

Supply

I should like to point out to the Hon. Member the achievements that have been made by the Government in terms of the agreement for a 50 per cent reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions and the tougher automobile standards which were introduced. Also we have provided and assured budget to the science monitoring program and took steps in creating an acid rain office. There was also a budget of \$150 million for the smelting industry for modernization and installations.

Mr. Frith: That is a speech, not a question.

Mr. Lewis: It is a comment. We also spent \$70 million on developing technology for the use of coal. All these things were an effort by our Government to pick up from the stagnation which occurred under the Liberal Government in earlier years. Perhaps the Hon. Member, in conjunction with the positive things he said about the PCB problems, might want to comment on those actions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The period for questions and comments has now terminated. I recognize the Hon. Member for Sudbury (Mr. Frith).

Hon. Douglas C. Frith (Sudbury): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin where the Hon. Member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Parry) left off. He left off on the issue of leadership which must be taken into account because each year spills occur in different provinces across the country. The only way in which we can judge the importance which Governments place upon the issue of spills and upon the protection of the environment is to witness the way in which the Government of the day reacts to a crisis.

I will not suggest that the Minister of the Environment (Mrs. Blais-Grenier) was responsible for the spill which occurred on the highway in northwestern Ontario. However, the only way in which we can judge the political will of that Minister is to interpret from her actions the way in which she views the effects of that spill on the environment. Let us take a look at the leadership which was exhibited by the minister in this particular case. After the spill in northwestern Ontario was brought to the attention of the House, the Minister refused to show up in the House for several days to answer questions on the issue. We asked why the Minister of the Environment did not—

[Translation]

Mrs. Mailly: Mr. Speaker, I was just wondering about something. It seems to me that under the rules, one should not comment on the presence or absence of other Members in the House, but the Hon. Member is now getting into a debate which is not usually—

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Yes, I understand. I addressed that same question earlier. I ask the Hon. Member not to comment upon the presence or absence of Hon. Members.

Mr. Frith: One should ask whether a Minister who refuses to instruct her officials to inspect the site is exhibiting leadership in this manner. For several days there was no communication between the federal Minister and her counterparts in the Province of Ontario. The Province of Quebec was just as negligent in its duties with respect to the spill in northwestern Ontario. Those issues involve leadership.

Let us look at the record of the Government in terms of the environment. Turning to the mini-statement of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) on November 8, the Minister of the Environment allowed him to override her concerns about the impact the cuts would have on the Department of the Environment. What did we end up with? There were cuts in the budget in terms of waste management. Instead of trying to protect her Department, the Minister of the Environment allowed the Minister of Finance to run roughshod over her departmental officials. We have had cut-backs in wildlife services and in research into the medical effects of these kinds of spills. Is that the kind of leadership we want from Conservatives? I do not think so. As the Hon. Member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Parry) said, Canadians want a leadership role taken by the federal Government to co-ordinate programs to deal with these kinds of emergencies.

As I mentioned earlier, this spill is not the first one to occur, nor shall it be the last. Examples abound, not only of PCBs but of other chemicals which impact upon the environment. It is important to note that part of the job of the federal Minister of the Environment is to protect the interests of her Department and the health of Canadian citizens. Also she must become an advocate for her Department when it comes to budget time, indicating to the people of the country that she will stand up and protect the health and safety of Canadian citizens. We are not receiving that.

● (1800)

This is not the first occasion where the Minister of the Environment (Mrs. Blais-Grenier) has neglected and been quite negligent in her duties with respect to the protection, health and safety of Canadian citizens. That is the kind of leadership that Canadians want from their federal Government. The suggestion that it was only in the last 24 hours or six to seven days that regulations had been passed to deal with this problem of interprovincial transportation is to stretch the imagination of the Canadian public that we have a Minister of the Environment who cares.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please. It being six o'clock, it is my duty to inform the House that, pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 62(11), the proceedings on this motion are now completed.