

Government Orders

Mr. Jean-Marc Robitaille (Terrebonne): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Témiscamingue for his very good question. I know the hon. member for Témiscamingue is having, or has been having environmental problems in his constituency caused by development projects which were planned with no consideration whatsoever for environmental concerns. I would like to add, Mr. Speaker, with all partisanship aside, that the constituency of Saint-Maurice is having a similar problem, where *Consolidated Bathurst*, of which Mr. Chrétien was a member of the board, has polluted the Saint-Maurice River. And it is precisely because of our lack of concern in the past that we are having these problems today.

The hon. member asked me why Bill C-78 is so important compared to what we had before? What we had before, as everybody knows, were guidelines approved by Order in Council in 1984 when the Liberal government was still in office. Bill C-78 in a great improvement over that Order in Council, Mr. Speaker. Progress has been made in many very important fields.

First of all, this bill is written in statute form, and will be interpreted as such by the courts. It will not be vulnerable and open to challenge in courts of law.

Mr. Speaker, one of the important aspects of the bill is the fact that, in the past, when a public review was seemed necessary, the decision making process would rest entirely with the minister, while in the present bill the decision making power rests with the Minister of the Environment, which is going to be now a bit like having the fox mind the geese.

As for the old order in council concerning regulatory bodies and the Crown corporations, just as an example, it was very vague and optional. It means that they could proceed with an environmental assessment, but the decision was up to them. Now, in bill C-78, it is set out in specific rules, Mr. Speaker.

Moreover, in the past the order in council only provided for review boards. Now you can have arbitration as an alternative to review boards, and this again, Mr. Speaker, is an improvement. Then, the public can have access to every step of the process.

• (1710)

We are therefore talking about a bill and a process which are characterized by openness, a process which the public can have access to. It is becoming increasingly

difficult, for whatever reason, to hide anything from anyone. In addition, Mr. Speaker, we will financially support organizations willing to take part in the assessment process. We are talking about openness, public participation to the review process and that, to me, appears to be one of the most interesting aspects of Bill C-78.

I could go on and on, Mr. Speaker, and give you 15, 20 or 30 examples of how the bill improves the guidelines of the old order vicouncil but I see that you are letting me know that my time is up and I know you wish to give everyone the possibility to ask questions, so I will end my remarks right now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The hon. member for Skeena on a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Fulton: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not think the hon. member would want left on the record a suggestion that there is intervener funding included in Bill C-78, as he just suggested. There is no clause in the bill allowing for intervener funding.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Marc Robitaille (Terrebonne): I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The hon. member for Terrebonne on a point of order.

Mr. Robitaille: Mr. Speaker, I am not saying that there is some indication in the bill about our financing it, but the government has clearly stated its intention to grant financial support to those environmental groups and public stakeholders wishing to participate in the environmental assessment process.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): End of questions and comments. Resuming debate. The hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

[*English*]

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, I was quite intrigued in following the debate and the questions and answers. My colleague, the hon. member for Terrebonne, certainly painted a picture that would excite most people who are concerned about the environment. I daresay all of us are.

When reading a Canadian Press report dated October 19, I noted that a coalition of the 28 groups of environmentalists wanted to pass its judgment and its