● (2:20 p.m.)

It is the Canadian view that it would be irresponsible to take a decision which would result in the mass movement of oil by tanker until all areas of potential risk have been fully assessed. It is time to ensure that the protection of our natural heritage becomes a major priority of public policy. Large, new engineering projects should not be undertaken before adequate information is available on the environmental risks which would be entailed.

For our part, we will wish to hold further talks with the United States in regard to areas where more information is required on the damages which could result from oil spills off the Pacific coast.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we find ourselves now in the position where a group of Canadian officials have met with a group of United States officials for the purpose of holding certain discussions and seeking certain information. I would like to emphasize to you, Sir, that although the question of approving the TAPS route has been before the U.S. authorities for some time, this discussion is the first, I believe, that has taken place between representatives of the two countries with regard to the problem, and this only at the official level.

The Acting Prime Minister pointed out that the officials discussed the dangers and the question of compensation and apparently secured the admission that further information is required before the dangers can be fully assessed. I would like to know, and I am sure the people concerned on the west coast of Canada particularly would like to know, whether the Canadian officials secured any assurance from the United States that in fact a decision will not be taken by the United States authorities to approve the TAPS route until this information has been obtained. The Acting Prime Minister did not tell the House today that the officials had received any such assurance. Therefore, I think I am perfectly correct in assuming that the Canadian officials have not received any such assurance that in fact the United States decision will be held up until all the information has been gathered which would enable a full assessment to be made of the dangers involved in this project. I think the House is entitled to know where the government intends to go from here.

The Acting Prime Minister spoke generally about further conversations with people in the United States. I certainly hope they will be at the ministerial level so that our American friends will know that we are at least taking this matter seriously and are not content simply to discuss it at the official level.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Question.

Mr. Stanfield: I have a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hear some gentleman opposite calling for a question. As I understand it, we are on motions. I will not keep the House too long, but there are one or two things I want to say.

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Trans-Alaska Pipeline System

I think it is fair to say that, as far as we could tell from the Acting Prime Minister's statement, the officials reported nothing new. We are now in a position where we do not know, the Acting Prime Minister not having told us, what the government of Canada proposes to do, if anything, in these circumstances. We have not been told what the government of Canada proposes to do to bring this home to the government of the United States.

We do not know whether the government of Canada intends to seek an assurance from the government of the United States that in fact a decision will not be made until these dangers have been fully assessed. We do not even know whether the government of Canada is actively pushing the Canadian pipeline as an alternative. In other words, Sir, I suggest it is time that the Acting Prime Minister and his colleagues stopped fooling around with this question and told the House and the Canadian people exactly where they stand and what they intend to do.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, the government has shown an amazing timidity in protesting against the proposed transportation of crude oil by sea from Valdez, Alaska, to the west coast of the United States.

For many months people on the Pacific coast have been perturbed and disturbed about the prospect of huge tankers transporting oil down the Pacific coast, and particularly into the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound. It was only after months of prodding that the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) finally agreed to get in touch with the United States government and ask for discussions.

I think most of us took it for granted that these discussions would take place at the ministerial level, and that the Acting Prime Minister himself would make representations to the government of the United States protesting against what could be a very serious pollution hazard to the people who live on the coast of British Columbia. Instead, we now have discussions going on in Washington between officials of the Canadian government and officials of the United States government. From the report the minister has given today it is perfectly clear the discussions were mainly about how to reduce the risks of pollution, what kind of navigational aids would be required, what standards of ship construction, what emergency and contingency plans would be ready in the event of an oil spill, and who should be held responsible in the event of a disaster. Mr. Speaker, discussions of this kind presuppose an acceptance of the TAPS program. We ought not to be discussing how we are going to reduce the risk of pollution in the event of crude oil being brought down the Pacific coast. We should be making strong representations and presenting data to show that the program should be abandoned.

The Canadian officials who have been attending the meeting in Washington have not been able to secure the information they want, if one may judge by the statements of Mr. George Wardroper, Director General of Science and Environment in the Department of External Affairs. He says they have not been able to receive from the American authorities any information as to how