

*Nuclear Power*

● (1630)

While Atomic Energy of Canada has prime responsibility for the program, several departments and agencies of the governments of Canada and of Ontario also participate, along with industry and the university community. The over-all objective of the Canadian program is to ensure that there will be no significant effect upon man and upon the environment at any time. The deep underground disposal method has been approved by many world scientists and engineers as the most suitable way to achieve our objective.

Therefore, work in Canada is concentrated on disposal in the stable, hard rock formations of the Canadian shield. The formations being investigated, known as plutons, are scattered across the Ontario portion of the shield. Studies of the geological characteristics and of the behaviour of immobilized wastes will contribute to a generic safety and environmental assessment of the disposal concept to be presented to regulatory authorities.

Only after this process has been completed will technically suitable sites be selected for disposal. The site selection phase will take account of economic factors, community impact, health and safety considerations, and environmental effects on each potential technically suitable site. The factors will be discussed with any communities near the sites and elected representatives of these communities.

There is no question that public knowledge, understanding and acceptance, are important to the success of this program. A full public information effort is now in effect over virtually all the Canadian shield region of Ontario and at the Whiteshell Nuclear Research Establishment in Manitoba, where an underground research laboratory is being built as part of the concept assessment stage. Exhibits, films, briefings for the media and for elected representatives of communities near which work is being done and mailings to householders, have all been planned or conducted to provide the general public with information.

Over the past year, scientists involved in the waste management program have made many in-depth presentations to municipal councils, associations and other groups. Accordingly, every effort is being made to reach out to the larger public, in an attempt to inform a wider range of people about the work which is being done in Canada, to answer the question of nuclear spent fuel disposal. The research can be pursued to the point where the basic concept is adequately assessed and justified and a long-range solution to the problem of nuclear waste disposal can be demonstrated as safe and permanent.

I think I have demonstrated, with respect to any concerns the hon. member may have regarding uranium mining, reactor safety and spent fuel disposal, that the federal government is moving vigorously to eliminate any potential risks. There will be no moratorium on our desire to maximize the benefits the CANDU reactor brings to our trading efforts, our industrial strategy, and our ability to provide Canadians with an assured and inexpensive energy source. There will be no moratorium on our desire, held with equal commitment, to protect Canadians from any health hazards.

The hon. member opposite proposed a three-year moratorium in the nuclear industry. He should realize that such a moratorium would kill the industry well before his public inquiry ever reported. Presumably he is advocating the closure of the uranium industry across Canada, including Saskatchewan, as well as the manufacturing industry which is currently at an important juncture in its development. If the industry were unable to survive a moratorium, the uranium industry and the Candu option would be lost just when we may need it most. Would the hon. member prefer the importation of inferior and less safe United States reactors? Would he prefer that we attempt to reassemble the industry when required to do so, at considerable expense and difficulty? If he is concerned about employment, innovative high technology industry and exports, I ask the hon. member to reconsider the wisdom of placing the Candu option in abeyance while our competitors are free to pursue sales worldwide.

A public inquiry may be an effective instrument of public information and may contribute to policy formation and decision making. However, public inquiries may also serve as delaying tactics for governments to avoid their responsibilities. There have been a large number of public inquiries into nuclear power in Canada in recent years. Their proceedings and reports have contributed to the information and analyses available to the public.

I should like to cite one or two examples. The Ontario Royal Commission on Electric Power Planning and the Porter commission actively considered many aspects of the nuclear industry. In Saskatchewan, the Bayda commission on Uranium Mining reported on the beneficial impact and assessed the opportunities for that industry in Saskatchewan. The Federal Environmental Assessment and Review Process reported on four different locations for a new uranium refinery. The Ontario Provincial Environmental Assessment Board reported on expansion of uranium mining at Elliot Lake. The Ontario Select Committee on Hydro Affairs investigated a number of aspects of the nuclear industry. In British Columbia, the Bates commission conducted an investigation of the implications of uranium mining in British Columbia. Its mandate was terminated some time ago by the British Columbia government.

At the federal level, a number of parliamentary committees have looked into different aspects of nuclear power and, no doubt, will continue to do so. Parliament devotes considerable time to nuclear issues.

The government takes the position that further formal public discussion of nuclear power issues is unlikely to improve the quality of decisions on this issue and that Parliament, with its committees, is a sufficient forum in which to discuss these issues at the federal level. The government will provide any additional fora in which to do so.

The government has been conducting a review of the nuclear industry in Canada, as the hon. member mentioned. A number of background papers on all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle have been prepared and will soon be made available to the public on completion of their translations. We hope these will