

However, we have to learn a lesson from all this, and find ways that it will not be repeated, whether it is through changes in response, developments of new technology, improvements in the way that tankers are operated through our waters, and a whole increased sensitivity to these issues on the part of the Canadian public and on the part of all of us in the House. That is an assurance that I know I can give on behalf of our Government and on behalf of my colleagues tonight.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): On a point of order the Hon. Minister of State for Fitness and Amateur Sport.

Mr. Charest: I have not had an opportunity to speak with my colleague, the House Leader for the New Democratic Party, so I will speak slowly and maybe he will have a chance to hear me verbatim. I have had a chance to speak with a representative of the Liberal Party. If it is agreed, and I think you will find that that is probably the case, from now on the House would entertain a change in its proceedings to 10-minute speeches, and beyond hours until the last person has spoken. All of this is in recognition of the importance of this issue for the House of Commons and for Canadians.

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased the Minister agreed to this type of arrangement. I take it that there will be no objections at all from this side of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Is it so agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Fulton: Perhaps you can just clarify for me, Mr. Speaker. I just came through the lobby and I know that the House Leader is not here at the moment. I understand he was involved in the discussions.

Mr. Charest: Yes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): So agreed.

The Hon. Member for Kent.

Mr. Rex Crawford (Kent): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak in the emergency debate on the Valdez oil spill. As my colleagues on this side of the House have stated, the worst spill in U.S. history will prove to have devastating effects on the economy of Alaska and most certainly the wildlife of the West Coast.

It will also force a serious re-examination of the policies governing the transportation of oil, and force us all to re-examine the question: "At what cost development, at what cost to our precious environment?" We must face the issue of sustainable development head-on.

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Forty-two million litres, 270,000 barrels of oil, have been spewed by a supertanker that ran aground two weeks ago. Fishermen fear for their livelihood. They fear for their future. Alaskans are asking why it happened, an accident that could have been prevented.

We praise the massive community effort to skim their waters with equipment at hand. Exxon officials seem to be more interested in their public relations and profits than our environmental safety. Environmental groups say that the oil industry has been misleading the North American public for years about the dangers of shipping oil, and being utterly and hopelessly unprepared for this catastrophic environmental disaster.

Ecologists have been saying for years that supertankers used should be specially built for the unique and risky job in that area of the world. The oil industry has constantly and consistently refuted that argument and saying "Everything is fine". No one thought a spill of this magnitude could even happen.

Even Jacques Cousteau has said that the ships currently in use are time bombs. For 30 years Mr. Cousteau has been pushing and pressing for reform of security standards for ships of this type, and better training for sailors and officers.

It is clear that Exxon and the American oil industry were entirely unprepared for a spill of this magnitude, in spite of their words of assurance.

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We know that employees working for the Alaska Pipeline were fired when they complained about cut-backs in its program to clean up oil spills. Let this be a message to the Canadian Government, "Cut-backs are dangerous!"

A six-volume environmental report prepared by the U.S. Department of the Interior in March, 1972 predicted that oil spills were inevitable. It stated there would probably be more than two million litres of oil spilled along the West Coast. So even then we knew the dangers, and Exxon took the risk without being prepared.

My heart goes out to those fishermen and conservationists who must now face the destruction of the Alaskan habitat and live with the spill's long-term effects on wildlife. I come from an area of Canada where an appreciation and a love of nature is paramount. I live alongside a native reserve where fishing and trapping is a way of life. Even in my riding, spills of another kind have had a terrible impact. Watching the scenes of wildlife devastation on the nightly news shows us how fragile our