

Oral Questions

My question for the minister is this. Will the minister now come clean with the House of Commons and tell us exactly what has transpired in this particular incident? Were there safety reports? If there were, where are they?

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Madam Speaker, the hon. member knows, and he has been told this the last three days, and he knows it without being told, that the whole regime for regulating provincial compliance with safety regulations is put in place by the province. The judicial inquiry will inquire into all those questions.

• (1120)

The federal government's role was a very limited one. We simply guaranteed a loan. We assured ourselves that we received certificates of compliance from the bank, which received them from the independent mining consultants on a monthly basis, that the mine was complying with provincial statutes. That is something we asked for and we got them on a regular basis, to show that they were in compliance with provincial statutes. These were certificates which we received on a regular basis.

Mr. David Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond): Madam Speaker, on Wednesday and Thursday of this week this minister said in this House repeatedly, almost 11 or 12 times, that he had independent reports in regard to safety which the government was getting through the auspices of the Bank of Nova Scotia. We now have a senior official who has said; "We did not independently check any safety conditions".

Why does this minister not come clean and produce those documents so that all members of Parliament, and the general public, will have all of the knowledge in regard to the safety conditions at the Westray coal mine?

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): We have made it clear that we are assembling all the documentation and will be bringing it before the House and before the public. The documentation is voluminous. It is into the thousands of pages but

we are making good progress with that and we will be bringing forward all this documentation very shortly.

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Cape Breton—The Sydneys): Madam Speaker, the minister stood in his place and no fewer than seven times yesterday and seven times the day before said that the government received "independent mining consultant reports about safety at Westray". We are now being told that they did not receive these independent mining reports.

He also said and I quote: "We informed ourselves on a regular basis that this contract was in compliance". He is now saying that this was not done.

He said that the \$85 million loan guarantee was given on the basis that safety would be maintained. We now see that the government did not care one bit about the safety of the Westray mine.

Why did the government say it received the independent consultants' reports when it did not? Even more reprehensible, why did the government try to give the impression that it did receive them when it did not?

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Well, Madam Speaker, even more reprehensible is the hon. member's allegation that the federal government did not receive certificates of compliance from independent mining consultants month by month. We did receive such documents and those are going to be laid before the House together with all the documentation on this issue.

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Cape Breton—The Sydneys): Madam Speaker, what the minister said was "independent consultants' reports", over and over again. This is what the minister said yesterday, and I quote him once again: "The Prime Minister made it clear that this particular mine is regulated as to its safety and health regimes." But when the Prime Minister was asked in Washington whether anyone raised safety issues with him, he said: "Of course not, of course not."

I want to ask the minister which is the correct version, or did the minister make a mistake about that, too?