

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister will know that on March 31 the mandate of Enterprise Cape Breton expired and that the government promised there would be a new regional development program in place before July 1. As the Prime Minister knows, the economic situation in Cape Breton is very serious. Unemployment is growing, there are continually closures and more bankruptcies. I want to know from the Prime Minister when this new regional development program, the successor program to Enterprise Cape Breton, will be announced and put in place.

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, I can simply respond on behalf of the Devco part of the equation, not the over-all Enterprise Cape Breton part of the question which perhaps my colleague can answer.

In terms of Devco, we have worked very closely with the board and with the union to see if we can have in place a more viable enterprise there. I am very hopeful with the co-operation that I have seen, the last three or four months in particular, between the union and management. So I am feeling more optimistic about Devco's future.

As for the other aspects of Enterprise Cape Breton, perhaps my hon. colleague can add to my answer.

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Cape Breton—The Sydneys): With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister knows and the hon. minister knows that Devco has nothing to do with Enterprise Cape Breton.

What I wanted was an answer. One agency has been taken away and we were promised by the government that in Cape Breton there would be a replacement regional development program. I do not think it is too much to ask the Prime Minister and the government when they are going to keep that promise, particularly when the deadline they themselves set for replacing this agency is only a couple of weeks away. When will this agency be put in place?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the minister has already given the indications of the government. We are very concerned about the situation in Cape Breton. It has been a tough time in Cape Breton for as long as I can remember, 30 or 40 years. Successive governments have wrestled, with varying degrees of success, with very serious structural problems in the economy in Cape Breton.

• (1500)

We began with Enterprise Cape Breton. We had some successes and, as the report indicated, some failures. The cost of attracting jobs to Cape Breton pursuant to some of the programs that the previous government initiated and we initiated was deemed by some outside observers to be excessively high.

ACOA, which Premier McKenna has described as the most important regional development agency ever introduced into Atlantic Canada, is contributing in some substantial way to some successes in Cape Breton, but we are cognizant of the problem that my hon. friend raises.

We are also aware that decade after decade we have failed as a country to successfully resolve some of these serious problems in Cape Breton. I give my hon. friend the undertaking that the Government of Canada in co-operation with the Government of Nova Scotia will try even harder to bring about a greater degree of prosperity and social justice throughout eastern Nova Scotia and into Cape Breton.

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CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs.

The government has indicated its opposition to sovereignty association, saying that Quebec can negotiate sovereignty but not association. This echoes statements by Reform Party spokesmen in the past 18 months, indicating to Quebecers that separation is not a costless excursion.

Will the government also indicate its opposition to asymmetrical federalism, that is that it is unacceptable in a truly federal system to grant special sovereign powers to any one particular province which cannot be granted to all provinces?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I hope that the little coalition between the Reform Party and the Bloc Québécois might allow them in their seat to work out the small differences that they might have.

Let me make one thing very clear. The position of the Reform Party of Canada is a position which assumes the separation of Quebec. That is not a position which we in this party or most Canadians in this country accept.