

*Oral Questions*

**An hon. Member:** Explain.

**Mr. Johnston:** If the hon. member wishes to address that question to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, I am sure my colleague will be prepared to deal with the issue.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

## SPENDING TARGET OF GOVERNMENT

**Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe):** Madam Speaker, yesterday the President of the Treasury Board, when he tabled his estimates, was at pains to say that these estimates did not constitute a spending plan for the government. Surely the time now has come for the government to indicate what its spending plans really are. Will the President of the Treasury Board tell Parliament and the Canadian people what, in fact, is the spending target for this government this year?

**Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board):** Madam Speaker, it seems to me that these questions are a rehash of what has already been covered in the speech by my colleague, the Minister of Finance, and by the questions and answers exchanged yesterday.

**An hon. Member:** Then just answer it.

**Mr. Johnston:** The projection which the Minister of Finance gave the other evening was the figure of \$60.4 billion, subject to reduction on the basis of whatever the blended oil price will be. I really do not understand—

**An hon. Member:** That is pretty clear.

**Mr. Beatty:** When the minister said he did not understand, it was the most candid statement he has made so far during his tenure.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Beatty:** I want to ask the President of the Treasury Board, does he feel bound by the commitment made by his leader, the current Prime Minister, in Toronto on January 12, namely, that increases in spending would be held to less than the increase in growth in the GNP this year? "Yes" or "No"?

**Mr. Johnston:** Madam Speaker—

**An hon. Member:** That is a good start.

**An hon. Member:** "Yes" or "No"?

**Mr. Johnston:** First of all, the object of this government, since its declaration of 1975, has been to keep the annual increase in over-all government spending within the rate of increase in the GNP.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Johnston:** That has always been the objective, and it remains the objective.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Johnston:** I would like to point out, Madam Speaker—

**An hon. Member:** You are as reliable as Herb Gray.

**Mr. Johnston:**—something that I think the House would like to know, namely, that on the basis of the estimates that I tabled yesterday, were our friends making any kind of financial projections of the kind they made last December, their total expenditure would be almost as high, except they would not have that very important plan to provide \$345 million under the GIS to our senior citizens.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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## ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

## ACID RAIN—CANADA-U.S. DISCUSSIONS

**Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena):** Madam Speaker, I should like to direct my question to the Minister of the Environment. First, I should like to congratulate him on his appointment to one of the most important portfolios in Canada.

One hundred and fifty lakes in central Canada are dead today, thousands more are dying and plant life and health are threatened. Before the minister left for Washington, we heard him describe acid rain as "a time bomb that has already gone off", and that we were "on the verge of disaster". I share these concerns, and I am sure we all do.

Given the fact that the minister returned from Washington with his tail between his legs, with no commitment whatsoever from the U.S. Administration, can he now assure the House that he views the U.S. response as totally unacceptable to him, his government and the people of Canada, and that his government will be increasing pressure on the United States to get meaningful action?

● (1425)

**Hon. John Roberts (Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment):** Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his kind comments on my arrival to this ministry. I agree with him that it is one of the most important portfolios, and I am anxious to have his support as well as his good wishes in the months to come.

I would like to make clear to the hon. member and to the House that the purpose of my trip to Washington was, not to return with an agreement but to begin the process of discussion. We received a sympathetic hearing. The American Secretary of State is here today and the same kinds of considerations which I presented in Washington will be renewed in those discussions.

We are anxious to press ahead as quickly as we possibly can, not only with the movement toward an agreement on air standards which go across borders, but also for some interim assertion of political will on the part of both the United States and Canada to use, as strongly as we can, the regulations