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I also want to make an observation on the intervention of the Hon. Member for Skeena. It was a legitimate and appropriate observation to make in the House this afternoon when he suggested that the spill might be a cause for concern with respect to the Alsek River. I am not sure if the Hon. Member for Skeena knew where the Alsek River was before. It is in the extreme northwest corner of the constituency of the Hon. Member. It is a short river with a bay called Dry Bay within the Alaskan Panhandle on the northeast Pacific. This river extends across the narrow section of the Alaskan Panhandle into Yukon and into northwestern British Columbia, and it splits into two rivers.

There is no evidence that the spill is moving in the direction of that river. The Member says that it might, and I grant that there is always a minimum probability of anything. The officials, the scientists, the officials of the Coast Guard, and the Department of the Environment who have advised Ministers are quite convinced that it is highly improbable that this oil spill will move in that direction toward the Alsek River.

• (2030)

It is important to understand that transboundary rivers such as the Nass, Taku, and Stikine, contain migrating stocks of salmon. In the mid-summer to the late autumn, adult salmon return to those rivers. Should there be an accumulation of oil in the mouths of those rivers, which are in American territorial waters, there would be a possible damage to such salmon stocks, some of which return to Canadian headwaters and spawning grounds. They are the property of Canada. This is not August, September, or October. That does not give me any more comfort in respect to the spill, but there is no immediate danger to returning Canadian salmon stocks, nor is there a danger to the young fry that have been hatched in the upper waters of those rivers. I am told by our best fishery biologists that the young fry will not migrate down toward the lower reaches of the river and the salt water until at least July.

I am not diminishing the significance of the issue the Hon. Member has raised. I am suggesting that to focus this matter as a crisis because there is an assumption the oil is moving in the opposite direction to which it is moving is irresponsible.

As to the response of the Government of Canada to this environmental tragedy, I can assure Canadians that our response to this date is exactly what they would expect from a Government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Siddon: Members opposite are accustomed to taking half sentences and interpreting them out of context.

Canadians would expect a Government to place the highest priority on protecting our natural resources and environment. That was the message of the Throne Speech yesterday, and it is a strong commitment of this Government.

An Hon. Member: All words, no action.

Mr. Siddon: The action is ongoing and has been since the early morning of Good Friday, ten days ago. We are extremely concerned about the spill which has occurred in Alaska and the environmental consequences on the people of Alaska, on the marine life they enjoy and depend on, and on the wildlife of the area. We British Columbians share with our Alaskan neighbours a very real sense of loss and of alarm. We certainly would not want to allow a situation where such a spill could occur within our own coastal waters.

Second, I can assure Canadians that their Government is now and has been, since the disaster was first reported, vigilant in monitoring the efforts of U.S. authorities who are responsible for controlling the spill; vigilant in monitoring the oceanic and climatic factors which can affect efforts to control the spill; and vigilant in tracking the movement of the oil. I can assure Canadians that we are in a state of readiness to respond.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Siddon: Hon. Members opposite laugh, but I can assure them, and the Hon. Minister of Transport (Mr. Bouchard) will add further evidence of this—

An Hon. Member: He is in pretty good shape.

Mr. Siddon: They choose to be sceptical. The facts are that we are equipped to respond and, if need be, we shall respond to any necessary measures. I should point out that we have offered and given assistance to the Americans in the clean-up of Prince William Sound. We have offered and delivered assistance toward that end.

An Hon. Member: You haven't invoked the treaty.

Mr. Siddon: The Hon. Member will take his opportunity—