

Oral Questions

The hon. member should be cheering the environment, not saying that we are not doing what we should be doing as a country.

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment. Rafferty-Alameda is the acid test.

I have in my hands a draft agreement between the Minister of the Environment and the Saskatchewan Water Corporation which says that the minister will agree that the Rafferty dam can proceed to completion and that the Alameda dam can start construction.

Is this the deal on which the minister shook hands in his office on September 5 with Grant Devine? Is this the agreement that was faxed to his office on September 10? Is this the agreement that sold the environment down the river?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no.

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the same minister. The *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* quotes George Hill, president of the Souris Basin Development Authority and past president of the Tory party in Saskatchewan as saying:

I'm prepared to put it in affidavit form, I'm prepared to appear in court and swear on as many bibles as anyone wants to produce that that was the agreement and Mr. de Cotret asked the Premier to shake hands on the agreement.

My question is this. Who is telling the truth? Who is prepared to table the documents that will prove who is telling the truth?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me to be a little unbelievable that Mr. Hill made that comment because he was not involved in the discussion I had. He was not involved. He was not there.

We did discuss a number of issues—

Mr. Boudria: Tories never cease to amaze me.

Mr. Nunziata: Robert, you've lost it, you've lost it.

An hon. member: You would think we were in the Senate.

Mr. Crawford: You'll wish you were.

Mr. Speaker: I remind hon. members that if we lose time waiting for order, they lose time.

Mr. de Cotret: I would just like to tell my hon. colleagues that I went to Saskatchewan on July 25 to meet with stakeholders, to meet with the proponent of the project, to meet with citizens, and to meet with the government. We have had ongoing meetings and ongoing conversations since that time.

There was no secret deal made. We always tried to reach agreement. Those conversations were ongoing until the panel resigned. And that, Mr. Speaker, is the truth of the matter. We have had a number of conversations on a number of occasions, either in person or over the phone. Unfortunately, the panel did resign. We are taking the measures that are required to ensure that we abide by a court order and ensure that the environmental assessment process is conducted properly.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment and concerns the Rafferty-Alameda dam. This is a test for the minister. Now is the time for the minister to show Canadians that he is really serious and that his government is really serious about the environment. We are discussing a situation about an environment review panel. I quote briefly from a letter dated October 4 to the minister from the environment review panel, which has resigned, and refers to the agreement between Canada and Saskatchewan. It says:

While the agreement may be ambiguous regarding some aspects of the Project, it clearly states that no work on the Rafferty-Boundary Diversion Channel or on the Alameda Dam and Reservoir—will begin, and that construction on the Rafferty Dam—

—will only continue after safety is ensured and the panel has made an environmental review. How can the Minister of the Environment stand in this House and say that he will appoint another panel? Who will he get to serve on this panel, when clearly the first panel was not able to do its work based on the very guidelines of his Cabinet?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, we have three documents that are very important in this issue. We have a court order which, by and large, is the most important of the documents; we have an agreement which signed in January of this year between the Government of Canada and that of Saskatchewan; and we have a licence that was issued in 1989 to the proponent of the project. And I intend to respect the letter of each one of those agreements and those documents.