

I share the view of the Atlantic Provinces Chamber of Commerce which recently declared ACOA to be "the best thing to happen in Atlantic Canada for a long, long time."

Without question, the most important feature of ACOA is that, for the first time, decisions are being made in Atlantic Canada by Atlantic Canadians and not in Ottawa.

The financing comes from the centre, but the creative energy, and the entrepreneurial spirit that drive the program come from here.

ACOA is about helping business people identify new opportunities, improve productivity, exploit new technology, develop new markets and create new jobs. It is about helping to build more dynamic, more diversified and more resilient commercial enterprises in Atlantic Canada.

ACOA is a strategic partnership between the people of Atlantic Canada and their national government, a partnership designed to boost the traditional entrepreneurial spirit in Atlantic Canada.

To say that ACOA has been a resounding success is to understate the case. ACOA has already out-performed all previous regional economic development schemes and then some.

To date, agency officials have fielded more than 68,000 inquiries, received 13,000 applications, approved 6,100 projects, committed \$600 million and leveraged \$1.7 billion in investment from the private sector.

ACOA aided projects have created 15,000 new jobs and saved 18,000 others. Some 800 new enterprises have been opened, half of those by first-time entrepreneurs.

But, despite all this, Ottawa's commitment to regional development is still questioned in some quarters.

Let me put it to you directly. Our government has confidence in Atlantic Canada and we are backing up that confidence with unprecedented sums of money. Here are the facts.