

Government Orders

Mr. DeVillers: The member points out that it took a year. However, as I indicated in my comments, the former government had eight years and did not proclaim it. It has been passed.

To answer the question, would I be prepared to look at it at committee? It is my role in committee to look at all legitimate issues and to make appropriate recommendations.

Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by commenting on the remark by the member for The Battlefords—Meadow Lake who said this took a whole year.

This bill is not the only thing we have done in the last year. In fact, I was thinking as we went through this legislation today that I am absolutely amazed at how much of the red book agenda we have been able to get done in our first year. At the rate we are going we will have everything in the red book done within the first two years when the Prime Minister had said the red book agenda would happen over the term of the government.

I begin by complimenting the Minister of the Environment and Deputy Prime Minister for moving forward on this very important legislation, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. I believe that the balance sheet of a nation will be judged by the way we take care of our environment.

The environmental assessment legislation is a systematic method of identifying potential environmental consequences of a proposed project and its impact on people, their livelihood and way of life. If these environmental consequences are identified early in the planning stages, then plans can be modified so potential risks are minimized or ideally eliminated.

Environmental assessment is a very logical tool for achieving sustainable development, that is ensuring that the needs of present generations can be met while allowing future generations to meet their needs.

I believe the legislation will lead to a whole new measurement of the economy. In the past the environment really has not been driving the economic agenda in our country. In fact, the environment always got a short shrift.

• (1835)

I actually should go back to when my colleague from Davenport was the Minister of the Environment in the previous Liberal government. He was probably the first Minister of the Environment to give the issue such a determined, sustained approach. His tenacity in making sure that this issue was always on the front burner gave all of us in the Liberal Party a real example. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Environment is following through today with that commitment from the red book.

I noticed in a book that I was reading earlier in preparing for this debate, written by Julia Moulden and Patrick Carson, *Green Is Gold*, that we now have industries that are starting to realize that if they commit to greening themselves or committing themselves to the environmental movement that their balance sheets can be much more profitable.

Even though the member stated that we were a year getting to this bill, ideally it should have been one we handled in the first quarter. However the fact is that we have now got the bill in the system. It will no doubt pass, we will be setting up a whole new structure and the environment will now take on a priority position.

I would like to say to members opposite that this is a bill on which we must all be united. It is a bill that regrettably once again the Bloc Quebecois will not support, not because its members are not committed to the environment, but because once again whenever you come forward with a bill that talks about national standards, a bill that can galvanize the spirit of the country, legislation that can pull us all together, the Bloc is consistent in walking away from it. They find some excuse that it impinges on the rights of Quebecers.

If there is one thing that everyone is committed to in every part of Canada it is saving the planet. I believe that Quebecers, once they understand the true meaning of the bill, will probably urge some of their Bloc Quebecois members to be a little less political and a little more concerned about what truly is important for everyone in our society, especially for future generations.

I stand here today in total support of this bill.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the comments from the hon. member. He has spoken on numerous occasions in the House on the environment, business and the economy. I always listen carefully to what he has to say.

I want to indicate that the matter that I was raising about it taking a year for the government to bring this bill in was in relation to the difficulties that ministers have sometimes in dealing with cabinet on environmental issues.

In the half minute available to me, I want to say that the minister probably could have brought in the bill in the first quarter. Consultation with environmental organizations and industry was concluded relatively early in the process. But the process of getting the new regulations through cabinet was a very difficult task. Again I commend the minister but it shows that cabinet is still a very powerful body when it comes to dealing with issues like this.

If the government has the will to see that the environment will be a first priority, then the system works. If this government or the next government chooses not to have the environment as its top priority, then the system does not work. We have to ensure