

Routine Proceedings

table on the environment and the economy is an important step, and I urge hon. members to sit at that table and to get involved.

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of the Environment for giving us the text of her minister's statement at around 10 o'clock this morning.

The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy Act was finally proclaimed today, after being tabled in the House in April 1992 and receiving royal assent in June 1993.

This round table, the purpose of which is to merge the environment and the economy, was inspired by the concept of sustainable development. It is clear that whatever our political affiliations, as the minister said earlier, whether we are sovereigntists or federalists, we all breathe the same air and drink the same water. We are all concerned about the impact poor environmental management may have on our quality of life. And we are even more aware of the impact our present actions and decisions may have on the lives of future generations.

Not to support this legislation would be a sign of bad faith. And I am therefore very pleased, as is the Bloc Québécois, and as were all opposition parties at the time, to see the government go ahead with this concept for obtaining intelligent advice from various sources.

However, as the Liberals and the NDP pointed out at the time, some aspects of this legislation are not clear or are at least open to question. The corporation's operational structure allows it to work with a measure of independence. However, there is always the possibility that the table will have ties with the government, since its chairperson and members are appointed by the Governor in Council.

Earlier, the Minister of the Environment announced that the Prime Minister had agreed to chair the round table. If the minister is considering applications, I would be glad to oblige, if you agree, that is—

Ms. Copps: Pierre-Marc Johnson is vice-chairperson.

Mr. Chrétien (Frontenac): Yes, he is a good choice. He would have made a good chairperson.

Mr. Ménard: We know him.

Ms. Copps: Yes, I know.

Mr. Chrétien (Frontenac): So the corporation's operational structure allows it to work with a measure of independence, but there is always the possibility that the table may have ties with the government, since its members are appointed by the Governor in Council.

• (1520)

However, I think the government is very much aware of this aspect, since it was involved in the debate on this legislation, and I am sure it will find a way to deal with this.

The government is comfortable with this legislation since under the Conservatives, the hon. member for Davenport proposed certain amendments that were, in fact, adopted.

The Liberal government is well aware that our air, water and soil—our physical environment—are very much at risk, to put it mildly. In some cases, they have reached the point of no return.

We should not focus on one particular form of consultation at the expense of the other components of our environment.

Often, to show it is environment-conscious, the government adopts this kind of legislation while at the same time cutting back on related commitments. Take, for instance, the defunct Conservative government's green plan. In 1990, the plan's initial budget of \$3 billion over five years was reduced a few months later to \$3 billion over six years. This is a reduction of 20 per cent in the same year, and there were subsequent cuts later on.

The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy can be an effective tool, provided partisan considerations are excluded. No group has the right to use the environment to promote partisan interests.

Next Tuesday, February 22, the Minister of Finance will bring down his first budget. In the section on environment and sustainable development, we will see whether the government puts its money where its mouth is.

Since we know this is one of the first priorities of the Liberal government, we can assume that budget allocations for the Department of the Environment will help us make up for lost time.

In concluding, I want to say that we should support this initiative for consultation and co-operation. We must take advantage of this opportunity to communicate with various players in sectors that are in a position to help the environment. The Liberal government has chosen this vehicle to get out of its ivory tower. The results will be gratifying, provided it does its homework.

[English]

Mr. Bill Gilmour (Comox—Alberni): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. minister for this initiative. I believe it is the direction we want to go and that most Canadians want to go. Most of us feel inside that we are environmentalists and this comes from the way we recycle our paper or compost or garbage. It is the mood of Canadians to move in this direction.