

Senator Flynn: You can never be direct in your answers, can you?

Hon. Lowell Murray: The kind of information being sought by honourable senators in this matter must surely be within the knowledge of a minister of the Crown, if these transactions are subject to the approval of the government as such.

My supplementary question to the minister is to ask him whether at some point he will enlighten us as to what the process is with regard to transactions of this kind undertaken by a crown corporation with the backing of the government.

It appears that this is a major transaction involving guarantees, perhaps even some use of the government's taxing power, and we would like to know whether such deals are made by the crown corporation simply with a wink and a nod from the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, or whether there is some process involving the cabinet.

Senator Olson: I am not sure just how naive Senator Murray is in these matters—

Some Hon. Senators: Oh, oh.

Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Government): It is not one of his mega-weaknesses.

Senator Olson:—but it does not appear to me—

Senator Flynn: Be sensible!

Senator Olson: Perhaps Senator Flynn would let me reply to the question.

Senator Flynn: I thought you were not ready to do that.

Senator Olson: It seems to me that Senator Murray is asking for a detailed play-by-play description of what goes on in cabinet. I know that he is not that naive. He knows the kind of discussions, consultations and exchanges of information and opinion that take place in this kind of process. Senator Murray may also recall that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources was, indeed, involved in the public announcement either at the same time or very nearly at the same time as Petro-Canada made its announcement that it intended to acquire this portion of BP.

An Hon. Senator: Had acquired it.

Senator Murray: On whose behalf was he speaking?

Senator Olson: Well, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources speaks as the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. Surely I do not have to go through a detailed description of what his responsibilities are.

Senator Murray: What is your responsibility? That is what I want to know. And what is the responsibility of your colleagues in the cabinet on this matter?

Senator Olson: In any event, this is one of those situations in which certain information, although it is not exactly hearsay, does fall into the category of what some senators believe they heard or read in the paper about the way numbers were added to come to \$347 million or \$400 million or \$600 million, and

so on. I have already given an undertaking that I would get a compilation of all those figures.

Senator Flynn: Not next year.

Senator Olson: When I have a compilation of all those figures I will bring it to honourable senators, and I am sure that will completely satisfy their curiosity. However, in the event that their curiosity is not satisfied then, after we have had that clear, comprehensive compilation of the numbers, perhaps they will wish to ask further questions.

Senator Murray: There is one question I would like to ask right now, and I will try to put it in words the minister will understand.

Hon. Richard A. Donahoe: There is no use. Don't bother.

Senator Murray: I think members of the Senate and the Canadian public have a right to know what the relationship is between this crown corporation on the one hand and the Governor General in Council, the federal cabinet, on the other. I would be grateful if the minister were to bring to the Senate in writing a statement of that kind at his earliest convenience.

Senator Olson: I can do that, and I will be glad to, but what it really amounts to is my doing Senator Murray's homework for him.

Some Hon. Senators: Oh, oh.

Senator Olson: I say that because, if he wishes to look at the statute, and the authorization that was given to the government in the first place for setting up Petro-Canada, he will find there precisely, and in legal terms, the answer to the question he has just asked.

● (1410)

Senator Balfour: As a further supplementary, I wonder if the Leader of the Government in the Senate would agree, in responding to my inquiry, to reduce his response to simple terms, namely, the total consideration being paid by Petro-Canada to British Petroleum for the assets and undertaking being acquired by Petro-Canada.

Senator Olson: I understood that to be the basic substance of the question in the first place.

Senator Balfour: No smoke and mirrors.

Senator Olson: I thought that for accuracy my honourable friend should have the totality of the factors that went into the compilation.

Hon. G. I. Smith: Honourable senators, I should like to ask the Leader of the Government in the Senate a question supplementary to the question raised by Senator Murray.

I just want to know a simple fact. Did the Government of Canada approve the purchase of BP by Petro-Canada, or did it not?

Senator Olson: I will go back and obtain the statement, comment or answer—and I am not sure which category it falls into—of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources at the time.