

Adjournment Debate

years and was forced to reduce funding to ROPE from \$150,000 to \$75,000. Their other major funder, Employment and Immigration Canada, was unable to increase its funding to offset the reduced funding from the Correctional Service of Canada.

The Correctional Service of Canada, at ROPE's request, did manage toward the end of the fiscal year to provide additional funding. This increased the level of funding to \$95,000. The agency was informed that it would have to find alternate sources of funding in the future because the need for straight job placement had decreased.

In August, 1987, the Halifax parole office conducted a needs analysis of its offender population. The results indicated that offenders had major problems in the area of substance abuse.

Unemployment was ranked as fifth in their list of needs. In fact, they found that the unemployment rate in the offender population was at parity with that of the general population in the community and that the lack of jobs was not the real issue but rather the lack of job skills. Consequently, the Halifax parole office approached each of the agencies under contract which offered employment services, ROPE being one of them, to submit proposals which addressed training offenders in the area of job skills.

The ROPE organization failed to submit a proposal which clearly addressed the training issue. It was decided by the Correctional Service of Canada, in December, 1987, not to renew their contract with ROPE and to use the money toward dealing with the substance abuse problem and other employment training programs.

Presently, the Correctional Service of Canada is contracting with the Coalition Support Services, a private agency which offers not only job placements but also job training and development. It also contracts with community residential centres that provide employment counselling and job skill training.

Unfortunately, Real Opportunities for Prisoner Employment does not meet the present needs of the Correctional Service of Canada. This does not mean, however, that its services will not be required at some future date.

FINANCE—NORTHERN TAX ALLOWANCES—GEOGRAPHICAL
DELINEATION OF AFFECTED COMMUNITIES/REQUEST THAT
REGULATIONS BE AMENDED

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, it has been said frequently that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I believe that the Government was well intentioned when it decided to broaden the prescribed areas which qualify for the northern residents tax deduction. After all, it is a generous scheme and a welcome tax measure for those who live in northern and isolated areas. It is a just and fair proposal which helps to provide at least a measure of economic equity for our citizens who live a good distance away from the larger urban centres of Canada. It is another useful

tool in regional development and I believe it is a necessary cost in the process of building a nation.

So much for the good news. In implementing this excellent tax measure, however, the Government has bungled in spades. In drawing up the criteria for eligibility, the Government has opened for itself a troublesome can of worms in terms of who qualifies and who does not. The Government knows that it has maladministered the program and it knows what has to be done, but it draws back. It draws back because it fears the subsequent loss of revenue and fears the costs of making the appropriate adjustments.

Instead of facing up to the mess it has created and making those corrections, it shrinks from its responsibility and hides behind another phoney task force. This task force will do nothing except cost the taxpayers of Canada \$3 million and will take about a year-and-a-half to report. In my opinion, the proposed task force is nothing more than a pricey P.C. patronage plum. It cannot come up with any answers. It cannot solve the problem. The proof of that is taken from the terms of reference provided by the Minister of Finance. First, there will be no retroactivity. Any communities which will be added because the task force deems them eligible will receive the tax benefit only in 1988, not retroactive to 1987 as do those who now qualify.

● (1810)

Second, I quote from the terms of reference:

The task force should bring forward proposals that are essentially revenue neutral.

That means very simply that there is no additional money for the program. Thus if other communities are added as a result of the task force work, something must be taken from the benefits now received by taxpayers in other communities who are presently eligible. For example, if my constituency of Marathon is added to the list, and it now does not qualify because it is 18 kilometres short of the distance, then Manitowadge, a nearby community, is going to have to receive a watered-down benefit. Thus it will go on and on across the country. That is inevitable. Therefore, the three million dollar task force will only compound the Government's problem. It is a sham and a farce and should be called off before it begins.

I do not know why I should try to keep the Government out of trouble but I predict that this task force will only make matters worse for the Government unless it is stopped now. Let the officials work with those Members of Parliament from all political Parties whose ridings are affected by this maladministered program. I tell you, Sir, that in relatively short order—it will not take long at all—we can devise a fair and reasonable set of criteria. That is the sensible way to proceed. I plead with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) to think again about what he has done.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre H. Vincent (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, we have said many times