

of those who does not recognize that some positive advances are made from time to time. However, I represent a constituency in the province of Saskatchewan, and I think the government does have something to answer for, at least in respect of that province. I am talking about the failure to renew ERDAs.

As the minister knows, the province of Saskatchewan lost 23,000 people from its population last year. That is the equivalent of some of our largest communities. In fact, Saskatchewan has only four cities that are bigger than 23,000. Three hundred of the 500 communities in that province lost population last year, so it is an urgent situation.

The existing Economic Regional Development Agreements, ERDAs, were originally scheduled to run for 10 years. The first five years were up last March 31, at the end of the fiscal year, and people had done their planning on the basis that there would be another five-year renewal. The minister said at the time that the negotiation of new agreements was just around the corner. When asked about it again later on in the summer, negotiation was just around the corner. I am starting to think that this building is an octagon. There are always more corners to go around to get to see the actual ERDAs. When is the government going to get serious about renegotiating those ERDAs?

In the area of minerals, they have kept small exploration companies. They have now been nailed by the elimination of the flow-through share program. In the area of forestry, not only are we not catching up, but with the forest fire devastation and so on, we are falling even further behind. In the area of northern development, a lot of good initiatives in the community development corporations, and so on, that were just getting up a head of steam are being allowed to stagnate. In the area of tourism, which does hold some potential, a lot of projects are stagnating. There have been a lot of positive suggestions made around the idea of supporting local economic and sectoral organizations so that small communities and small business can get involved in organizing their sectors to be more competitive and to access big programs like WDO. If the commitment is so serious, how can we have waited a whole year and still have nothing in sight? In fact, we are being told once again that this building has another corner.

Supply

Mr. Mayer: Madam Speaker, we do not have to get serious about negotiating ERDAs. We have always been serious and we have said so right from the budget in April, 1989. The provinces are well aware of our position.

I will be straightforward with the member. It has taken us longer than any of us would have liked, or I would have thought at the time, to get the final paperwork done to get everything in place. In the meantime, he should know that there is regular western diversification programming going on in the province of Saskatchewan. It is pretty significant in some areas. He should also know that there are some fairly exciting projects in the pipeline that we are looking at with province of Saskatchewan that will be of direct benefit.

We have \$242 million still there. We do not operate on the basis of spend it or lose it. The money is not rotting. It is there. I have met with representatives of the province of Saskatchewan as recently as a month ago to go over where some of their priorities are. We are both getting ourselves geared up so that once we have our final paperwork done that we will be in a position to sit down, be specific and sign the agreement.

The province is not chomping at the bit to sign these agreements because some of the other money is still flowing. There is regular programming under Western Diversification and they are satisfied that the money that we were allocated to use in ERDA-type arrangements last April is still there. I have never used the word "corner". We are getting closer and closer all the time to signing those agreements.

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have a chance to speak in this debate this afternoon which is of vital importance to every member of our caucus, to every member of the resource areas of this country, including Atlantic Canada, northern Ontario and the western provinces.

The resolution was brought forward this afternoon by the hon. member for Kenora—Rainy River because of the extreme concern there is in every part of our country with the direction that we are going, whether we are talking about transportation across these regions and VIA Rail, the dramatic cutbacks in the funding of ERDAs, as has been raised by the hon. member from Saskatchewan, the fishery problems in Atlantic Canada, or the tremendous problems that western farmers face because the government is not willing to make a commit-