

*Oral Questions*

This was a very supported project by municipal leaders in that area.

**Hon. Roger C. Simmons (Burin—St. George's):** Madam Speaker, the minister can skate all he wants. The Prime Minister had an intimate involvement in this project.

I want to put a question to the Deputy Prime Minister. Given that intimate involvement by the Prime Minister, he must have known that this was the most dangerous coal seam in North America. Will the Deputy Prime Minister tell us about the people whom the Prime Minister so quickly embraced, what was the extent of their experience in driving an underground coal mine, in operating an underground coal mine?

Did the Prime Minister even have that information before he decided to fast track the project?

**Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)):** Madam Speaker, I notice the hon. member is wearing running shoes today. If he calls three years fast tracking, then he is a pretty slow runner.

This project in fact took over three years to put in place. Thousands and thousands of pages of documentation and contractual agreements had to be worked through. It frankly took a considerable amount of time to put in place to the acceptability of the province and of course to Westray, the banks and ourselves a proper contractual arrangement for the beginning of this mine.

**Hon. Roger C. Simmons (Burin—St. George's):** Madam Speaker, the minister makes my point beautifully for me. Sure it took three years but I put it to him that he should check. It took a lot less than three years after the premier called the Prime Minister.

The Minister of State for Small Businesses and Tourism is having an awful time getting his lines straight on this one. Everything he has said so far has been contradicted by respected, knowledgeable people, people in the know, responsible people.

The Deputy Prime Minister this morning, given now a total I think of eight opportunities, just sits there. I want to ask him: why the stonewalling on this one?

**Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)):** Madam Speaker, I cannot think of one instance in the last three days where anything I have said has been contradicted by anybody in the know.

We have allegations from hon. members opposite but allegations are not clear refutations, they are just allegations. Yesterday, in fact, we had a statement from the independent mining consultants confirming still further what I have already said.

What the hon. member should know, if he has got concerns about this tragedy and we all do, is he must direct his attention to the commission of inquiry in Nova Scotia where all of these matters will be looked at properly. I have made it clear we are going to be not only open with that commission of inquiry but co-operative as well.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Before I recognize the next member it would be helpful if members would make an effort and not impute motives at this time.

**Mr. Lyle Kristiansen (Kootenay West—Revelstoke):** Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Small Businesses and Tourism.

In April 1991, Alan Craven, an engineering consultant for Associated Mining Consultants and the Bank of Nova Scotia, said:

That the construction of the Westray coal mine was one of the most rapid he had ever seen. It is extremely fast to achieve an underground mine in 10 months. Normally you are talking years instead of months.

Considering the excessive speed of this mine construction raised by this consultant in April 1991, a year ago, and in view of the federal government's and the minister of energy's awareness as early as 1988 that this coal seam was a high-risk venture in terms of safety, why did the federal government not exercise greater direct scrutiny over safety developments rather than relying on the loans office of the Bank of Nova Scotia to do its job for it?

**Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)):** Madam Speaker, we have no jurisdiction over matters of that sort. This is a provincial jurisdiction.

Yesterday we had a major constitutional discussion between the provinces and the federal government. Different levels of government have different levels of responsibility.