

Adjournment Debate

people of New Brunswick, whether francophone or anglophone, to bid for service contracts in Quebec, while New Brunswick gladly opens its doors to Quebecers who want to do business or live in our province. Mr. Speaker, this last example of the gas retailers' strike in Quebec shows how fragile our basic rights and freedoms are and how the governments must agree to take every action required to guarantee that these rights are applied equitably. This is what I expect as a Canadian, on my own behalf and on behalf of my fellow citizens.

● (2225)

[*English*]

Mr. David Dingwall (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, the issue raised by the hon. member for Madawaska-Victoria (Mr. Corbin) is not only important to the government but, as he alluded, it is also important to the people of New Brunswick.

Since the serious matter of the gasoline retailers' strike in Quebec was raised, the strike has been settled and all gasoline service stations are now in operation. However, this strike was a matter of great inconvenience to the public, inasmuch as it extended throughout the period from April 5 to April 8 and affected a very large percentage of retail outlets in the province of Quebec. It was also beginning to impact on gasoline supplies to the public in the neighbouring province of New Brunswick. When the transportation of people and merchandise is impeded, it does not take very long to have a major impact on the economy of a province, and such effects were being felt in Quebec before the strike was terminated.

● (2230)

As the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde) noted in the House on April 5, the best way for the

Quebec government to have settled this matter would have been to reduce the excessively high tax on gasoline levied by the Quebec government. This ad valorem tax was doubled to 40 per cent on November 18, 1981. As a result, Quebec residents now pay 13 cents per litre on regular leaded gasoline compared with 6.3 cents in Ontario. Even Prince Edward Island, which has the second highest provincial gasoline tax, is far below the Quebec level, at 8.3 cents.

It is unfortunate that this issue had to be resolved through a price increase to consumers rather than a reduction in the Quebec government tax. During the past few days retail gasoline prices have risen by as much as 4 cents per litre in Quebec, with prices now well above those of both P.E.I. and Newfoundland, and, of course, higher than any other province.

Finally, I would like to note that the federal government has no direct jurisdiction over the retailing of gasoline. This is a provincial government responsibility. The number of retail outlets is controlled by licensing authority within a province, and a province may set retail prices.

The federal government is continuing to monitor petroleum marketing in all provinces to ensure the free movement of individuals and goods across the country, but, in the type of marketing situation that developed in Quebec earlier this month, this is a direct responsibility at the provincial level.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): A motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at two o'clock.

At 10.33 p.m. the House adjourned, without question put, pursuant to Standing Order.