

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Blais (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, my officials are having discussions with the provinces and we are presently considering the various options we could put forward to meet this expressed need.

I applaud to and take interest in the announcement the Ontario government made yesterday. It is of course only one of the measures announced as part of the Throne Speech, but we will have the chance, in the next few weeks, to discuss with the Ontario government how he intends to do this. I can assure you that my department should have something for Canadians in the near future to deal with this situation.

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[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Ethel Blondin (Western Arctic): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of the Environment, or should I say this Monty Hall of the environment, who insists on playing *Let's Make a Deal* with the environment?

With James Bay II, the federal government has chosen to pit the right of the U.S. to import cheap power over the aboriginal and treaty rights of the Cree and Inuit of James Bay. In light of what has happened with Rafferty-Alameda and Oldman River, I would like to ask the minister about the government's legal obligation under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement.

Will he commit to recognizing the government's legal responsibility with regard to the effect the project will have on aboriginal and treaty rights under the 1975 James Bay Agreement and ensure that the Cree and Inuit will trust him on his word?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, in terms of the environmental assessment of James Bay, the government can work under the James Bay convention in northern Quebec and establish a joint panel to make sure that a proper and full environmental assessment is made of all the aspects of the project.

What we mentioned in Mr. Robinson's letter, which was published earlier this week, followed advice given by the Department of Justice back in April, saying that under the terms and conditions of the convention *per se*

the federal government could not participate under Chapters 22 and 23. However, the letter stated very clearly that the full federal process can be applied. At the moment, we are trying to finalize negotiations whereby, rather than having a provincial evaluation on one side and a federal evaluation on the other side, we could have a joint panel that would also include the native people of the region, the Inuit and the Cree. We very much would like to see that happen.

Ms. Ethel Blondin (Western Arctic): Mr. Speaker, James Bay II, as everyone knows, is a massive hydro-electric project which will cause irreversible environmental and social damage. It may be constructed without a full public forum because of the sheer negligence of this minister.

If the minister has the confidence to state that there is the possibility of having one, will he state here and now that in fact there will be a full environmental assessment review and engender some kind of trust with the aboriginal people of that area, the Cree and Inuit? Here and now, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. I have said that time and time again. There will be an environmental—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Andre: They can't take yes for an answer.

Mr. de Cotret: There will be an environmental assessment of the project, the roads, and the airport. It will be a public process.

It is a process that we would prefer to carry out jointly with the other interested parties. That is still under negotiation. But I can assure the hon. member that we have the power to have that kind of assessment and we will have an open and public review of the project and the infrastructure.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. Bankruptcies in Canada have increased by 60 per cent this October over last October. Unemployment in Canada has increased for the fourth consecutive month in a row. The Conference Board of Canada