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accommodated. Unfortunately, we could not find that common ground. Had it completed its task, the panel would have provided valuable recommendations to the benefit of the environment and the people of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and North Dakota. The resignation is a loss for all concerned.

I believe that this bit of history demonstrates that the government has tried very hard to ensure that a proper environmental assessment panel review was conducted. My colleague, the Minister of the Environment, has had many discussions with the government of Saskatchewan to negotiate a practical way to allow the review process to continue. However, in the final analysis, his work has been frustrated, not through lack of effort, but rather because of a lack of authority to deal with this type of situation. It has become clear that the present environmental assessment and review process guidelines order developed by a previous administration was both confusing and ambiguous. We are now seeing, and I regret, the practical example of its failure. It would be appropriate later on this day, Mr. Speaker, for other hon. members to address how this matter might be rectified as, indeed, I am sure they will.

It is clear that the matter before us is a difficult one for two reasons. It is difficult because the guidelines that were originally designed in the early 1980s were not intended to have the force of law. They were drafted consequently in a manner in which, on occasions, was both sometimes confusing and ambiguous. These guidelines were later given the force of law, despite their inadequacy, and that is the system under which we are currently operating. I think most members of the House would agree that these guidelines have proven to be inadequate to the responsibility given them and that is why Bill C-78 is before this House and will be discussed in greater detail tomorrow.

It is also clear that the agreement reached between the Government of Canada and the Government of Saskatchewan in January of this year was not as precise as we would wish it to be, and that has led to different interpretations.

As to the significance of that agreement on the part of the Government of Canada and the Government of Saskatchewan, we proceeded in accordance with our responsibilities, as we understood them, in the early part of this year to appoint a panel. That panel has met and attempted to fulfil its task during the course of the

summer. It has taken longer than many people in the area would have wished and the consequence has been an immense amount of frustration with that fact. As I have indicated, the task of the panel was substantive and the progress significant. We regret, therefore, that they felt compelled to resign.

The minister, when he speaks later this morning, will indicate in some detail the response of the government to the fact that the resignations have occurred. He indicated in the House yesterday that he made a commitment on behalf of the Government of Canada that it will fulfil its legal responsibilities and will address the matter of the appointment of a replacement panel because that is part of its responsibility.

I am somewhat at a loss in terms of being unable to be more precise at this time in the absence of the minister, but I can make a commitment to the House that the minister will speak to the House as soon as he is available and will at that time provide a more detailed explanation of the government's response to the resignation of the panel.

Mr. Simon de Jong (Regina—Qu'Appelle): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to what the parliamentary secretary told us. First, we understand that the hon. member feels personally concerned with this since the question of water quality in the city of Souris is a broadened question on the study itself. A large group of people who are opposed to the project come from Brandon and Souris.

I also understand, Mr. Speaker, that the Saskatchewan government's stated intention to go ahead with the Alameda part of it might really be counter to what already has been told to the Saskatchewan government.

I understand in a letter dated August 15, signed by the Minister of Transport, to Mr. J. F. Dolecki of the Department of Economics at Brandon University, the minister stated as follows:

The proponent, SaskPower, has applied under the Navigable Waters Protection Act (NWPA) for approval of the total project, including the causeway. The application will be processed in the usual manner. However, as a result of the Federal Appeal Court decision of March 13, 1990, on the Oldman River Dam project, the federal Environmental Assessment and Review Process (EARP) Guidelines Order will now apply.

Given the fact that this project has been recommended for a public panel review under EARP, no action will be taken on the NWPA application until the panel has rendered its decision. I should add that