

Government Orders

portunities Agency is to effectuate where possible economic activities in the Atlantic region.

Those of us who come from the Atlantic region, such as my colleague the hon. member for Dartmouth, will attest to the fact that economic growth in many of our communities is not what we want it to be. We are continually trying to find ways to foster economic growth. We have moved away from a previous set of targets in terms of providing grants to small and medium sized businesses. We have done away with that. We have moved to a system of repayable loans which provides more accountability for all.

There is still a lot of partnering. As an agency of the crown we can partner with the provinces, universities and non-profit organizations. This is done not for the sake of having announcements but for the sake of trying to get communities, the intellectual side, the business side and the non-profit side together, forging a coalition to try to meet the challenge of creating economic activity in the poorer regions.

Much has been said about regional economic development in the past. I am sure much more will be said by those who oppose that forum. Let it be understood that as the minister responsible for one small agency, ACOA, I believe as the red book and the 1994 and 1995 budgets have identified, that regional economies are the backbone of the nation.

There is no question there are differences between the economy of Atlantic Canada and that of Quebec. There are differences between western Canada and the Atlantic region. There are differences between Ontario and the west, be it the prairies or British Columbia. They are different. We must acknowledge that factual thing: a small population base, a widely dispersed people over a large geographical mass. It is our task not to put the blame on those that have come before us and tried to seize the moment and the opportunity by creating through partnerships something that will provide some hope and some dignity to individuals in that region of the country.

• (1515)

All agencies of government were asked to provide moneys to cut the deficit. Fifty person years will be reduced at the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, 15 person years at Enterprise Cape Breton. All aspects are being reviewed.

As members opposite find opportunities to either ask questions or put before me as the minister responsible, as my colleagues in the Atlantic Region do, ways in which we can improve, to cut things and to add to things, I would be happy to hear from them.

I want to make something very clear to those members who sit in the House. I make no apology to any member, any political party, and any representative of the press for standing up for a

region which has historically sustained a lot of economic difficulty. As I say to my friends and as I shared with caucus colleagues, we in Atlantic Canada do not want handouts. We want a hand up. Regardless of where they live, Canadians are entitled to that kind of opportunity from the national government.

In the time that I have remaining, I want to briefly touch on the subject of the Royal Canadian Mint. Colleague opposite knows that I have umpteen different agencies for which I am responsible so I am just hitting the highlights of some of them.

With regard to the Royal Canadian Mint, I want to clarify a rumour. It was circulating in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia that the \$2 coin we will be issuing will have the picture of the hon. member for Dartmouth on the coin. I want to make it perfectly clear it was a difficult decision I had to make personally, but given what I had to work with I think everyone can understand why I reached the decision I did.

Let the House be aware that the new \$2 coin will save taxpayers over a 20-year period a quarter of a billion dollars.

We have gone one step further. We are looking at all of the coins and their composition. We are going to change the composition of those coins in order to reduce their cost, thereby increasing the revenues which will total almost an additional \$12 million per year for the 20-year duration of an average coin. That is new revenue for the national government. It is new revenue for the purposes of writing down the deficit of the Government of Canada.

I want Canadians to know that these measures have been taken because we listened to them. I am the minister responsible for public works, government services, and a host of other agencies. I have gone before the standing committee for a record number of times for any minister; three times. I have had good questions from opposition members. I have had good suggestions from opposition members. Equally so, I have had very good quality questions and suggestions from government members. I want to thank them for their help and assistance.

• (1520)

I throw out a challenge to all members of the House. If we are sincere, which I take as a given, of reducing the deficit of the government in the years ahead, they should come forward with solutions. Yes, criticize too because that is part and parcel of the political process. As I have told my exempt staff as well as all of my deputy ministers, it is fine to identify problems but it is more important to identify solutions to those problems.

I know that my time has come to an end but I would be happy to attempt to answer any questions my colleagues may wish to raise at this time.