

Oral Questions

Has the minister asked the Americans to stop payments, given his own inability to stop the project?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I replied to an earlier question today by saying that I am instructing my officials to seek an injunction on continued construction and land acquisition related to the Rafferty-Alameda project.

I think that is quite a direct and definite statement. We are not in a position right now to go any further than this, quite obviously. We are appointing a panel to look at all the environmental consequences and we are stopping construction and land acquisition.

Mr. David Walker (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, we watched this minister stumble for the last week looking for some ways of stopping this project. He gives us this weak injunction. We give him a second option in the international agreement. Obviously he does not even know about the international agreement.

Again, he can ask the Americans to stop payments. Under the same agreement, we agreed to give progress reports on water quality. How can the minister guarantee water quality when he does not have an environmental review process?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I have committed to two things, and very clearly, in the House today. I have committed to have a full review process, a full environmental assessment process, and I have committed to have an injunction sought on further land acquisition or construction on the Rafferty-Alameda project.

Mr. Brian L. Gardiner (Prince George—Bulkley Valley): Mr. Speaker, the government has made a mockery of the environmental assessment review process from Rafferty-Alameda to James Bay, and now to Alcan.

In British Columbia the government abandoned the process all together by exempting the Alcan project from a review. In 1984 the Prime Minister, when he was the Leader of the Opposition campaigning for votes, promised a full environmental review of the project.

Will the Minister of the Environment follow through on the Prime Minister's promise and order a full and complete environmental assessment of that project?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, it is strange that the hon. member would raise a question about the Kemano project. We had an independent panel of 10 very distinguished Canadians, chaired by the President of UBC. That panel went through an exhaustive review of the project and, in conjunction with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, held public consultations. The panel recommended a long list of measures that were incorporated into a signed agreement between the Government of British Columbia, the Government of Canada, and the company. We went through a process that I doubt could be attacked on any grounds for lack of efficiency and objectivity.

Mr. Brian L. Gardiner (Prince George—Bulkley Valley): Mr. Speaker, officials in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans—three or four biologists now—reject the minister's point of view. They are suggesting in fact that the government put political pressure on scientists to justify the decision of the government—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

An hon. member: That's quite an accusation.

Mr. Speaker: I wonder if the hon. member could put his question.

Mr. Gardiner: That accusation is being made by biologists in the department.

Will the Minister of the Environment conduct an immediate investigation into these allegations by these Fisheries and Oceans officials that the government has completely sabotaged the environment assessment review process? Why doesn't he put an injunction on this project, too?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I can only invite my hon. colleague, if he has got any evidence of any political influence in the environmental process, to send it to my office.