

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is perpetrating an exaggerated fiction from what Devco said in 1987. What Devco did, and let us be blunt about this, was analyse the impact of Westray on its market share in the coal business. Of course it was concerned that some of its market share of Nova Scotia Power business could be taken by Westray.

Therefore, Cape Breton members of Parliament were very concerned about this and so were Devco employees. This was outlined in great detail in the Devco report. There were a few very brief references, just a few sentences, concerning possible safety concerns. But as Teresa MacNeil, who was the chairman of Devco, said at the time, the over-all thrust of the report was about business, about market share, about economics and there was only the briefest reference to safety. Of course the safety concerns expressed were to be dealt with when the mine was put in place.

**Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso):** My supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, is for the same minister.

Yesterday the minister told this House that the concerns we had originally with Westray were basically business and economics. But on both counts, safety and economics, Devco told the government: "Don't do it".

I ask the minister again, given the safety concerns, given the economics, why did the government fund this project?

**Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)):** The federal government gave a loan guarantee to a bank loan which helped fund the project. In fact, it is a loan guarantee on the Bank of Nova Scotia bank loan, plus an interest buy-down that we put forward. That is what the federal government did.

Why did we do it? The answer is very clear. It was for regional economic development. There was high unemployment in the member for Central Nova's riding, there is high unemployment in the Stellarton area. There is a long history of a productive seam of coal. They wanted to participate in the production of coal for NSPC as well as for other customers. This was an opportunity to create 240 direct jobs and of course a multiplier of two or three or four times that.

It was done for regional economic development reasons and it was a very stimulating addition to the region's economy.

**Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Small Businesses and Tourism.

For most of yesterday the minister, in reviewing the *Hansard*, spent the day telling the House that safety was the responsibility of the Bank of Nova Scotia. He spent most of today suggesting that safety was only the responsibility of the provincial government.

I want to remind the minister that the Bank of Nova Scotia had at risk exactly \$15 million. The Government of Canada in financial terms had at risk \$85 million. But the coal miners had at risk either their future prosperity or their very health and safety—tragically, in the case of 26 miners, their lives. Those miners counted upon governments, federal and provincial, because they did not have a union, to ensure that this project was safe, to ensure that given the history of the Foord seam it could be mined safely.

What did this minister and this government do to ensure that when it put \$85 million into reopening the mine, a mine that could not have reopened otherwise, that the operation would be safe? What was done?

**Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)):** Mr. Speaker, to ask the same question as all previous members have with a higher decibel of sound does not make it a different question. The question is the same and the answer is the same.

We guaranteed the loan and, when we did, we satisfied ourselves that the provincial regime for the regulation of health and safety would be in place and indeed the provincial regime across all regulations that affect a mine would be in place.

**Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte):** Mr. Speaker, that answer is not acceptable.

I want the minister to understand that everybody in Canada knows, and in particular those in Atlantic Canada, that this mine could not have opened without the direct involvement of the federal government. Everybody knows there were large question marks about this mine and many people strongly recommended against it,