

*Oral Questions*

from Newfoundland, that they would want at least to give it the attention it deserves.

On Sunday—I can give the exact date and I can make all this material available to the House—November 29, after preliminary reports a decision was made by the Bureau of Field Operations, HPB in Ottawa, to stop distribution of any further product from P.E.I. At 10.15 a.m. it was discussed with fisheries officials. At 10.30 a.m. the Atlantic Region of HPB advised headquarters of further arrangements. Then on Sunday the sale was stopped, not because of a health link, but what the Department through its experience calls, “the sale was stopped on the basis of reason to believe”.

On Monday, the tests continued. I got my first briefing on Monday. I said to the Department: “Give me every piece of information”. I got the information at approximately on Tuesday of last week, 5 to 5.30 in the evening. We developed the health alert, and I believe at 6.55 on that same night I was already in front of national television on this.

**An Hon. Member:** You were late.

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** No, I was not late at all, Mr. Speaker. It is important that Ministers and the Government have the right to put information like this forward. I think it is responsible for the Opposition, as well, not to throw out allegations such as they do unless they have proof, and understanding in this place that some people have to be believed when they put out the information.

## MINISTER'S POSITION

**Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East):** Mr. Speaker, I have here a telex from B. C. Williams, Bureau of Field Operations, Health Protection Branch. It was a health issue, and he states that “HPB was first notified of an illness in Montreal on November 25, 1987. Further investigations. On November 25, DFO Moncton Inspection Office was also informed”.

We had two separate health incidents that were relayed to the Ministry of Health on November 25. In fact, the Minister thought that it was serious enough that he told all companies to stop shipments on Saturday morning, at 10 a.m. It was not until Monday night, at 7 p.m., that he informed the public, and I would suggest that the only reason the Minister can explain for the delay, contrary to the untruths that he told outside the House on Friday—

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

● (1430)

**Mr. Speaker:** I am sure that the Hon. Member knows that what she wants to say outside this Chamber about what anybody else said outside the Chamber is any Member's responsibility, and he or she, of course, takes the risk under ordinary common law to which that person would be subjected if the individual chooses to do that.

The Hon. Member may very well not agree with what the Hon. Minister said, but perhaps she could put it in ways that say something to the effect that she does not agree with what he said. I think in the interests of order we could do without the other allegation.

**Ms. Copps:** Mr. Speaker, why did the Minister make misleading statements on the issue last Friday? Why did he not come forward with the information to the people of Canada at the same time that the information went forth to the shipping companies? Didn't the Minister really put the health of Canadians at risk? Doesn't he think he should resign?

**Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** No, Mr. Speaker, I do not believe I should resign. I do not believe I should resign because I followed the position of the health link very carefully. The instructions I gave to the Department are that on every issue we will err on the side of safety. I did not interfere with the Department, with its professionals, with its scientists or with its toxicologists.

What the Member is trying to put forward is something before health links could be established and that is what the Department establishes. In fact, scientists and toxicologists were dealing with a new toxin not related to shellfish poisoning, and the Department got the co-operation of the Prince Edward Island mussel growers to pull back the shipment. We have to do lab work. Despite that, the pull-back took place.

If the Member wants to take her partisan shots, she can. The Member is entitled to that, but I would like to think that Canadians, officials, toxicologists, scientists in Health and Welfare are as interested in the health and safety of Canadians as anyone else. They were not trying to protect an industry. There were trying to protect the health of Canadians. I think it is about time that the Member and others looked very seriously at the work that was done, rather than making allegations which the Member likes to throw out hoping somehow that they might stick to someone.

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## SOVEREIGNTY

## ARCTIC WATERS—REPORTED CANADA-UNITED STATES AGREEMENT

**Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister for International Trade which also pertains to the concession which the Government has made once again to the United States involving a question of Canadian sovereignty.

Just a moment ago the Minister indicated that the Government of Canada believes it is exercising its sovereignty in this accord. Will she now admit to the House that there is no reference whatever to sovereignty in the agreement that has been signed? Will she answer that?