

Oral Questions

Mr. Mulroney: The information was conveyed to the Department of the Environment. It is important to note, as the Minister has just pointed out, a quote from Mr. Green:

He did not mention diesel fuel or gasoline because he was not aware of the extent of the problem.

To the extent that he was aware of the problem, that information was conveyed to the Department of the Environment and the Minister for the Environment has acted very competently and fully—

Mr. Lapierre: Yesterday.

Mr. Mulroney: —in regard to this difficult matter and will continue to do precisely that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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[*Translation*]

NATIONAL REVENUE

ILLICIT TRAFFIC OF TOXIC MATERIALS

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Revenue. Yesterday in the House, the Minister of the Environment said that he learned a month ago, and I quote, "Daniel Green had been informed of illicit traffic in toxic substances between Canada and the United States." Today, Revenue Canada's chief investigator said:

• (1440)

[*English*]

—whenever Canada Customs inspected a tanker truck they looked for tax law violations—not hazardous wastes—"Had we known of these allegations our approach would have been entirely different—we weren't testing PCBs,"—

[*Translation*]

That is quite a different story!

When did the Minister of National Revenue learn about toxic substances crossing the border between Canada and the United States?

[*English*]

Hon. Otto Jelinek (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, as did my other colleagues in Cabinet, I learned of the suspicion of toxic wastes being included in liquid fuels this Monday. I immediately initiated an investigation within my Department to ascertain whether or not any officials were knowledgeable of the fact prior to this

Monday. The response was no. No one was informed of anything of that sort.

With respect to testing of tankers, it is true that Customs and Excise tests on a periodic basis tankers for tax rules and regulations for tax evasion. We had no reason whatsoever, prior to this Monday, to suspect the presence of toxic waste in liquid fuel in oil tankers any more than we had any reason to suspect toxic waste in taxed fuels as of this Monday.

Upon finding out, through the leadership of the Minister of the Environment, the Government, on a broad basis, took immediate action. Customs and Revenue Canada is co-operating fully with the Department of the Environment, with the Province of Ontario and with other provinces.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

CUSTOMS—SEARCH FOR TOXIC CHEMICALS

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, we heard both today and yesterday that Ministers knew at different times about this potentially very dangerous hazard to the health of Canadians. The Minister of the Environment said yesterday one month. Is it not the practice that other Ministers would inform the Minister of National Revenue, who is responsible for Customs in Canada, to ensure that he undertook to begin to search for hazardous toxic waste at the Canadian border as soon as the information was available? Why was the Minister not informed?

Hon. Otto Jelinek (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how often Ministers on this side of the House have to say that the first time this matter of toxic waste in fuel specifically came to our attention was on Monday. How often do we have to say that? As soon as we found out, immediate, proper, direct and decisive action was taken by the Government.

LOW-SULPHUR WESTERN CANADIAN COAL

Mr. Arnold Malone (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, and pending his answer, this could have a very significant, positive impact on Canada's balance of payments and on our environment.

What undertakings has the Minister made or is considering making with respect to the movement and utilization of low-sulphur western Canadian coal in the industrial heartland of Ontario to prevent the utilization