

*The Address*

The government is aware that by targeting assistance to small and medium sized businesses that are active in the environmental sector today, we will create the jobs of tomorrow.

The government will also review the tax system and federal subsidies to identify barriers to sound environmental practice. We want to ensure that at the national level, government expenditures and taxes are used to promote social equity, protect the environment, conserve resources and develop new green industries in order to create future prosperity.

The government will promote energy efficiency which can quickly generate economic and environmental dividends. We must extract maximum value from the energy we consume. It makes sense, both economically and environmentally, to use our precious resources wisely.

We will also adopt an industrial policy to promote the value of our natural resources and the processing of these resources into finished goods that can be sold on international markets. Increasing jobs and prosperity without depleting our natural wealth and resources is a vital part of the Liberal national employment policy.

More and more environmental problems have a global dimension, and that is why we must work together. These problems cannot be solved without international co-operation, and that is why we will make sustainable development a key element of Canada's foreign policy.

The Prime Minister has already shown the way. He was the first political figure to ask for the inclusion of environmental guarantees in NAFTA. He realized that this was a unique opportunity to promote both economic prosperity and a healthy environment. His approach showed great vision.

[English]

Under the NAFTA the North American Commission for Environmental Co-operation will be located in Canada. To that end we are engaged in an open and transparent process to select the host city for the commission. We have commissioned an independent consultant to provide selection advice based upon objective criteria.

For the first time ever in the history of the Canadian government the environmental record of the applicant cities will be taken into consideration in choosing the site of this important international institution.

[Translation]

Significantly for the first time in Canada's history, an environmental record is requested of each city that wishes to act as host to this international institution. At the Seattle summit, the Prime Minister invited all Pacific Rim countries to contribute to sustainable development.

• (1150)

It is in response to this invitation that foreign and Canadian environment ministers will meet in Vancouver next March with my colleague, the secretary of state responsible for Pacific affairs, to consider solutions to common concerns. The Prime Minister thinks that our trade partners must also become our environmental partners.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, permit me to congratulate the Prime Minister on his choice of the new ambassador for the environment, your predecessor, Mr. John Fraser, who had a reputation for cleaning up this House. It should serve as a model for how we can clean up the country. We will move in the spirit of John Fraser very quickly to proclaim the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. However, I want to assure you that we will do more than that. We intend to establish a concurrent process for amendments to strengthen that act as it is being introduced. Our goal is an assessment process that is comprehensive and effective.

Environmental assessment is not a stumbling block to be circumvented. It is a powerful tool to promote sound decision making to prevent environmental damage and to avoid costly mistakes.

At the request of the Prime Minister, I am also working personally to analyse the requests in the red book for an environmental auditor general and for an independent environmental assessment agency. If we as Parliament and government are going to encourage others to clean up their act we have to start by putting our own House in order.

At the Prime Minister's instruction, I am examining the most effective means of ensuring that our own practices are held to rigorous environmental scrutiny. We intend to work very co-operatively with provincial ministers.

[Translation]

I already had a very fruitful discussion with my counterpart from Quebec on several issues, including proposed harmonization measures.

[English]

We have already signed an administrative agreement with the province of Alberta to make sure when we get into the business of environmental regulation that we do it in a way that protects the environment and at the same time ensures that we use taxpayers' dollars wisely. That is the spirit in which we will, as Parliament, be reviewing the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. I know the parliamentary committee will be working very hard to hear the concerns of all Canadians and I welcome input from all sides of the House.