

S. O. 52

[English]

We will have to look at a number of things. First, we should consider the possibility of reducing the traffic. Is the volume too high? Some 25 per cent of all American domestic oil now comes from Alaska, so much so that the price of world oil was affected immediately by this oil spill. We have a very vulnerable situation.

Second, should we reduce the size of the tankers to limit the damage potential? Third, should we ensure that the shipping channels are as far away as possible? The 1972 agreement with the United States put that limit at 125 miles. Is that sufficient?

Fourth, should we allow winter traffic with all the risks as outlined by the Hon. Member for Skeena of tide, wind, storm, and unpredictability?

Fifth, is there a possibility that we should extend the moratorium on exploration and development off the west coast? These are issues that the Minister of the Environment should treat seriously. This is the first test of his ministerial responsibility. It is not something that he can duck.

This is an issue about which all Canadians are concerned. He knows as the rest of us do, even though we do not take polls at government and taxpayers' expense, how important the environment is to the ordinary Canadian who is worried about his children and family. We are the most fortunate nation on the face of the earth.

We are a nation dictated by geography. We are a nation governed by our environment. We are a nation that still has an open frontier. If the Minister and the Government do not understand that they do not understand the force of this debate. I am asking the Minister to act now, before it is too late.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by discussing the measures taken by the federal Government following the Alaska oil spill. I will not try to use the tactics of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) because I believe the matter is too important to try to play politics with. It is something about which I believe every Canadian is very sensitive tonight.

I agree with the points raised by the Hon. Member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton). I believe that, once again, from St. John's, Newfoundland to Vancouver, British Columbia every Canadian is worried about the environment.

Personally, as the Minister of Transport, I am very proud to be responsible for the Canadian Coast Guard which I believe has done a wonderful job in the circumstances. My remarks tonight are more to give Canadians information about what can be done and what we have done in the circumstances. The federal Government has reacted immediately.

My colleague, the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Bouchard), the other twin, and myself announced that the federal representatives would monitor the situation closely in order to ensure that appropriate measures would be taken in those circumstances.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to state again, for the information of Canadians, that Valdez is 1,000 kilometres from the nearest point on the Canadian border north of British Columbia.

[English]

This means that the oil slick would have to travel 1,000 kilometres to reach Canadian waters. Initial assessments indicate that oil will not reach our shores. Nevertheless, the Coast Guard has requested that both Environment Canada and Fisheries and Oceans keep it appraised of the trajectory of the spill. In addition, we have a Coast Guard observer permanently on the scene.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Coast Guard also has an information office on the spill in Vancouver where information can be obtained at all times.

Since then, ongoing evaluation has indicated that it is and remains very unlikely that the spill will have an impact on Canadian waters. Based on ocean currents and seasonal climatic models, the Canadian Hydrographic Service predicts that the spill will continue to move west and southwest towards the Aleutian Islands. The spill could reach Canadian waters only in the event of 20 days of steady northwest winds.

Mr. Speaker, we have also taken the following action.

At the request of Exxon, the Canadian Coast Guard has made available a number of special systems for the recovery of hydrocarbons, with their operators. Equipment from the depot in Tuktoyaktuk includes 1 skimmer, 1 Framo ACW 400, 2 oil slick removers with spare parts, and from St. John's, Newfoundland, 1 skimmer, 1 Framo ACW skimmer, 1 oil slick remover, 1 GT 185 Destroyer skimmer, 1 Mark V slick-licker and 1 Swed-trawl.