

● (2205)

Frankly, I want the minister to cancel this stupidity and put the money and the effort that will be wasted on this program where it will help certain people in the economy; home owners, small business people and farmers, who are the victims of this kind of extravagance and the high interest rate policy of the government.

I see the parliamentary secretary in the House tonight. I ask him to deny that any of those matters are going forward and I ask him to state categorically, on behalf of the government, that once and for all that decentralization program is ended.

Mr. Norman Kelly (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, the subject of organizational decentralization has received much attention in recent days, so I think it is appropriate at this time to review the government's position on this matter. As you know, decentralization has been part of this government's administrative approach for several years. It began in 1975 when the task force on decentralization was established, led by the Treasury Board secretariat. Its purpose was to develop a relocation program within the following framework. First, the location of any government unit must be consistent with an acceptable level of efficiency and effectiveness. Second, within the flexibility afforded by this principle, locations should be determined in terms of such objectives as regional development, urban development, controlled growth in the National Capital Region, and of considerations related to national unity.

As a result of this study, part of a relocation program was developed between May, 1975, and October, 1977. It consisted of nine projects, including the move of the headquarters of the Department of Veterans Affairs to Charlottetown, which is still in progress.

A second announcement in October, 1977, included 15 projects involving 12 departments and agencies, plus an important decentralization of the income security program offices of Health and Welfare Canada in nine provinces. The stated objectives then were: first, to move the administration of federal government programs closer to the people directly affected by them; second, to assist areas of slow economic development and high unemployment; third, to increase the presence of the federal government in communities where it had been low and where activities of a national character could contribute to national unity; and fourth, to lessen the proportion of federal employees in the National Capital Region vis-a-vis the rest of Canada.

It was then understood, Mr. Speaker, that if, in due course, there were to be other worthwhile decentralization projects, they would emerge from the normal annual planning process of the departments and agencies of the federal government. In effect, the responsibility for meeting the thrust of the policy has now been placed on departments and agencies, with emphasis placed on new programs which would have no impact on the National Capital Region. In other words, departments are required to review their geographic distribution at least annually. When changes of any kind are identified or when

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new units must be established, various alternative locations must be examined in relation to the efficiency and effectiveness of program delivery and protection of employee rights in areas such as official languages.

This examination of location options will permit the government to bring appropriate considerations to bear on the location of government units. These considerations will obviously include regional economic factors and other matters on which the choice of location can have beneficial results.

Regarding existing decentralization commitments, the government has had to consider how they can be met. Mr. Speaker, we have recognized that the substantial benefits to be obtained are not free but entail additional costs, for removal expenses and new buildings, for example, plus some disruption of programs and, most important, of the people involved.

Mr. Speaker, this government has been very much aware—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. I now have to recognize the hon. member for Winnipeg-Assiniboine.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): That is hardly an answer.

INDUSTRY—LOCATION OF AEROSPACE TRAINING CENTRE INSTITUTE

Mr. Dan McKenzie (Winnipeg-Assiniboine): Mr. Speaker, on October 16 of this year I directed a question to the Minister of Employment and Immigration with regard to the establishment of an aerospace training centre in Winnipeg. Earlier this year the minister had appointed a 12-member advisory group under retired General A. MacKenzie. This group recommended that the aerospace training centre be established in Winnipeg. I did not receive a satisfactory answer from the minister when I directed my question to him. He just gave me some evasive answer that there was lots of work for everyone. I asked him to give a commitment that the aerospace training centre would be located in Winnipeg. I find it very strange that the minister is not here tonight to answer this question because of the importance it has for Winnipeg and western Canada.

● (2210)

We were disturbed to hear recently that the Quebec caucus of the Liberal party and its chairman have stated that the aerospace training centre will either be in Montreal or will not be built at all. Apparently this was also a Liberal caucus resolution. They have completely overruled the minister's recommendation that the aerospace training centre be located in Winnipeg. I understand that all 74 members of the Quebec caucus and 14 cabinet ministers have stated that the centre will be in Quebec. I find this very strange as the cabinet is to make the final decision. However, the decision has apparently been made at a Liberal caucus meeting that the aerospace training centre will be in Quebec, and the advisory group's recommendation that it go to Winnipeg will be completely ignored.