

*Government Orders*

of many of the comparative advantages we enjoy, be compromised in order to meet the short term needs of today?

Some might consider my characterization of these options as mere rhetorical excess, but I profoundly believe these are the real choices we face.

[*Translation*]

The previous government spent a lot of time and energy to develop the legislation we are now discussing. Eight years ago, the then minister was the first to try to integrate a more rigorous environmental evaluation process into the laws of the land.

Ironically, his successor, now Leader of the Official Opposition, was the architect of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. I used the word "ironically" because I believe that all Canadians should be grateful to him for having developed a bill that is basically good but which the present Minister of Environment has improved and reinforced.

● (1820)

[*English*]

The Leader of the Opposition's successor actually tabled CEEA but was unable to galvanize the political support necessary within his own party to get it proclaimed. The current leader of the Progressive Conservative Party had his chance to move CEEA forward. He worked with both House and Senate committees to make several positive thoughtful changes to the original legislation but he too was unable to proclaim the act. Finally the last Minister of the Environment in the previous government was unable to get his government to focus on the urgent need for CEEA to be proclaimed.

The record is remarkable. Over a seven-year period no less than five ministers were unable to proclaim this important piece of legislation. The legislation represents reform which the overwhelming majority of Canadian environmental groups, industry associations, provincial governments and ordinary Canadians concerned about the environment agree is an absolute necessity.

There is an important lesson here to which I want to draw the attention of members. For various reasons certain misguided interests pulled out all the stops to try to prevent this forward looking piece of legislation from ever seeing the light of day. That is why the achievements of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of the Environment on this file are all the more remarkable.

[*Translation*]

Actually, in less than a year, she was able to obtain the collaboration of interested groups in order to review the four key regulations that give the law its real scope and make them more precise, more concrete and more rigorous. The minister has reinforced the act by bringing forward an amendment forcing

the Minister of Environment to establish a funding program that will allow an enlightened participation of the public to reviews and mediation processes.

The minister took steps so that the review commissions' recommendations receive due consideration by requiring that they be submitted to a cabinet decision. Following the wishes of the industry she induced an amendment so that decisions could be taken more rapidly and in a more co-ordinated way after environmental assessments, according to the principle of one evaluation per project. In less than a year, the minister did more than five Conservative ministers in eight years. Present and future generations of Canadians owe her a lot.

[*English*]

The 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development pointed out that the environment is where we live and development is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within the abode. The two are inseparable. The commission was right and remains so today.

Environment and economy are inseparable. An environmental assessment is the foundation upon which sustainable development can and must rest. Conducting environmental assessments makes both good economic and environmental sense. By integrating environmental concerns early in the planning stages before decisions are made, business and industry protect themselves from having to deal with environmental problems later on.

[*Translation*]

Several features of the new environmental assessment system are worthy of note. The first one is public participation, which is recognized as essential to any efficient environmental assessment. In fact, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act provides the public with many opportunities to become involved in the various stages of the assessment process.

It provides for the establishment of a public registry to ensure the accessibility of the documents relating to any ongoing federal environmental assessment, including those conducted in co-operation with a province. It sets into law a participant funding program ensuring that resources are made available to interested individuals and groups to participate efficiently in the process.

The second feature that I would like to mention reflects the federal government's commitment to changing decision-making practices throughout the federal administration. Recommendations from public review panels will be subject to a joint cabinet decision. Another amendment is designed to ensure that only one federal environmental assessment is conducted with respect to a project, which will permit better coordination of the decision-making process in projects where more than one federal department or agency is involved.