

Transportation Accident Investigation Board

I hope this portion of the legislation is passed quickly so that we can have a board in place which will strike an inquiry into that oil spill which took place off the west coast of Vancouver Island. At least then we can have an independent inquiry which we are all desperately seeking.

Mr. Skelly (North Island—Powell River): Madam Speaker, I have three short questions. The first concerns the matter of very serious importance. The Hon. Member for Comox—Alberni (Mr. Skelly) represents in this Parliament the people of the Nuu-chahnulth Tribal Council. They are currently working on a government contract under which they are becoming familiar with the beach areas. It is a voluntary organization for clean up. That contract is an important part of having a group of people available for the next oil spill.

The Government has denied the Kwagwelth people, who have oil washing upon the shores of their complex beaches, the same type of contract to clean up the oil and develop the expertise to clean up the resources. I want the Member to comment on that. It is absolutely necessary that the Government treat equally the native people on the West Coast who are exposed to these hazards.

Richard Lucas, a person from the Hon. Member's riding, is here in Ottawa. He co-ordinated the Nuu-chahnulth Tribal Council clean-up contract. The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) has refused to see him. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. Siddon) has refused to see him. The Minister of the Environment (Mr. Bouchard) and the Minister of Transport (Mr. Bouchard) have refused to see him.

However, to compliment the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Epp), he has made provisions to have discussions with this person who has first-hand knowledge. I suggest to my colleague, the Hon. Member for Comox—Alberni who has also heard the complaints, that the only way the Government will listen to the people from the West Coast of British Columbia is if, per chance, the next oil spill happens to circumnavigate the globe, wash up the St. Lawrence River and on to the shores of Charlevoix. That is the only way we will get a fair hearing on the next oil spill. That comment is being made by people up and down the coast of British Columbia.

People who come here as a delegation must be given a hearing by those responsible for launching a public inquiry and allocating the resources for the proper

protection of the people in British Columbia. Will the Hon. Member for Comox—Alberni not agree?

Mr. Skelly (Comox—Alberni): Madam Speaker, given the nature of the question and the questioner, the question is in such terms that it would be very difficult not to agree. However, this is another of the problems that faced us during the development of this oil spill and the understanding that damage was taking place off the west coast of Vancouver Island. Once we found that the oil was coming ashore it was very difficult to establish contacts with the Ministers involved. We tried to phone the Ministers and we tried to contact them at their constituency offices, in one case, in Vancouver. It was very difficult to make contact with the Ministers involved.

When a disaster like this takes place, I think it is very important that the first contact that is made is between the Ministers who have jurisdiction over the clean-up and the issue, who should then get in touch with Members of Parliament in the area, members of the local Government in the area and make sure the information they have is made available to the people in the area and that the issue is treated on a non-partisan basis.

I think the agreement between the Nuu-chahnulth Tribal Council and the federal Government to monitor the beaches is an excellent one. I think it is based on some very good precedents. For example, there are archaeological observers or wardens who monitor the archaeological sites up and down the coasts. There are environmental wardens and fisheries wardens in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans who, as volunteers, basically monitor what is happening in the fishing industry and are able to report back to the paid staff in the Ministry so that they can be kept informed because they cannot always be in every part of the province or coast at once.

To have people from the Nuu-chahnulth Tribal Council hired virtually as coast watchers to make sure that damage is not taking place which the Ministry is not aware of is a good idea. It does not make any sense at all for the Government not to hire the Kwagwelth on the same basis that it hired the Nuu-chahnulth Tribal Council whose land occupies the southern part of Vancouver Island below the Brooks Peninsula. The Minister has left the northern part of Vancouver Island virtually uncovered when there should be a similar force monitoring that area.