

Oral Questions

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Secretary of State of Canada and Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Citizenship)): At their meeting on March 20, 1990, the Canadian ministers of Environment set up a task force to identify and examine possible solutions. Since then, they have started to collect as much information as possible. I may add that Environment Canada has already started its work, and at the next meeting to be held in July, we will be able to continue the process.

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MEECH LAKE ACCORD

Mme Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

Yesterday, the Special Committee on the proposed companion resolution to the Meech Lake Accord tabled its report and I would like to congratulate the members of this committee for it. This report was unanimous and I believe that it is the necessary first step to break the constitutional deadlock. It is now up to the first ministers to prepare an acceptable companion resolution.

My question for the Deputy Prime Minister is this: Can he report to us on the consultations which the Prime Minister has had with the provincial premiers and can he tell us what he specifically intends to do to get out of the impasse?

[English]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I can only confirm to the leader of the New Democratic Party that this process is ongoing. He is engaged in discussions directly with the premiers.

As well, the minister responsible for intergovernmental affairs will be contacting the premiers and the other government members who are involved to get a firsthand assessment of the report. It is hoped that the dissident provinces will find it necessary to come on side and support the major recommendations of the committee and, in so doing, lay the groundwork for the next step, which will probably be the holding of a First Ministers' Conference.

As I indicated to the Leader of the Opposition, this preparatory work is necessary in order to set the stage. Hopefully, as a result of the consultations, we will be

able to proceed with the calling of a First Ministers' Conference.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I agree that the holding of a First Ministers' Conference is very important. I hope that the Prime Minister is not waiting for a guarantee of success. Obviously a guarantee of success is just a photo op. I hope that the Prime Minister is prepared to take the leadership to call that First Ministers' meeting to ensure that we can begin the dialogue for which this committee's report has provided the basis.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Ms. McLaughlin: It has been said about the report that the committee has set the table for a First Ministers' Conference. I want to point out to the Deputy Prime Minister that one of the items on that table has been the rights of the women of Canada which have been outlined as being important so that the women of Canada can be assured that their rights are protected.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister commit today, on behalf of the women of Canada, and on behalf of his government, that he and his government will ensure that this time women's rights are guaranteed.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I simply remind the Leader of the New Democratic Party that the Meech Lake Accord was signed by the Prime Minister and 10 provincial premiers. They, in their wisdom, believed that it was an appropriate document.

However, since that time there have been other developments. Three provinces have stated some reservations, which has resulted in the recommendations of a parallel accord and the work of this committee. Of course, much of the success will depend upon the position or the response that Manitoba, Newfoundland and New Brunswick make towards advancing the process.

What is necessary now is to ascertain the positions and the responses of the dissident provinces. Hopefully they will find sufficient latitude within the recommendations for them to come on board and support the process, at which time a First Ministers' Conference could be held and we could get this problem resolved once and for all.