

Government Orders

Very simply, we believe the federal government should recognize, if the provinces have in place a process, and if that process is as good as or better than the federal process, that as a legitimate process to adjudicate the environmental worthiness of various projects.

I think that is the key. If a provincial government has a department of environment, it should be capable of deciding what is good for the province. Otherwise, we will have a conflict between the federal and provincial governments, and I would like to quote the minister again: "By getting into those kinds of issues, we think the federal government would be clearly intruding on the province's constitutional rights to determine destiny over their resources".

This is fundamental. Provinces should have jurisdiction over environment—obviously with some co-operation from federal experts if necessary—and should have the last word.

Mr. Gauthier: Madam Speaker, I understand the interventions of the members for Longueuil and for Calgary Northeast. I should not have to repeat that way back in 1984 we started talking about the possibility of bringing in legislation to try to implement a better framework. It has been quite a while. Now we have reached the last stage, the third reading of the bill, and some members would like to start over, to have this House re-examine all of that legislation. I am not a government member. I am part of the opposition, but I want to tell them that this bill is not all bad. I simply want to say that I can feel a possibility for co-operation among all levels of government—federal, provincial, municipal or regional—with a view to coordinating efforts in order to ensure a more complete and more efficient evaluation of all environmental projects. That is all I said today.

I understand that some provinces might say: "Our environment is our business; the air we breathe is our business; the water we drink is our business". I understand, but it just so happens that our country is huge and that we must take into account the relationship between provinces. All I am saying therefore is that there might be in Bill C-13 a beginning, a step in the right direction toward a better co-operation between all levels of government. What to do about those who do not agree? Pray for them.

[English]

Mr. Brian O'Kurley (Elk Island): Madam Speaker, in light of the discussion that has gone on in this debate with regard to the attention paid to the bill now before this House by other legislatures and by other jurisdictions, I thought it was important to address some of the concerns with the press release that has just been released by the Minister of the Environment in Vancouver.

Generally the release outlines some of the background of the bill and some information that I think is very pertinent to the debate. Much of the controversy, as we know in the parliamentary business, is sometimes based on misinformation or a lack of information. So I would like to take this opportunity to just go through the press release that was released in Vancouver today and perhaps it will resolve some of the questions put before this House.

The Minister of the Environment disagrees with Quebec's reaction to the bill on the federal environmental assessment process which is presently at its third reading in the House of Commons.

The minister reiterated that the purpose of the bill is to assess decisions that are to be made by the federal government within its own jurisdiction and that it only applies in these circumstances.

In his public statements, Quebec's environment minister raised a number of issues which must be addressed.

With regard to the background, in 1987, having recognized that the federal guidelines order for the environmental assessment of federal decisions was seriously flawed, the Government of Canada initiated the preparation of a bill to regulate the environmental assessment of its decisions.

The proposed legislation was frequently discussed in federal-provincial meetings and in June 1990, the government tabled Bill C-78 concerning an environmental assessment process. Discussions with the provinces were then intensified in the context of the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment.

The bill was reintroduced as Bill C-13 in May 1991 in the new parliamentary session. All the provinces and territories, including Quebec, were kept informed of the progress of the bill and the contents of the amendments were the subject of several multilateral and bilateral meetings.