

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I should at the beginning express my appreciation to the party on the other side for all the help they have given me.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: My question is addressed to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources who yesterday tried to evade his government's responsibility for a national inquiry into nuclear power. I should like to draw the minister's attention to one of the statutes of this parliament which governs his own activities, the Atomic Energy Control Act, which states quite clearly that "it is in the national interest to make provision for the control and supervision of the development application and use of atomic energy". In light of that clear mandate in a statute of this parliament, will the minister now tell this House whether the government of Canada intends to slough off this critical national responsibility to the province of Ontario, or whether the government will honour its responsibilities to the thousands of Canadians who are vitally concerned about this power source and at the same time honour its commitment to its own party in national assembly?

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could take this opportunity of congratulating the hon. member on his first anniversary.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gillespie: We look forward to future years when he will be on that side and we will be on this side of the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Paproski: Don't you believe it.

Mr. Hees: You are all mixed up, Alastair.

Mr. Gillespie: I am not sure, Mr. Speaker, whether the opposition are serious about the question or whether they are so overcome with goodwill on this occasion that they do not want an answer.

Let me make it quite clear that I consider the question of nuclear energy, the benefits and the risks, an exceedingly important one. That is why I was particularly pleased when the Porter royal commission interpreted its terms of reference in a very much wider way than they were first given to the commission, so wide in fact that they engaged in a public dialogue and debate respecting the benefits and risks of nuclear energy; and that is now in motion. I think it is also important that hon. members understand that Ontario, far more than any other province in this country, is committed to generating, and indeed is generating, its electricity from nuclear power today. Probably one-fifth of the lights in this room derive their electricity from nuclear generated power.

The question that is surely before us is: What is the best way to go about examining the potential, the benefits and the risks,

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and to deal with the apprehensions of the Canadian people or those who may have them? I believe that one of the most important ways is to support the report of the royal commission of the Ontario government. I also believe there are a number of other things that we can do. I believe that the Atomic Energy Control Board needs to be beefed up. I believe that its terms of reference—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I was hoping that in that long list the minister might finally come to a public inquiry, either held by a standing committee of this parliament or by some other agency, which would ensure that the national responsibility which is set out in law would be honoured and exercised by a national agency, instead of ducking behind the work of a province. May I ask the minister quite specifically and simply: will he establish a national public inquiry into this question; or, alternatively, will he make a reference to a standing or special committee of this House to look into the question?

Mr. Gillespie: Mr. Speaker, I was very clear in my answers yesterday: if the hon. gentleman can show how such an inquiry would not duplicate an already good inquiry being undertaken by the province of Ontario, I would be prepared to consider that.

● (1420)

Mr. Clark: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. We now have a willingness to consider. We will provide the demonstration and we will then ask the minister not simply to consider it but act on it. The point I want to make now—

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: —I have read the minister's answer and have listened to his answer as to whether or not—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: Take it easy!

ACCEPTANCE OF PROVINCIAL STUDIES AS BASIS FOR FEDERAL ACTION

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources is embarking upon a very serious precedent as to whether he is prepared to accept the work of a royal commission established in a province as being an adequate substitute for the national government or national institutions carrying out a responsibility that is set out in law as applying to the national government. I should like to ask the minister whether it is going to be the continuing practice of this government in the energy field or otherwise to accept work carried out under provincial jurisdiction as a substitute and an excuse for not acting within its own responsibility.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!