

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I realize why the Opposition is using scare tactics, but it is totally untrue to claim that Canadians will have to sell their energy to the United States. Canadians will sell their energy if they think they can make a profit. There is nothing in the Agreement to contradict this. I know the Liberal Party wanted to prevent people in Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia from taking advantage of their own natural resources, and that was the case under the Liberal Party's energy program at the time. It cost Western Canadians and Canadians in general a lot of money, and we do not want to get back to that kind of policy, Mr. Speaker.

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REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

INQUIRY WHETHER MATANE REGION PAPER MILL PROJECT HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY CANADA-UNITED STATES FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion. The House is aware that a delegation from Matane was here this morning to pressure the federal Government into deciding in favour of a proposed paper mill in the Matane area, and as you know, Mr. Speaker, the Government has been dragging its feet. My question is as follows: Has this project been compromised under the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and United States?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Not at all, Mr. Speaker.

INQUIRY WHETHER FEDERAL PROGRAMS AFFECTED BY CANADA-UNITED STATES FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): I have a supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister say categorically that our present regional development policy such as tax credits and subsidies, not just for those projects but for other regional development programs as well, have not been compromised by the Agreement signed by this country and United States? Could you say so in no uncertain terms, right now, for every project?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, I can say categorically that federal programs aimed at resolving regional disparity have not in any way been compromised by the Agreement signed by our two Governments.

MATANE PAPER MILL PROJECT—INQUIRY WHETHER GOVERNMENT WILL CARRY OUT PROMISE

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, I also have a question for the Minister for Regional Industrial Expansion. Isn't this project jeopardized by the indecisiveness of the Minister if not by the Free Trade Agreement? For months, and particularly in the last weeks, people in Murdochville, for instance, had to block roads to get answers from Ottawa. People in Sept-Iles are going to take their protest onto the streets, on the 31st of this month, in an attempt to get answers from Ottawa. People from Matane are here to try to get this Government moving.

I ask the Minister the following question. He promised to give us an answer within a month and his deadline will expire in a few hours. Could the Minister ensure us today that we will be given an answer within this deadline?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister for Regional Industrial Expansion and Minister of State Responsible for Science and Technology): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

INQUIRY IF MINISTER POSSESSES ALL NECESSARY FACTS TO MAKE POSITIVE DECISION

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, I want the Minister to give us an answer and not a mere commitment to answer "within the next few days", as for the Picard report about which he has not answered as yet.

I ask the Minister if he now has on hand all the elements required, as well as the assurances from the Minister of Finance, in order to make a positive decision?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister for Regional Industrial Expansion and Minister of State Responsible for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, I shall say to my hon. colleague that when I personally met, for the first time, with the representatives from Matane, about one month ago, I told them that the final data from the sponsor of the project had just been received ten days earlier and that it would take about six more weeks to reach a final decision. I then said that I would give an answer around the 14th, which is tomorrow.

Generally, Mr. Speaker, it takes quite a long time to study matters of such importance. All the studies have been completed, all the recommendations have been received and I am confident that, in the next few hours, we shall be able to give a definite answer to the people of Matane which I want to congratulate for the representations they made today. In fact, they presented in a very dignified and sound way their views on that project. I congratulate them and I can say to my honourable colleague that they will get an answer within the next few hours.