

Opportunities for Youth Program

Mr. Greene: Is that an original line?

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Quite obviously the vast majority of young people who took the government at its word when the program was first announced will still be disappointed. They are already disappointed because in most cases they have not received any information about the projects they submitted almost one month ago. The fact that the government is now accepting projects at the rate of 100 a day will be cold satisfaction to the vast majority of young people who hoped and expected the government to respond favourably to their applications.

Although all hon. members welcome the addition of \$10 million to the program, I must say that some of us are extremely disappointed that the Secretary of State has not indicated what alternative suggestions or proposals he or his department has in mind with respect to the remaining thousands of projects. After all, some 13,000 projects have been submitted. If about 600 have already been accepted, and a few hundred more may be accepted, this means that between 11,000 and 12,000 projects will go unanswered. This is one of the most, if not the most, shocking aspects of the whole Opportunities for Youth program.

I would have been much happier if the Secretary of State had indicated that he and his officials, in light of the great reaction to this program, were now actively consulting with municipalities, provinces, universities and industry so that some of the most imaginative projects that have been put forward by Canada's young people could be acted upon either in the private sector or in other areas of the public sector. Instead we have been told that, while an additional \$10 million will be allocated to the program, the vast majority of projects, conceived in good faith and presented to the minister and his officials with great hopes, will simply not be allowed to come to fruition. That is simply not good enough for the hundreds of thousands of this country's young people who have taken the time and trouble to advance some of the most important, useful and constructive projects that young people of this country have advanced for many years. I urge the minister, in conjunction with his officials, to give serious consideration within the coming week to finding areas where programs that have not been accepted may yet be instituted in order to give our young people an opportunity to serve and so that they may be assisted to continue their education in the fall.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this party may I thank the minister for making his statement and announcing that an extra \$10 million is to be made available for the Opportunities for Youth program. Like the hon. member for Egmont, I am very happy to see that the minister has acted upon our suggestions—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nystrom: —and upon the suggestions of thousands of young people across the country. The issue that must be raised is that this announcement has been made on May 11, two or three weeks after many university stu-

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

dents have finished their classes, when it should have been made several months ago. I do not see why we should still be formulating student employment policies in the month of May. I do not see why this had to happen. It should have been done last fall or in the early winter so that the young people could have planned their university years and their summers.

As the minister has said, thousands of projects will not be granted or approved. What will happen to the young people depending on getting jobs through the Opportunities for Youth program when their projects are turned down on May 25? How much time will they have to compete for jobs that may not be available? These are things the minister should have thought of early last fall and early last winter instead of coming up with an ill-planned ad hoc type of Opportunities for Youth program at the last moment.

There are other points which come to mind. How many jobs will actually be created under this program? We still do not know the answer. In the jobs that are created how long will the students be employed? Will they only be employed for six or seven weeks or for two or three months? Many students need full summer employment if they are to be able to return to university next fall. They also need summer jobs that pay wages high enough to enable them to continue their studies. These are some of the questions which the program has failed to answer.

In general, this program is a good public relations job, but how much of the problem will it really solve? I would like to make two or three suggestions.

The minister and his department should start thinking right now about next year and do some long-range planning. Why not convene a conference with young people such as the proposed conference that was cancelled last spring? Why not contact the provincial and municipal governments with regard to planning for next year? This should have been done this year instead of this last minute attempt to put forward a patched-up program.

The government should also be pursuing a policy of full employment. If we had full employment we would not be faced with so many problems in finding jobs for our young people.

Finally, whether a student finds a summer job should not determine whether he returns to university. We must think about universal accessibility to education regardless of one's financial background.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nystrom: One's future in education should not depend on how successful one is in competing for jobs that are all too scarce in Canada today.

These are a few points that I hope the minister and the government will consider. Let us not get into this bind next year and disappoint the students again by coming out with a plan at the last moment. Young people want to do something. The minister was surprised that the young people have responded so enthusiastically to this program. I was not surprised. I knew the young people wanted to do something, so let us start planning now for next year and get on with something meaningful.