

Oral Questions

program which will ensure that this industry remains a leader in progress in Canada.

Mr. Gustafson: Madam Speaker, the minister continues to deny that oil rigs are leaving and that the industry in western Canada is being seriously affected by government policy. Yet it was stated in the news today that Saskoil is preparing to explore in Williston, North Dakota. Oil rigs are lining up at the border, yet the minister continues to deny the fact in the House. Will the minister take the necessary steps to redirect Canada's energy policy and see that the economic development of the nation does not become a foreign aid program of the United States?

Mr. Lalonde: Madam Speaker, the hon. member contends that oil rigs are leaving the country. As of the last count by *Oilweek* magazine, 36 more rigs are in operation in Canada at this time than at this time last year. Thirty-six is the difference between 532 and 496. So the gloom and doom picture which the hon. member is trying to paint does not seem to be supported by the facts.

Mr. Gustafson: Madam Speaker, the minister is aware of the fact that Canada has one of the finest oil fleets in the world, that many rigs have been built in the last year and that seven rigs have left the Estevan area alone. The picture is the same all across western Canada. Does the minister want to turn towns in Saskatchewan, such as Estevan, Weyburn and Lloydminster, into ghost towns through the economic direction he is imposing on this country?

Mr. Lalonde: Madam Speaker, the executive director of the oilwell drilling association stated last October, well before the budget and well before the National Energy Program, that it expected a 30 per cent reduction in wells being drilled in 1981.

Mr. Clark: He saw you coming.

Mr. Lalonde: That projection was completely independent of the influence of the budget, and based on an expected surplus in natural gas in the country at this time. The National Energy Program foresees a very substantial increase in revenue going to the industry and to the government of Saskatchewan over the next four years. If the hon. member cares to check the figures, he will find that the amount of money going to the government of Saskatchewan and to the industry under the energy program over the next four years is substantially higher than the last four years. There will be plenty of money for the industry to do the job it must do.

● (1420)

Finally, I should like to say that I had a very worth-while, fruitful and constructive meeting with my colleague, the Saskatchewan minister of energy two days ago.

An hon. Member: He told you to leave the province.

NORTHERN PIPELINES

ALASKA HIGHWAY GAS PIPELINE—FINANCING OF PROJECT

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Madam Speaker, if it is true that figures do not lie, there must be some liars around who can figure.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Oberle: What the minister has just said certainly does not correspond with the true situation in western Canada. My question is also directed to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, Madam Speaker, and it is in reference to some comments attributed to him yesterday by the press which he apparently made outside the House with respect to the Alaska highway natural gas pipeline. The minister is quoted as saying that the United States administration is completely committed to the \$22 billion project. The minister draws his conclusion from a telephone call he received from the new energy secretary in Washington, who said there is strong support for the pipeline in the new administration. Naturally, we on this side of the House would have liked—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Does the hon. member have a question?

Mr. Oberle: My question to the minister, therefore, is whether it is the intention of the new administration in Washington to issue something that comes closer to the ironclad guarantees that the minister was so anxious about earlier, or was it that the energy secretary called with respect to the new administration's intention to renegotiate and review the pipeline treaty that we have with the United States?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Madam Speaker, the hon. member is misinformed. Secretary Edwards did not call; I called Secretary Edwards to congratulate him on his appointment and to assure him of the co-operation of the Government of Canada with the government of the United States in the energy field. I must say we had a very worth-while and fruitful discussion over the phone.

Mr. Clark: Did he thank you for the rigs?

Mr. Lalonde: We agreed that we should meet eventually, either in Ottawa or in Washington, to pursue further a number of files that are currently active between Canada and the United States in the energy field.

I raised with the energy secretary the question of the Alaska gas pipeline as one to which this government attaches a very high priority. He confirmed that, as far as the Reagan administration is concerned, this pipeline is also of the highest priority and that he will make sure that all the commitments given by Congress under the previous administration and by the previous administration will be fully implemented.

Mr. Nielsen: Have you got that in writing?