

Oral Questions

Let us be very clear. This government does not lack jurisdiction. It lacks competence and it lacks courage. This government does not understand that the Rafferty precedent establishes very clearly that \$600 million cannot be spent on roads and airports without compromising the environmental process. Does the government understand that a road cannot be built without asking what it is for?

My question is very clear. Will this minister simply give us a yes or a no? Will the minister ensure that no work will begin on any aspect, roads or airports, without a full evaluation process being completed?

One more thing, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister undertake that whatever his answer is in this House, it will stand at least until the scrum outside is completed?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the position of this government is that any major project of this nature over which the federal government has jurisdiction—and that is certainly the case here—will have to undergo an environmental process under the EARP legislation or under a process that is agreed upon to be equivalent to the EARP guidelines. That is the case we have before us. I have said in this House, time and time again, that there will be a full environmental assessment done and no decisions made before then.

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, in September the minister said: "We don't have two projects here. We have one and it should be looked at in its entirety". In October he changed his mind and said he did not object if Hydro Quebec went ahead with \$600 million worth of work on roads and airports before the full environmental review was done.

Which is it, Mr. Minister? Is it one project, or is it two? Are we going to have a full environmental review before any work starts or are we going down the same rocky road where two years from now two or three ministers will have put us in a situation where a dam is done before a review is done?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, let me make the point once again very clearly so that maybe people opposite will fully understand.

We want this project to be assessed from an environmental point of view.

We want it to be assessed fully. We want participation from the provincial government. We would certainly like participation from native people who, as the hon. member opposite well knows, have a very great interest in this matter.

We are trying to work this evaluation process through the James Bay and northern Quebec convention that was signed in 1975 by the then Liberal government. Under that convention, there will be one joint panel appointed by the province and by the federal government to review all aspects.

They will have two mandates; one to review the infrastructure and one to review the project. After that we will see what decisions the federal government will take and what the decisions the Quebec government will take.

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, the minister said yesterday in the House that the government believes there has to be a full environmental assessment before work is done. This is not what he has said in other forums, where he is prepared to let \$600 million worth of work go ahead. He has also said he does not object to those works going ahead.

If the minister is so unclear about what his responsibilities are, despite three court decisions telling him, will he join the Crees in court to find out what his responsibilities are? Will he take this matter to court so we can have a full environmental review?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I wish that the member opposite had listened to my answer before reading her prepared second question.

I said very clearly that no work will be undertaken on the project before an environmental assessment is done. That is very clear. The roads, infrastructure and airport will be evaluated. The project will be evaluated. Then you get to the stage where licenses are issued. I have maintained that throughout.

It is totally false to say that I ever suggested in any forum anywhere that work could begin before an environmental assessment was undertaken and completed.