

*Government Orders*

amendments before the House to allow us again the opportunity to have a look at the bill.

I will raise it in committee as well, but I believe the three amendments I support, the three amendments in front of us, are not sufficient to make the bill the important bill it could be.

I mention a couple of things in this regard. The first is with regard to intervener funding. We have raised it a number of times in the House today. The intervener funding process is absolutely crucial to the positive workings of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act itself.

• (1915)

In fact, as we are well aware, proponents of projects generally have access to the capital they need to see that project through to completion. They budget for the preparation of environmental assessment reports. They budget for the public hearings that may take place. They are prepared to deal with that. However, without adequate intervener funding there cannot be adequate assessment quite simply because those who wish to challenge the proponent do not have the same access to capital as the proponent does and budgets for.

It is very important that we set out a very specific intervener funding process to ensure that it is not only adequate but indeed meets all the criteria that we have established in the past for an intervener funding program that works positively. I commend the government for seeing the need to move forward with intervener funding in more specific terms like this. I hope that in the committee we will be able to broaden that out.

I also suggest that the committee have another look at the regulatory process while looking at the act and there is the opportunity to review it. The regulatory process is what provides for the workings of the environmental assessment. The act sets out the guidelines but without the regulations the act is not much. The regulations make it work. This is why we have noticed and recognized that the regulation making process itself has been so controversial, so complex and has involved so much time.

Members of cabinet, industry, and the environmental community have all had input into the regulation making process. However members of the House of Commons speaking for all Canadians have not had the opportunity to respond to the final product they have produced. Unlike the act where we can debate parts of it, we can go to committee and study parts of the act, in terms of the specific regulations members of Parliament in the House of Commons do not have the same opportunities to challenge parts of the regulatory process.

It is time we looked at an amendment I raised two years ago in this very Chamber. It was an amendment similar to a clause in the existing gun control legislation that allows for members of Parliament and members of the other place to call before committee certain regulations for scrutiny. We should have a

similar clause in the legislation that would allow us to call certain pieces of regulatory decisions and discuss them in committee.

The process of ultimate cabinet responsibility should also be examined. Although I am supporting the amendment about cabinet responsibility at the moment, I do believe that at a time when governments are demonstrating they cannot be trusted—we had a government in this country for nine years that proved that—we have to ensure it is Parliament and the people of Canada in the end who have a full understanding and responsibility for matters like this.

When a panel makes a decision based on a tremendous amount of information, the government should be looking very seriously at the results of that panel hearing. When cabinet makes a final decision on a panel recommendation members of the cabinet can never have read that recommendation but have been influenced by many members of industry who perhaps have been speaking to them in another context but have made their wishes well known. The secrecy of the cabinet room should not be the final arbiter of public environmental process.

• (1920)

In any case I do recognize the accountability of government through the cabinet process. As I say I support the amendment before us, but it is important that perhaps the committee look at this process and see if there is not another way of dealing with this very important and specific issue.

I believe very strongly in the concept of environmental assessment. I heard the witnesses who appeared before the committees on Bill C-78 and Bill C-13. Witnesses from the corporate community indicated very strongly that they wanted to see an environmental assessment process that was up front and took the issues on early and did not come at them after the fact.

The court rulings that have been made across the country have indicated clearly that the guidelines that existed and continue to exist until Bill C-13 was proclaimed were inadequate to meet the needs of the country. Therefore Bill C-13 although it is not the one I would have written had I been the Minister of the Environment is very much a bill that moves us forward. Certainly the amendments in front of us do that as well.

We have the opportunity to move this process forward a great deal further than the three amendments do. I hope the committee which will receive this bill at the will of the House at the end of my remarks tonight will look seriously at taking the bill a little further than the government is prepared to move at this point in time.

I appreciate the co-operation of the House in allowing me to finish my remarks. In that spirit of co-operation and compromise I will not abuse the time of the House.