In light of the arguments put forward and the decisions of my predecessors, I must conclude that the matter before us is a dispute as to facts and does not constitute the basis of a question of privilege.

I thank hon. members for their contributions.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), the government's response to 11 petitions.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise the House that the government is taking three important initiatives to fulfil our red book promises on environmental assessment.

[*Translation*]

First, the government will proclaim the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. This means that the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency will be up and running in January.

[*English*]

Second, the government will publish in the next issue of the *Canada Gazette* a complete list of new, greener environmental regulations required to implement the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. These regulations follow one year of intensive consultation with the provinces, territories, business and environmentalists.

In parenthesis I might add that the legislation follows seven years of intensive consultation. I want to personally thank not only my parliamentary secretary who has done yeoman's service in moving a very complicated file forward but also and most particularly the team headed by Michel Dorais which worked very hard and very long for many years on this issue.

Third, I wish to advise the House that the government is proposing three amendments to the environmental assessment act. The first amendment will entrench in federal law the principle of one project–one assessment. The second amendment will guarantee the public the funding necessary to take part in major environmental assessments. The third amendment will require a decision by cabinet in response to any recommendations of independent review panels.

[*Translation*]

With the new agency, the new regulations and the new amendments, the government is moving to implement our election promises on environmental assessment.

The federal government intends to proclaim the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act which was conceived and developed by the Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition in the fall of 1989. When the bill was in preparation, my hon. colleague said and I quote: "This law will surely be the best law of its kind in the world".

I would like to take the opportunity on this memorable occasion to congratulate the hon. member for Lac Saint–Jean for his role in the development of this Canadian law. I also want to commend the hon. member for his support, even during the recent election, when he said on *Le Point*, and I quote: "There is also the federal government's jurisdiction which must be respected".

I await the support of the hon. member for Lac Saint–Jean, to whom the environment is more important than petty jurisdictional quarrels between different levels of government.

• (1015)

[*English*]

Members on all sides of the House understand that environmental issues go beyond partisan political bickering. Members on all sides of the House know that whatever is thrown into Hamilton harbour eventually finds its way to Sept–Iles, dans le fleuve Saint–Laurent.

[*Translation*]

Neither the fish in the St. Lawrence nor the migratory birds on the Prairies carry passports.

As every Canadian knows, the process of environmental assessment in Canada has, in the last decade, become mired in controversy.

[*English*]

Business is unhappy because the current process has become unbelievably complicated and unpredictable. Environmental groups are unhappy because the process is haphazard, arbitrary and incomplete. The public is unhappy with the current process because it drags on forever and the public interest is sometimes lost in squabbling among jurisdictions and various interest groups.

[*Translation*]

Today's announcement will change that. We are strengthening environmental assessment, and we are also making assessment of projects fairer, less complicated, less costly and more transparent. The new system will ensure that the environmental effects of projects are considered before these projects are approved, will encourage sustainable development and will require that transboundary issues be considered.