

Oral Questions

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, it is over three weeks since the Oldman River dam decision, when the courts clearly told the government what its responsibility is. What is there to question when tonnes of carbon dioxide will be going into the atmosphere? The government likes to brag about conferences, protocols and leadership, but when it comes to action, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources is waiting for someone else to go first.

The world's climate cannot wait for this "after you, Alphonse" routine. Will the Minister stop side-stepping his legal and moral responsibilities and get on with an environmental assessment immediately? What more thought is needed?

Mr. Lee Clark (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member has indicated, the decision with respect to the Oldman came down about three weeks ago. That decision, of course, was contrary to an earlier decision of the Federal Court.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, as most hon. members know, the province of Alberta has given indication of its intent to apply for leave to the Supreme Court to appeal. In the meantime, departmental officials in conjunction with other related departments, as I have already said, have been very closely investigating not only how we should respond to the Oldman, which I think is an appropriate deliberation on our part, but how we should also respond to each and every other project which has been proposed within the country that might have implications for the federal government.

We are doing that and those decisions will be announced in due course.

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ENERGY

Ms. Catherine Callbeck (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. The minister was quoted last week as saying he would take steps to protect the environment but only if they were, in his words, "doable".

There are many alternative energy conservation measures which help the environment which have proven effective in Canada, Japan and Europe.

Why does his government continue to cut back on alternative energy and conservation programs?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the hon. member would suggest that as a society we can only do those things that are doable within the balance that has to be made, which is the environmental considerations as well as economics.

I think we must keep in mind that development is part of that phrase, "sustainable development".

We had a task force study since 1988, following the Toronto conference, looking at CO₂ emissions. The task force study clearly pointed out for example, that we could not meet that 20 per cent target if we also factored in growth. That task force report was released.

I have said as well that according to the best studies we have, energy efficiency, which has to become part of the action plan of the Department of the Environment, and we are working with that department, can reduce CO₂.

Our best projections at the present time are about 2 or 3 per cent of the 20 per cent that could be met through that way.

Ms. Catherine Callbeck (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is to the same minister. Alternative energy and conservation programs are very popular with Canadians. They protect the environment and they must be given a higher priority than this government has been giving them.

Why does the minister not listen to Canadians when it is clear that they want more, not less money spent on alternative energy and conservation?

• (1450)

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I already pointed out that an energy efficiency program will be incorporated into the environmental action plan. I will not hesitate to say to the hon. member again that I will not spend money and I am not spending money on the kind of programs that came out of the National Energy Program where there was money spent but very little return in terms of either alternate energy or reduction of CO₂. That is why we are changing that policy.

I also point out to the hon. member that if one takes a look at alternate energy, for example in her own