

[English]

Mr. Taylor: Madam Speaker, I am happy to try to answer this question. On numerous occasions in this House I have expressed my belief that the environment is a matter that knows no provincial boundaries, it knows no political or historic boundaries created by humans. The environment extends beyond those artificial boundaries, whether they are created by politics, history, heritage or whatever.

I have always looked at the development of this bill first in terms of the protection of the environment and second, in terms of the way in which the various players in this country would fit into it.

I was not surprised by the remarks of Mr. Paradis that appeared in the media this morning. However, I was a little surprised at the time it has taken for those remarks to come to our attention.

The bill has been with us for over two years. It is a bill that has had considerable attention inside and outside the House of Commons. If I am not mistaken it is a bill that was originally drafted when the member for Lac-Saint-Jean was the Minister of the Environment. It took into account a number of jurisdictional areas.

The bill, as I read it, goes no further on the environment than what was recommended by the Supreme Court of Canada in the Oldman Dam decision. As I recall all judges were of the same opinion on the jurisdictional issues regarding the environment. This bill simply reinforces the Supreme Court decision.

I listened very carefully during committee hearings when the Council of Ministers of the Environment, then represented by the provincial minister of British Columbia, was heard. The Council of the Ministers of the Environment is now headed by the federal Minister of the Environment. At that time there was a fairly strong representation about the ability of the various jurisdictions to work hand in hand.

Although it has some faults, the decision of our committee on the joint review panels very successfully dealt with this area of jurisdiction. While the federal authority is in essence paramount, the joint panels have a significant participation from within the provincial offices. The joint panels, when they are convened, will serve the environment and provincial needs quite well.

Government Orders

Therefore, at least in this part of Bill C-13, I feel quite comfortable with the direction that has been taken. I feel that the government and the committee have taken the correct steps in this regard.

[Translation]

Madam Deputy Speaker: There are two and a half minutes left in the debate. Does the hon. member for Richelieu wish to speak?

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu): Madam Speaker, the previous speaker stated that the environment is neither a federal nor a provincial matter, that it knows no boundaries. That is fine, we all agree on that, but this does not mean that the environment is not managed as well when it is managed provincially rather than, federally. That is my point.

Why this overlap, this duplication of efforts, as it is referred to by the Canadian Electric Association, by the Quebec government—because this encroachment Mr. Paradis talks about would have an impact—when there are very well defined provincial jurisdictions which are, indeed, very well managed? This environmental clause will empower the federal government, upon granting any amount as a result of its spending authority, to get involved in them environmental assessment of the operations of small and medium sized businesses despite the fact this is a matter over which Quebec has exclusive jurisdiction. That is why Mr. Paradis expressed concern although he is a known federalist. He says the same thing happens with regard to energy, forestry, transportation and so on. We could go down the entire list of ministries. He calls it a real Trojan horse.

• (1550)

The point I wanted to get across to my hon. colleague is that federal involvement in environmental matters does not mean a better environment. Everybody wants a better environment, but when the province is perfectly capable of providing this better environment, why would the federal government get involved, thus doubling the costs?

[English]

Mr. Taylor: Madam Speaker, the specific example the member points out, which is that if the federal government wants to get involved in a matter of environmental assessment with a province it can simply grant money to that area and then require an environmental assessment, stretches the point to a considerable degree.