

takes us the other way. It weakens what we already have in place. The government has not served the public well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for The Battlefords—Meadow Lake—Agriculture; the hon. member for Vancouver East—Human Rights; and the hon. member for Cape Breton Highlands—Canso—Fisheries.

Mrs. Christine Stewart (Northumberland): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand this afternoon to speak to Bill C-78, the government's proposed environmental assessment act.

I have to say at the outset that regrettably I am not an expert in the area of environment, but I do have a strong concern about the proposed legislation. I have in front of me some statements made by people who are experts in this country who along with me have expressed serious concerns about Bill C-78.

To quote from some of their statements, they are saying such things as: "Mr. Mulroney's government's latest environmental legislation is fundamentally flawed. Canada will return to the dark ages of environmental law if Bill C-78 passes in its present form. Bill C-78 proposes to replace current federal environmental assessment laws. The federal law presently requires that environmental impact studies be conducted for proposals likely to injure the environment significantly. Environmentalists assert that the presently proposed bill will give the government complete discretion over whether to hold environmental impact studies". Rod MacDonald of the Saskatchewan Action Foundation for the Environment is quoted as saying: "This bill completely fails to meet the objectives of environmental assessment."

• (1530)

The environmental assessment caucus of the Canadian Environmental Network met in Hull on September 28, 29 and 30 solely for the purpose of discussing the bill before us today. Thirty-five representatives from groups across the country were in attendance. Delegates unani-

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mously called Bill C-78 a step backwards, directly contradicting the federal Minister of the Environment.

When we complete debate at second reading of this bill, a vote will be held. We will be voting in principle whether to support or not support this bill. If the main principle of this bill is purported to provide good environmental assessment to all projects in this country that are federal, and projects out of this country that are funded by the federal government or funded by other agencies with federal government input or projects that cross a federal boundary, that would be one thing. It is my belief that there is a principle hidden within this bill which is more significant and that is, that this government has full discretion when to call an environmental assessment review and when not to. That is of serious concern to me because I believe it is a step backward from where we are right now with FEARO.

I have particular concerns with regard to this bill. One of them starts with the preamble to the bill itself, which does not even express the words "sustainable development" nor support the principle of sustainable development. Instead, it talks about ensuring that economic development is compatible with the high value Canadians place on environmental quality.

There are all kinds of Canadians and some support environment in one way and some in other ways. I think what we are all trying to say is that whatever Canadian projects we are involved in, they must encourage and support sustainable development. It is a serious flaw of this bill that it does not speak in its preamble about the importance of sustainable development.

To change that we could propose an amendment. There are other amendments that could be proposed to this legislation that would improve it. I have to say again that I am more particularly concerned about what seems to be an underlying fact of this bill, that no matter how we amend it, whether or not an assessment is done is entirely up to the discretion of a minister, not even the Minister of the Environment.

The purpose of this act is to ensure that the environmental effects of projects receive careful consideration. I believe that the purpose of the act should be more ensuring than stating that projects receive careful con-