



Bernard Valcourt, minister of state for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, was in Charlottetown this week as part of a winter tour of Atlantic Canada. He was hosted at a reception by the Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce, welcomed by Kathy Hambly, centre, executive director, and Kathryn Coll, president. GUARDIAN PHOTO BY NIGEL ARMSTRONG

Valcourt says Atlantic Canada doesn't need handouts

By RYAN ROSS
THE GUARDIAN

The federal government needs to hear from Canadians as the country deals with a fragile economic recovery, says Bernard Valcourt, minister of state for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

During a speech at the Rodd Charlottetown Hotel this week, Valcourt said what happens in the rest of the world could also happen in Canada.

"We're not immune to all of that and this is why we have to keep our eyes on the road," he said.

It was a relaxed speech during which Valcourt joked he would go on strike and not talk if the roughly 150 people there to hear him speak didn't move closer to the podium.

Valcourt was in Charlottetown as part of an Atlantic Canada tour to make announcements in sev-

eral provinces, including a funding announcement in Charlottetown regarding the cruise ship industry.

Valcourt said he held his first meeting with his provincial counterparts during his visit and they had a good discussion about economic opportunities for P.E.I.

In keeping with the speech's tone, Valcourt joked that he told them to remember they were all newly elected, including him.

"We're stuck together for the next four years, we might as well work together," he said.

Valcourt said a lot of Atlantic Canadians have taken the view that the recession isn't a big deal because the region is always in a recession, but it's why the government is sticking with its low-tax plan for job growth.

"A plan that has worked and served Canadians, Canadian families and entrepreneurs well since the advent of the recession," he said.

During the speech, Valcourt referred to the \$350,000 funding announcement for the cruise sector he made earlier in the day and said someone asked him how the government could justify spending in a time of fiscal restraint. He said reducing the deficit didn't mean the government would stop all spending.

"We're going to keep spending on targeted initiatives that help create jobs, that help create growth and promise it for the future," he said.

Valcourt said Atlantic Canadians don't need a handout.

"They need a hand up."

Before wrapping up his speech, Valcourt told the crowd his door is always open to get innovative ideas on ways to help the economy in Atlantic Canada through ACOA.

"We don't have the monopoly on ideas there," he said.