

ASSISTANT'S REPORTED KNOWLEDGE OF ISSUE

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess what the Minister is saying then is that he did not tell the truth when he gave an interview—

Some Hon. Members: Order!

Some Hon. Members: Sit down!

Mr. Speaker: I am sure the Hon. Member for Hamilton East means that perhaps the Minister was mixed up.

An Hon. Member: No, she doesn't.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member will put her question.

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, the Minister must be confused because on December 7 he said in a radio interview: "I and the Minister of Health were made aware of the symptoms when some people became ill about a week ago". The Minister of National Health and Welfare has already told this House that he personally became aware when he was briefed at eleven o'clock on November 30.

I would like to ask the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans again whether he is denouncing the statement made by his own assistant that he first learned of the case of the toxic mussels on November 27 when he was in Toronto attending the First Ministers' meeting with the Minister, where he was in full consultation with the Minister? And does he really expect the public to believe that he only learned of it on the afternoon of December 1?

Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment on a particular interview which I think the Hon. Member has taken out of context, but I certainly know something about the truth. I said this afternoon in this House that I first learned and was advised of the serious shellfish, mussel toxin problem at 1.30 p.m. on the afternoon of December 1. Whatever a member of my staff or officials of the Department might have known at a prior time is completely appropriate in accordance with standard procedures. I learned of this issue at 1.30 in the afternoon on December 1.

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TRADE

CANADA-U.S. FREE TRADE AGREEMENT—DEADLINE FOR SIGNATURE

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister for International Trade. The Minister will know that the Prime Minister has said that there is nothing special about the January 2 date for submitting the trade proposals for agreement between Canada and the United States. I assume the Minister also knows that there are literally thousands of Canadians who want an adequate opportunity to study the implications of this deal.

Oral Questions

Is the Minister aware that there is precedent in the United States for extending the date in the fast-track process? In conjunction with that, is she aware of, and could she confirm to the House of Commons, that the Canadian Government made no request to extend the January 2 deadline?

Hon. Pat Carney (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, these dates were explored by our officials on both sides of the border. I have been advised by my officials that the January 2 date at midnight is the operative date for the operation of the fast track. I have no information to the contrary.

GOVERNMENT'S POSITION ON DATE FOR SIGNATURE

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, that was not the question. We all know that January 2 is the date. The Canadian Government has tried to leave the impression with the people of Canada that this was an American imposed date. The reality is that it is this Government which is fast tracking this project because it does not want the Canadian people to have time to understand all the details.

Will the Minister now deal with the question? Considering there is precedent in U.S. experience for extending the deadline, considering that the Prime Minister himself said there is nothing special about it, and that thousands of Canadians would like to have time to understand it, why in Heaven's name has the Government of Canada not requested the U.S. Congress to extend that deadline?

Hon. Pat Carney (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the suggestion by the Hon. Member that the January 2 date is a Canadian imposed date, designed to withhold information from the Canadian people, is just the kind of misinformation that that Party is spreading to obscure the very real benefits to the country of the free trade agreement.

Again I am telling the House that my advisers, and our negotiators, including our embassy, tell us that under the 1974 trade legislation in the United States, and other relative legislative bodies, the U.S. fast track authority, under the U.S. trade legislation, runs out at midnight on January 2.

Mr. Riis: Unless you ask for an extension.

Miss Carney: If the Hon. Member has other pertinent information, I will be glad to receive it from him.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I naively assumed that the Minister herself knew the responsibilities she was given to act upon in the interests of the people of Canada. The reality is that we could have requested an extension of the deadline but this Government was not interested in extending the deadline and it is trying to blame the Americans for it. That is the reality and the people of Canada will understand that.