

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 11, 1989

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVILEGE

CONTAMINATED WASTE—CLARIFICATION OF COMMENTS DURING QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Otto Jelinek (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a matter of personal privilege stemming from remarks I made to this House during the course of Question Period yesterday in response to questions from the Hon. Member for Yukon (Ms. McLaughlin) regarding contaminated waste.

I said yesterday:

—I learned of the suspicion of toxic wastes being included in liquid fuels this Monday. I immediately initiated an investigation within my Department to ascertain whether or not any officials were knowledgeable of the fact prior to this Monday. The response was no.

That statement was made on information I received from my officials earlier this week and was based on the best information available to them and to me at the time.

Late yesterday afternoon it was brought to my attention that on September 11, 1987, a meeting was held at the headquarters of Revenue Canada in Toronto. As a result, calls were made to some of those purported to be in attendance at that meeting.

In clarification of my statement yesterday, I have since been advised that the meeting took place. I am advised as well that Revenue Canada was not provided with any evidence of contaminated fuels being brought into Canada.

I am further advised that during the discussions on fuel import fraud, which took place at the time, a reference was made to the transport of contaminated material between states in the United States. At no time was there any allegation made about toxic materials being placed in fuels for export to Canada. For this reason, I

am advised information was not conveyed to senior officials in Ottawa or to the Minister.

I hope that the information I have submitted to the House at the earliest opportunity will clarify the extent of my Department's knowledge in respect to this situation.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, I am to understand that the Minister has clarified his statement of yesterday and that, in fact, according to his new information his Department became aware of certain allegations in September of 1987. I have in my hand a letter from the Assistant Deputy Minister of his Department at the time. It is dated February 9, 1987. It states that "the Department is presently involved in an investigation of the petroleum importation and distribution industry and has in co-ordination with several other federal, provincial and international investigation and enforcement agencies maintained an exchange of information and liaison concerning this matter. It has been through this exchange of information with these enforcement agencies that we have been able to proceed with the pursuit of the Canadian perpetrators. Unfortunately, due to the confidential nature of our court evidence, I am unable to provide you with further details at this time.

In addition, I should mention our investigators meet on a scheduled basis approximately twice a year to discuss various enforcement issues. Petroleum fraud has been high on the agenda at the most recent meeting—," et cetera.

• (1110)

Mr. Speaker, the reason I have put this letter on the record is because in response to the Minister's statement today in the House that his Department has been aware of details concerning petroleum fraud since September of 1987, I can only assume that if his own Department were conducting an investigation which involved contact with international agencies and international enforcement agencies, that would have included, for example, the FBI, and we know from the reports in the press that