

Supply

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): I am sorry but there is no unanimous consent.

Some hon. members: Shame!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): I call on all hon. members to please co-operate. There is no unanimous consent. Resuming debate.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre. Will the hon. member need 10 minutes or 20 minutes?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Ten minutes. My colleague for Winnipeg North Centre will be following at that point.

First, let me say with deep regret that members of the Conservative side of the House did not allow us to proceed with proper questioning of the minister. This is an issue of vital importance to specific regions of the country, my own province of Manitoba, as well as Saskatchewan. We have international commitments with North Dakota. It is a matter of serious concern to all Canadians because of the implications it has for the credibility and legitimacy of the entire federal role in ensuring proper environmental treatment of major capital projects.

To be denied the opportunity in this House to engage the minister makes it clear that the minister has no answers. He has been promising since last Friday that the Government of Canada would take all measures necessary to stop the construction in Saskatchewan so a proper environmental review could go ahead.

The government is now saying that it will establish a new panel to undertake another review, but will take no action to stop the Government of Saskatchewan which, with total impunity, total arrogance and indifference, has said, "We don't care what the federal government is going to do. We are going to assert our own rights to go ahead with this project." The minister caved in. The minister backed off.

The minister and the government have failed a major test of asserting federal responsibility, federal obligation, and federal rights. The question we have to ask, Mr.

Speaker, is why? Why, when there was such a clear-cut unmistakable, unequivocal test for the federal government, does it back off?

Ms. Copps: They cut a secret deal.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the answer is clear. There is a lot behind the covers. There is a lot behind the smoke-screen that the minister has not said.

We have here, for example, an agreement that arrived on members' desks today which talks about an agreement between Her Majesty the Queen, in right of Canada, and the Saskatchewan Water Corporation. I would like to read to you, Mr. Speaker, if I might, section 3 which states:

Notwithstanding the terms and conditions contained in paragraph 1 of the original agreement, it is expressly agreed that the corporation may now proceed to acquire land and take all steps necessary to proceed with the construction of the Alameda Dam.

Section 4 states:

Notwithstanding the terms and conditions, it is expressly agreed that the corporation may now proceed to do all that is necessary to complete construction of the Rafferty Dam.

And so on.

What this agreement really says is that, when the minister shook hands with Grant Devine back there on September 5, they had a deal.

Ms. Copps: That's right.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): They had an agreement.

An hon. member: A secret deal.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): It is an agreement which he is now attempting to cover up. I say, Mr. Speaker—and I do not use these words lightly—the minister is covering up a private secret agreement with the government of Saskatchewan to go ahead with the dam. The proof of that action is the fact that he is unprepared and unwilling to take the proper and necessary actions to stop the construction. We have prima facie evidence that this agreement in fact has already been signed, sealed and delivered, and we have a minister who will not own up to it. It is not the first time. It is not that this comes by accident because what we had