responsible for the