

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 45 deemed to have been moved.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS—REQUEST FOR ASSURANCE OF INVESTIGATION. (B) COMPENSATION FOR VICTIMS

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on my questions to the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) on Friday, April 19, having to do with the PCB spill that we have been talking about all day. I am not sure who is in the House to respond to my comments. In any event, on Friday I directed three questions to the Prime Minister. One had to do with the question of charges in respect of the PCB spill. The next had to do with compensation for the known victims, the family driving behind the truck. The third had to do with the cancellation of the study into the assessment of PCBs that was requested by the Ontario Government and which was cancelled by the federal Progressive Conservative Government.

On the question of charges, the Prime Minister indicated to me at that time, and I quote:

—it may be that there were violations of law and regulations and disregard for human life, in which case I can assure the Hon. Member that prosecutions will be made with vigour and to the fullest extent of the law.

I would ask the person responding on behalf of the Government to indicate in what area the Government might be contemplating this kind of action. Will the investigation announced earlier by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) when he was speaking to the House on this be the kind of investigation that could lead to prosecutions, if that was judged to be warranted after the investigation? Also, in the course of that investigation will not only the company involved but also the Province of Ontario be looked at in that same critical light with respect to its actions?

I also asked the Prime Minister about compensation for the family that was driving behind the truck and which had their car impounded. The Prime Minister replied:

With regard to individual families who may be suffering unduly, apart from the tragedy itself, as a result of it, we will look at that, and where we can be helpful we will be delighted to come forward and provide facilities from the Government of Canada to assist them in any way we can.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Gurbin), who apparently will be responding on behalf of the Government, tell the House whether the Government has made any overtures to the family and whether any provision has been made, for example, for transportation back to Red Lake, and any other short-term things of that nature that the family may require? I would appreciate being brought up to date on that.

The third question was the cancellation of the NRC study on updated scientific analysis of key issues in the assessment of PCBs. As I mentioned before, this study was requested by the

Adjournment Debate

Ontario Government. The study was cancelled as a result of the cuts announced by the Government on November 8. In response to me at that time, the Prime Minister said:

● (1805)

I think all Members of the House will be seeking the assurance that it never happens again. If that representation—

That is to say, the representation which I made on behalf of reinstating that program—

—turns out to be one way we can ensure that, Hon. Members may be certain that we will proceed.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment tell us whether or not, as a result of the Prime Minister having said that to me on Friday, any reconsideration has been given as to the wisdom of reinstating the study on up-dated scientific analysis of the key issues in the assessment of PCBs? The Prime Minister probably heard about the cancellation of the study for the first time on Friday, and I did not expect that he would have mastered all of the details of the cuts, but I believe that a light went on and the Prime Minister, in light of recent events, might have thought that cancelling that program was not such a great idea. Could the Parliamentary Secretary indicate whether any reconsideration has happened?

Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, in the brief moments which are allowed, I will try to respond to the many questions which have been raised.

I would like to deal with the question of support for the family. As the Hon. Member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Parry) indicated, the response mechanism, by agreement, is through the local medical officer of health and local officials. As part of the total response package, we have offered to provide, through the local authorities, an airplane or anything else which might be required by the people who are affected. I can assure the Hon. Member that that was done, and that the offer will remain if it becomes necessary. As well, I am sure that the offer can be expanded if it is appropriate from the point of view of local officials.

With respect to the investigation, I cannot specifically answer his question as to what might flow from the investigation which has been announced by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski). I do not know whether that investigation has anything to do with charges, but I will undertake to find that out for the Hon. Member. However, I can tell him that the liability has already been accepted by the company. I do not know what happens under the legal system following that, but the liability has been accepted.

I also indicated very clearly that there is a code of guidelines for the management of PCBs, which was established before the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) was Minister of the Environment. My understanding was that the company had been transporting materials in agreement with that code. However, clearly the company did not do that. However, it had made that commitment to the Alberta Government. Therefore,