

travel great distances in order to contact government boards or agencies. So the dilemma which faces members of parliament and the government in trying to determine what degree of decentralization is adequate is simply this fact of geography, which means, in effect, that there is no set answer.

● (1750)

Let us take a look at the operations of the National Energy Board. The main thrust of the argument of the hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre) is that the bulk of the activities carried on by the National Energy Board concern the west and the west only; therefore the board ought to be moved to Alberta because that is the centre of the oil and gas industry. What are the facts? They are, of course, quite different. Oil and gas reserves in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and British Columbia are the responsibility not of the federal government but of the provincial governments. The National Energy Board has jurisdiction only when it comes to dealing with the export of these resources, not with their discovery, not with bringing them into production.

Therefore the primary responsibility for energy resources in Canada, such as oil and gas, is not that of the federal government but that of the provinces. Of course, there are exceptions. There is the exception of off-shore oil which might be found off the east coast, perhaps in the area of Hudson Bay, off the coast of British Columbia or in the Northwest Territories. Generally speaking, however, in terms of current energy policy it is not the National Energy Board which has jurisdiction; it is the provincial governments which have that jurisdiction.

If hon. members examine the totality of the energy policy in Canada they will discover it is the provinces in Canada which have primary jurisdiction, and they have shown no desire to turn over their jurisdiction to the federal government. So when we talk about the place of residence of the National Energy Board and about a national energy policy, we are not talking about one resource policy but rather a series of energy policies as promulgated by the various provinces, with the federal government attempting to convince them to co-ordinate those policies for the good of all Canadians. As we all know, that is no easy job. In fact, it is very difficult even in the best of all possible worlds.

When we deal with the functions of the National Energy Board we deal with the powers of the National Energy Board with what its actual jurisdictional powers are. I think under any consideration it must be admitted that the operations of the National Energy Board, while important, are not really as important to the health of the oil and gas industry in Alberta as the hon. member for Calgary Centre has made out. Rather the province of Alberta has a tremendous responsibility in this field because the authority of the National Energy Board is indeed limited.

I wish to address myself further to the question of the geography of Canada. Ideally the federal government should have been located in the geographical centre of Canada. That would mean there would be no discrimination against the west, the east or any place else in respect of where the government of Canada took up residence.

National Energy Board Act

Ideally the geographical centre of Canada should be the location of the government of Canada.

When we contemplate the decentralization of departments or regulatory bodies, ideally we should be looking for a place in the centre of Canada where these bodies could be domiciled. Mr. Speaker, quite humbly I suggest that some place in the Precambrian shield, in northwestern Ontario in the riding of Kenora-Rainy River, would be ideal for the location of the government of Canada and the agencies of the federal government if there were decentralization.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I wonder whether the hon. member would entertain a question.

Mr. Reid: Of course.

Mr. Knight: Could the hon. member inform the House, in view of his suggestion in respect of a new location for the national capital, if the humidity in his area is as bad as it is here?

Mr. Reid: I wish to assure the hon. member that the climate in Kenora in the summer is simply marvellous and since the House of Commons seems to have some unusual desire for summer sittings I believe this should be a matter to be weighed. I am prepared to admit that there are periods in the winter when the temperature is not ideal, but it might be possible to have a winter recess rather than a summer recess in those circumstances.

I should like to return to the matter of location of the National Energy Board. One other aspect is that the National Energy Board is bound by duty to provide advice to the government of Canada on energy matters. It is quite obvious that in this particular case there would be a conflict concerning the easy accessibility of senior officials of the National Energy Board to members of the federal government if in fact the board were decentralized out of Ottawa. When we come to deal with the whole question of decentralization this factor will emerge time and time again, simply because there is no easy way of eliminating the sheer dilemma of the geography of Canada.

Such decentralization would be possible perhaps in the case of corporations such as the CNR, Air Canada, the Northern Power Development Corporation and the Canadian Development Corporation, which are proprietary crown corporations. They could probably be decentralized in a way which would not affect their work or the terms of reference which they have been given under acts of parliament. If the National Energy Board were to be moved physically out of Ottawa to some other location, then there would be a penalty to be paid by the government and by the National Energy Board. This is a dilemma which we will have to face in respect of all aspects of decentralization. The government is engaged in this policy and I hope it continues, but it would be unwise for us to proceed without the knowledge that there are some difficulties ahead.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order. The hour appointed for the consideration of private members' business having expired, I do now leave the chair until 8 p.m.

At six o'clock the House took recess.