

Why did this government choose a cosy, cursory, internal review of the North American free trade agreement that fails these tests? Why is this government determined to ignore its own environmental legislation to ram through the NAFTA?

Hon. Jean J. Charest (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions for a certain time within the government and with opposition members on how to proceed to environmental assessments. In fact, I think the members on the opposite side, including the member next to the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, participated in some very detailed discussions on how we should proceed.

It was made clear from the outset that the policy development within government would be dealt with on a separate track. In fact I think it was in 1990 the government announced a process by which we would do such an environmental assessment.

NAFTA is probably the first major policy initiative to go under such a process with very good and comprehensive results which we have since made public to the hon. member and to other Canadians.

Ms. Lynn Hunter (Saanich—Gulf Islands): We have heard the government's repeated assurances. The government is obviously too afraid to undertake a real environmental assessment of the North American free trade agreement.

The record of the government is clear: broken promises, cuts to the green plan, environmental legislation completely bypassed. Now in the name of competitiveness, in a ruthless levelling of the playing field, there is a review of environmental regulations to ensure they do not hinder trade.

What mandate does this government have to dismantle the few protections we have when Canadians have expressed their desire for more rather than less protection over this dangerous chemical cocktail in our—

Mr. Speaker: I think the hon. member has put her question.

Hon. Jean J. Charest (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, one thing on which I can agree with the hon. member is the fact that the government's record in this regard is very clear. It is one of the best in the world, as described by Mostafa Tolba, who was the director of the UNEP until he was replaced by a Canadian. It is one

of the best records in the world as described by President Clinton only a few weeks ago.

Environmental review of the regulations is happening in about 20 government departments, including Environment Canada. It is something that governments must undertake from time to time. We have done it with a view to upholding and protecting health and environmental standards. I have made that very clear from the outset.

To give the issue some perspective, I can say to the hon. member as I had the opportunity of saying to the executive of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers at a recent meeting that in this area the government expects in the next few years to be regulating more rather than less. However, we want to do it more efficiently and in a way that meets Canada's environmental competitiveness, and its over-all competitiveness.

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[Translation]

MONTREAL'S ECONOMY

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the minister responsible for metropolitan Montreal. Yesterday in the House, the Minister of Employment and Immigration admitted that the changes affecting unemployment insurance would take practically half a billion dollars out of the city's economy. My question is therefore directed to the minister responsible for that area. What action is he considering to deal with a situation that is intolerable in a city where 250,000 people are out of work?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the premise of the hon. member's question is completely erroneous. It is based on the conclusions of an erroneous study which attributes this short fall to the proposed changes Bill C-21 and Bill C-113.

• (1440)

However, the study fails to consider that the people of Montreal will have received more than \$4 billion in unemployment insurance benefits during the period from 1990 to 1994. Montreal will receive additional amounts totalling \$800 million to finance training and re-employment activities throughout that period, and this does not include, for instance, parental benefits for women in Montreal.