

Supply

them. That has added very substantially to the difficulties of the federal government.

I firmly believe that Bill C-78 will be a very major step in ensuring that these issues will be addressed and resolved in the future, rather than concerns being addressed part way through the process as has been the case with Rafferty-Alameda.

Mr. Ray Funk (Prince Albert—Churchill River): Mr. Speaker, I was wondering, first of all, whether the parliamentary secretary has had the opportunity to confer with his colleagues, the Solicitor General, about how it looks to the country to have three court orders essentially being overruled by a political fiasco in Saskatchewan that includes, I might remind him, George Hill, a former president of the Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan who has very much politicized the whole SaskPower operation, and the new Senator Berntson in the other place who is one of the eight new appointments there. This is how it looks to the Saskatchewan people. There have also been suggestions from a former cabinet minister in the Saskatchewan government that water could be diverted from the Saskatchewan River system or even from the Churchill River system down into this swamp.

I was just wondering whether in fact the minister was aware of how this must look to the people of Saskatchewan, including the political implications as well as the environmental implications.

Mr. Clark (Brandon—Souris): Mr. Speaker, first of all the hon. member referred to a swamp and I am not too certain as to what area he is referring to. I have visited the area on two different occasions to meet with officials and with interested parties on both sides. While I did see an immense amount of very dry land, I did not see any swamp.

Mr. Funk: That is what there will be when they build the dam.

Mr. Clark (Brandon—Souris): I guess that is an issue on which there would obviously be a great deal of division of opinion, just as I believe there is a great deal of division of opinion on this issue in the province of Saskatchewan. On the question of whether or not Mr. Hill is qualified for his task is probably something which is better addressed in the provincial legislature of Saskatchewan rather than in the federal Parliament.

Certainly the Minister of the Environment has consulted with all his cabinet colleagues, as one would expect, and continues to do so. I think the federal government has tried very conscientiously. I would like to compliment the Minister of the Environment for the fact that in July he did visit the site. I know because I was present. He met with the opponents, with representatives of SCRAP in the city of Regina, and travelled to the site. I think all present had a good thorough knowledge of both the arguments in favour and opposed. I might add that that visit was very much appreciated because one of the things that is very frustrating to the people who live in that part of Saskatchewan is the fact that so many of these projects are evaluated from people who reside in very distant places. They do not always take the time to visit, to understand and to listen to both sides of the argument. I might say that the Minister of the Environment has very appropriately done that.

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on this motion before us. Certainly this is the most serious test and challenge of a government's commitment to environmental action that we have dealt with in this House.

The member who has just spoken talked about the inadequacy of the guidelines. I would remind the member opposite what the courts had to say about the government's action with respect to the guidelines. The courts have said that it is very clear that the government is trying to evade its responsibilities under the guidelines, which have now given substantially more force than will be the case with Bill C-78. The government, they said, should be embracing the guidelines in its responsibilities and instead it is evading them.

There are many things we do in government or as politicians on behalf of our constituents that can be undone if we have made a mistake. This is one of those things that cannot be undone. This is one of those things with damaging consequences that will go on for generations after none of us are here to live with those consequences. That is why it deserves the full attention of this House and the full attention of the government.

In fact what has happened is that we have a history of shame surrounding this project. It is the history of the government, through three consecutive ministers of the environment, that has sought to do everything it can to