

The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton complained about the fact that hon. members have the right to move an amendment, and the Chair should not in its decision preclude any members from doing so. I referred to that point in my previous comments. The Chair has one main function, that is, to apply the rules and regulations of this House and make judgments, not on the judgments of hon. members on subject matters, but in the application of these rules.

The hon. member denied the fact that his motion was an expanded negative or was not relevant. I feel that this is a question of opinion, especially in the perspective in which he is putting his argument. He referred to his amendment as a relevant modification. This I have to admit is quite the fact, that the amendment is directly related to the report and to the construction of a pipeline in the north of Canada, but that is quite far from denying the fact that the amendment is not a new proposition.

Finally, however, the amendment proposes that the House pronounce itself on the proposition that no commitment in principle be made for or against the building of a northern pipeline without parliamentary approval. In my view this is clearly a new proposition. The main motion asks the House to make a decision on a recommendation which could delay for ten years the construction of a pipeline. The official opposition proposes to refer the subject matter and all related subjects to a committee. Finally, it adds a limitation to the decision of the House, a limitation which makes it subject to a future parliamentary approval. In my view this is clearly a new proposition and beyond the scope of the original motion. It is the kind of proposition which the House might want to debate some time; however, according to our rules it cannot be debated as an amendment, but only as a motion. As I say, it introduces a new proposition—I refer particularly to the words “and urges that no commitment in principle be made to build a northern pipeline without parliamentary approval.” Because of all these considerations, it is impossible for me to accept the amendment.

● (1520)

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not wish to take the time of the House—

Mr. Peters: Then sit down.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): I listened carefully to the points Your Honour has made, and I am rising merely to seek clarification. Your Honour may have been greatly moved in your consideration of this matter by the words “and urges that no commitment in principle be made to build a northern pipeline without parliamentary approval” on the ground that they imposed a new principle. If that is the case, and bearing in mind it has been the consistent hope of the official opposition that the House will be able to pronounce itself on the establishment of a parliamentary committee, I wonder whether the Chair would reconsider its judgment if I were to indicate that the removal of the phrase to which I have referred would certainly be acceptable to us.

Mackenzie Valley Pipeline

Some hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): I say this because it has been a consistent hope of the official opposition that the whole question of the pipeline together with all these reports ought to be considered by a parliamentary committee.

An hon. Member: The Chair has ruled on it.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Despite the chit-chat from the noisy rump down there, I advance this suggestion, not in any way to question the judgment of the Chair, but to seek clarification.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I might, of course, have referred during my judgment to some of the precedents mentioned by the hon. member. I have them in front of me and the majority of them refer to cases in which the purpose of the amendments proposed was to narrow the subject matter of the motion. In this case we are clearly widening the scope of the subject matter. My reference to the words mentioned by the hon. member does not mean that the consideration of relevancy is less important. The hon. member will agree with me that the reaction of hon. members while he was seeking to convince the Chair and the House that there might be some kind of agreement possible to remove the latter part of the amendment was not entirely favourable. As he knows, this could only be withdrawn by unanimous consent; the hon. member does not have the floor, and it is my judgment that such consent would not be forthcoming. The only alternative left to the hon. member would be to put forward a further amendment while another speaker has the floor. At the same time, there would still be grounds for refusing the amendment and I suggest that the course the hon. member has in mind would not alter the decision of the Chair.

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I open my remarks by saying that I listened carefully, as always, to the hon. member for Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth). He is a man who speaks from experience, and obviously he is a very articulate spokesman within his own caucus. He is probably responsible for the decision of his party, even earlier than today, to take exception to the building of a pipeline through the Mackenzie Valley. Perhaps this is related to his election promise. I do not know.

I was encouraged by his statement that he was very anxious to obtain a better understanding of the country's energy needs. He was clearly keeping the matter within a national context when he made that comment. It seemed to me he was making the case which the government has made in this debate—that until the report of the National Energy Board has been submitted, and until parliament has had an opportunity to discuss the matter, we cannot be sure what those energy needs are.

At the same time I was discouraged by what I can only describe as the “shoot from the hip” attitude of some members of the official opposition. I regret that this particular tactic, one which they have followed with great success in recent